CENTRE FOR QUALITY ASSESSMENT IN HIGHER EDUCATION

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EVALUATION REPORT

STUDY FIELD of DESIGN

at Vilnius Academy of Arts

Expert panel:

1. **Prof. Dr. Ian Montgomery (panel chairperson),** *member of academic community;*
2. **Prof. Dr. Lylian Lainoja,** *member of academic community;*
3. **Doc. Dr. Maria Štranekova,** *member of academic community;*
4. **Dovilė Gaižauskienė,** *representative of social partners;*
5. **Aistė Kazlauskaitė,** *student representative.*

Evaluation coordinator – Austėja Pliupelytė

Vilnius
2023

Study Field Data

Title of the study field and cycle	*Design (First Cycle)*	*Design (Second Cycle)*
Title(s) of the study programme(s) and state code(s)	6121PX013 (Design) 6121PX016 (Graphic Design) 6121PX017 (Interior Design) 6121PX019 (Fashion Design)	6211PX007 (Design) 6211PX010 (Graphic Design) 6211PX011 (Fashion Design) 6211PX022 (Visual Design) 6211PX023 (Visual Communication Design)
Type of studies	Undergraduate Degree	Masters Degree
Cycle of studies	First	Second
Mode of study and duration (in years)	Full time 4 years	Full time 2 years
Credit volume	240	120
Qualification degree and (or) professional qualification	Bachelor of Arts	Master of Arts
Language of instruction	Lithuanian *(with the common language of English used in some learning situations and for international students where possible)*	Lithuanian *(with the common language of English used in some learning situations and for international students where possible)*
Minimum education required	Secondary	Degree or equivalent
Registration date of the study programme	Design - 1997 05 19 Graphic Design - 1997 05 16 Interior Design - 2002 06 14 Fashion Design - 1997 05 19	Design - 1997 05 19 Graphic Design - 1997 05 16 Fashion Design - 1997 05 19 Visual Design - 2011 04 15 Visual Communication Design - 2014 07 04

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I. INTRODUCTION

1.1. BACKGROUND OF THE EVALUATION PROCESS

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

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

The evaluation process consists of the main following stages: *1) self-evaluation and self-evaluation report (SER) prepared by Higher Education Institution (HEI); 2) site visit of the Expert Panel to the HEI; 3) production of the external evaluation report (EER) by the Expert Panel and its publication; 4) follow-up activities.*

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

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

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

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

1.2. EXPERT PANEL

The Expert Panel was assigned according to the Experts Selection Procedure as approved by the Director of Centre for Quality Assessment in Higher Education on 31 December 2019 Order No. V-149. The site visit to the HEI was conducted by the Panel on 25-26th of October, 2022.

1. **Prof. Dr. Ian Montgomery (panel chairperson),** *member of academic community* (United Kingdom); Director of Sustainability, former Pro Vice Chancellor for Global Engagement at Ulster University;

2. **Prof. Dr. Lylian Lainoja,** *member of academic community* (Estonia); lecturer at Tartu Art College; former Dean of the Faculty of Design at The Estonian Academy of Arts;

3. **Doc. Dr. Maria Štranekova,** *member of academic community* (Slovakia); associate professor at Pan European University, Faculty of Media; former Head of Fashion Design department at Tomas Bata University Zlin;

4. **Ms. Dovilė Gaižauskienė,** *representative of social partners* (Lithuania); policy analyst at Government strategic analysis centre (STRATA) *(Policy Lab - strategic design)*; former Head of processes at Design department at Vilnius Design college;

5. **Aistė Kazlauskaitė,** *student representative* (Lithuania); fourth-year Bachelor's student of study program *Multimedia and Computer Design* at Vilnius Gediminas Technical University (VILNIUS TECH).

1.3. GENERAL INFORMATION

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

No.	Name of document
1.	Campus resource slide presentations: Kaunas, Klaipeda Telšiai
2.	VAA Bachelor's and Master's theses and mid-term works (all four faculties)
3.	Summary of how many design study field teachers work full-time/part-time/less than part-time.

1.4. BACKGROUND OF DESIGN FIELD STUDIES AT VILNIAUS DAILĖS AKADEMIJA

Institution Type and Structure

The Vilnius Academy of Arts (henceforth, VAA) is the only higher education institution with a specialisation in art, design, and architecture in Lithuania. Its academic traditions can be traced back to 1793, when the Department of Architecture was established at the College of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania (now Vilnius University), and in 1797 the Departments of Painting and Drawing were created.

VAA is a public higher education institution in the Republic of Lithuania (registered address: Maironio St. 6, LT-01124 Vilnius, Lithuania), whose founder is the Seimas of the Republic of Lithuania. VAA is a legal entity operating as a public institution. VAA is autonomous in its academic, administrative, economic, and financial management activities based on the principles of self-governance and academic freedom, as defined in the Constitution of the Republic of Lithuania, the Science and Education Act of the Republic of Lithuania, and the Academy's Statute.

The collegiate governing bodies of the Academy are the Council, the Senate, and the Rector. Student representatives delegated by the Student Association participate in all collegiate governing bodies of the Academy. The governance of the Academy is based on the principles of democracy, subsidiarity, self-governance, and efficiency.

The Academy is divided into academic and non-academic units based on their function, as well as into main faculties and dependent departments based on their status. The main academic divisions whose purpose is artistic activity, art and/or scientific research and/or studies, are the faculties of Vilnius, Kaunas, Klaipėda and Telšiai, as well as the Institute of Art Research. The Faculties do not form part of other academic divisions and are the structural basis of the Academy, whereas Departments are dependent parts of the main Faculties.

Faculties, just like other academic divisions, are governed by councils headed by the deans of faculties. Each council consists of up to 30 members. The heads of the academic divisions and the deans of the faculties are ex-officio members of the councils. At least 10 percent of the members of the Faculty Council are student representatives appointed by the VAA Student Association. Resolutions of the Faculty Council are binding upon all employees and students of the Faculty. The Senate Study Committee oversees all types and forms of studies in the Academy in accordance with the Study Regulations. This Committee ensures the conformity of the Academy's study programmes with the Academy's mission and strategic plan, handles study-related matters, and offers guidance and recommendations to the Senate.[1]

Programmes under this review for the First Cycle are Design; Graphic Design; Interior Design; and Fashion Design. Those under review for the Second Cycle are Design; Graphic Design; Fashion Design; Visual Design; and Visual Communication Design

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[1] The VAA Study Regulations, approved at the VAA Senate meeting No. S-1 on 16 January 2013.

Locations

The Academy has 4 campuses across Lithuania: in Vilnius (lead campus and administrative centre), Kaunas, Klaipėda and Telšiai, with more than 1,500 students in total.

Previous External Evaluation

In the year of evaluation, several Design field study programmes were evaluated across different campuses of VAA. In 2015, Design (BA) was evaluated both at Telšiai and Vilnius faculties, and Design (MA) and Costume design (BA&MA) were evaluated at Vilnius faculty. In the same year, Costume design (BA) (the name of the study programme was changed to Fashion Design in 2019) was evaluated at Telšiai faculty. In 2014, Graphic design (MA) was evaluated at Kaunas faculty, and in the same year, Interior design (BA) and Visual design (BA) were evaluated at Vilnius faculty. Visual design (MA) was evaluated at Klaipėda faculty in 2013, and Graphic design (MA) was evaluated at Vilnius faculty in 2012.

Limitations of the evaluation

Due to the nature of the review and time constraints, it was not possible to visit all 4 campuses of VAA. Meetings with staff and virtual campus workshop and studio tours were conducted online, as were meetings with students. Whilst the nature of the meetings was adequate, remote communications with multiple participants sometimes requiring translation is always challenging. However, the judgement of the Expert Panel was not impeded by the arrangement.

II. GENERAL ASSESSMENT

The *first cycle* of the *Design* study field at Vilnius Academy of Arts is given a **positive** evaluation.

Study field and cycle assessment in points by evaluation areas

No.	Evaluation Area	Evaluation of an Area in points*
1.	Intended and achieved learning outcomes and curriculum	4
2.	Links between science (art) and studies	5
3.	Student admission and support	4
4.	Teaching and learning, student performance and graduate employment	4
5.	Teaching staff	4
6.	Learning facilities and resources	5
7.	Study quality management and public information	4
	Total:	30

*1 (unsatisfactory) - the area does not meet the minimum requirements, there are fundamental shortcomings that prevent the implementation of the field studies.

2 (satisfactory) - the area meets the minimum requirements, and there are fundamental shortcomings that need to be eliminated.

3 (good) - the area is being developed systematically, without any fundamental shortcomings.

4 (very good) - the area is evaluated very well in the national context and internationally, without any shortcomings;

5 (excellent) - the area is evaluated exceptionally well in the national context and internationally.

The *second cycle* of the *Design* study field at Vilnius Academy of Arts is given a **positive** evaluation.

Study field and cycle assessment in points by evaluation areas

No.	Evaluation Area	Evaluation of an Area in points*
1.	Intended and achieved learning outcomes and curriculum	4
2.	Links between science (art) and studies	5
3.	Student admission and support	4
4.	Teaching and learning, student performance and graduate employment	4
5.	Teaching staff	4
6.	Learning facilities and resources	5
7.	Study quality management and public information	4
	Total:	30

*1 (unsatisfactory) - the area does not meet the minimum requirements, there are fundamental shortcomings that prevent the implementation of the field studies.

2 (satisfactory) - the area meets the minimum requirements, and there are fundamental shortcomings that need to be eliminated.

3 (good) - the area is being developed systematically, without any fundamental shortcomings.

4 (very good) - the area is evaluated very well in the national context and internationally, without any shortcomings;

5 (excellent) - the area is evaluated exceptionally well in the national context and internationally.

III. STUDY FIELD ANALYSIS

3.1. INTENDED AND ACHIEVED LEARNING OUTCOMES AND CURRICULUM

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

3.1.1. Evaluation of the conformity of the aims and outcomes of the field and cycle study programmes to the needs of the society and/or the labour market

The SER's analysis demonstrates that the first and second cycles programmes are based on the needs of the society such as sustainability or green transition, and there is a clear link to the needs of the labour market. Even though study programmes are operating in classic design fields such as fashion, product, interior or graphic/visual design and the market might require new skills, the content of the programmes is contemporary and reflects the newest trends in design. In the BA study cycle, programmes are organised in 4 groups: "the Design programme represents product design, the Fashion Design programme focuses on fashion and clothing design; Graphic Design belongs to the area of visual communication design, and Interior Design allows students to explore interior space design and engineering" (SER BA, p. 10). In MA study cycle, study programmes are in 3 groups, except for Interior design.

As was stated in the meetings with senior staff, the aim of the design study field is to educate "the future people of this field in an environment of high intellectual and infrastructural quality. Design could be a game changer." There are plans to use design thinking to make changes in the academy itself and it's a good indicator of the value of design for the VAA.

The external partners of the study programmes in the field of Design are diverse private and public bodies - businesses, cultural and educational institutions, and local government institutions. Academy strives to ensure that students engage with design problems in a real-life context. The forms of this engagement are organised in various ways - students are encouraged to do internships in partner companies/organisations, some study projects are implemented with external partners, and students have an opportunity to participate in R&D activities. Collaboration with external partners is an important factor of the quality of the artistic activities and research of the Design programmes staff too - teachers can develop their skills, for example, in learning about new materials and new technologies available etc. The level of participation of social partners in the meeting with the Expert Panel reflected the strong support from social partners that VAA enjoys across all campuses.

The scope of the content of study programmes and the potential of VAA to reflect market needs are well reflected by the example that graduates from Design study programmes specialise in the following areas of design: furniture, graphics, transportation, electronics, exhibition, store equipment, home appliances, conceptual design, medical equipment, musical instruments, interior elements, fashion accessories, advertising, services, packaging, small-scale architecture, toys, educational materials, lighting fixtures, utensils, and more.

The Design Innovation Centre is the VAA Centre of Excellence, established in 2007, and ensures collaboration between the VAA and business, industry, and other interested institutions. The activities organised under the Design Innovation Centre add value in promoting achievements in the design field of VAA.

It can be concluded that strong links have been forged between the design education field at VAA taking into consideration the needs of society and the labour market. These often intensive and productive collaborative partnerships have been developed through various channels (departments, faculties and the Design Innovation Centre). There is a focus on sustainability/green transition and innovations which are visible in the choice of study themes, student internships, and research.

VAA is an intellectually rich academic environment that supports innovation, research, and a diverse learning environment whose provision reflects key strengths across a number of design disciplines. VAA would benefit if the high number of programmes in the design field would form a design "body" of linked fields instead of each design field pursuing aims or agendas - interdisciplinarity within the design field and beyond could be ensured with, for example, joint projects and research questions.

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

The culture and ethos of teaching and research at VAA completely align with its mission, objectives, and strategy. The four campuses of this university each have their own identity and have each developed their own network of social partners. In their own words, VAA highlights the links between its core strategic mission and its programme offerings: "The programmes in the field of Design are an integral part of the Academy's strategy and mission, which is to contribute to the future of Lithuanian art, design and architecture, and to educate its creators and researchers." (SER BA, p. 16).

The first cycle covers a broad range of design disciplines: design, graphic design, interior design, and fashion design. There are obvious progression paths for undergraduate students into Master's level study in the areas of design, graphic design, interior design, visual design, and visual communication design. Each of these disciplines focuses on developing high-level applied skills. The institution has a strong and ambitious leadership team which was also displayed by various staff teams during the Expert Panel visit. Within the Vilnius campus, there are excellent opportunities for interdisciplinary learning and access to various workshops. The Academy well supports staff and students benefit from a well-rounded complement of staff expertise and global perspectives. Students are encouraged to develop their knowledge, understanding, intellectual, and professional skills in design and craft. Students were content with their experience at VAA and felt that their respective courses met or exceeded their expectations, they felt well-supported in their learning.

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

The recruitment, admission, retention, and support of students into the first and second cycles as implemented by VAA is transparent, fair, and in line with national requirements. The study aims and content of the reviewed design disciplines meet the requirements of the Design study field descriptor. Information also includes programme outlines, aims, learning outcomes, and modes of study. For undergraduate programmes, each one has a curriculum of 240 ECTS credits, spread over 8 x 30 credit semesters. They state (SER BA, p. 17): "Pursuant to Article 9 of Chapter III of the General Study Requirements,[2] field-specific courses in all programmes under consideration are worth no less than 120 credits, while elective courses freely chosen by a student and offered by the higher education institution are worth no more than 120 credits." Internships/practicals and the Bachelor's thesis are worth no less than 15 credits. There did not appear to be any student recruitment or retention issues across both study cycles.

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

The aims, learning outcomes, teaching and learning methods, and assessment as set out in the SER are well-defined and designed to support the student experience with appropriate attention to developing knowledge, intellectual, professional, and transferable skills.

Staff research and scholarship expertise provide an excellent academic environment for students with an excellent and diverse mix of staff across the disciplines both in the first and second cycles. The combination of practical design modules and theory teaching provides an excellent framework for the development of key design skills.

The senior management team articulated opportunities for collaboration within and outside the design disciplines (e.g. fashion and theatre, product design and ceramics etc.). The staff teams meet regularly and share good practices although it is unclear how 'parity' of formative assessment and marks bandings operate across the design disciplines. Ensuring parity across different educational programs requires a thorough examination of individual student skills and the assessment criteria. The Expert Panel could not determine if there were any consistent approaches to student assessment forms and equal standards across different programmes, fostering a more equitable learning environment for all students.

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

The first cycle programmes give a strong grounding across the design disciplines with appropriate levels of challenge and a focus on developing student skills towards employment.

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[2] The Order of the Minister of Education, Science and Sport 'On the Approval of the Description of the General Requirements for Study Programmes' (30 December 2016): https://www.e-tar.lt/portal/lt/legalAct/739065a0ce9911e69e09f35d37acd719

The second cycle programmes clearly showed a higher level of training with many opportunities to identify design problems and create high-level innovative design solutions. Evidence gathered about both cycle levels indicated good levels of formative assessment throughout the programmes of study complemented by formative assessment in the academic calendar. Each course has a clear identity and ethos and overall the provision shares some common threads, for example, sustainability and critical thinking.

The syllabi and corresponding discussions with staff and students reflected the fact that subjects and modules are designed in such a way as to support and develop student learning with sequential levels of challenge as the courses progress. However, there appeared to be a challenge with computing teaching in some programmes which was highlighted by graphic design students who expressed the lack of design software teaching. The matter of inconsistency of technical support across programmes was also raised by the student group.

From the Panel's discussion with students, they are willing to have the updated subjects of the curriculum focused more on design management, marketing, arts management etc. focused on practical knowledge of starting a business. Whilst the SER BA (p. 35) identifies the need for "More intellectual property, project management and administration courses should be included in design study programmes" in the first cycle, it appears these areas are not an issue in the second cycle (SER MA, p. 34).

The evidence from interviews with social partners strongly suggests that they are satisfied with the knowledge and skills of students from both cycles.

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

Undergraduate Design programmes are grouped in 3 ways: firstly, through compulsory general university courses, secondly through compulsory field-specific courses, and thirdly via optional general university and field-specific courses.

The nature of design study affords students the opportunity to think independently and to utilise their design skills both in the studio and workshop. The provision of design briefs allows students to work independently through a variety of design options and to develop their own set of design solutions. Students are also afforded opportunities for study visits and to engage in Erasmus exchange and the link with social partners also exposes students to opportunities to develop and extend their thinking in the professional practice aspects of their work.

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

Standard of student work for the final thesis, which was presented to the Panel is very good at Vilnius and in most cases at other faculties. Most of the works which were presented during the field visit to Vilnius faculty or online is a good example of skilled exploration and creation of design concepts with a strong focus on visual representation. Academy follows up the

compliance of the final work with the requirements through multi-level mechanisms - the student chooses the topic and method of the final BA or MA thesis in consultation with the supervisor. Students reported they can access appropriate support and supervision during the process of researching and writing their thesis. For the BA thesis, an assessment committee is approved by the Rector, with the chairperson and members proposed to the Dean by the study programme committees (henceforth, SPC) (SER BA, p. 28). Similarly, according to the second cycle the Master's thesis assessment is delivered by the defence committee, which is approved by the Rector and is based on the principle of impartiality, for example, peer reviewers are appointed by the SPC (SER MA, p. 26). The defence committee must consist of at least five members, including social partners and persons with doctorates in Arts or Sciences (doctoral candidates). The two parts of the Master's thesis in the field of Design may be reviewed separately by one or two peer reviewers. The Panel members were pleased with the public aspect of student work during the process of the defence of their thesis, followed up with thesis work exhibitions as well as the opportunity for students to participate in the „Young designer competition".

However, analysis of the final theses projects reveals some possible areas for improvement. The material of the final thesis provided by various faculties is of diverse scope, however, there does not appear to be any consistency of approach regarding the basic requirements for students' final projects representing both study cycles in 4 faculties - projects are presented by short project description, which includes visualisations, renderings and in some cases are followed up by the written report and additional presentation material, for example, video. There does not appear to be any clear delineation regarding the difference between BA and MA final project scopes, as well as artistic argumentation and focus behind the projects (especially important for works of MA students not coming from Vilnius faculty).

As stated in the SER BA (p. 6), for the first study cycle „the Academy is committed to close co-operation between professors and students in knowledge acquisition; therefore, it encourages the participation of academics and students in joint scientific or artistic research and social and cultural activities". The Panel could not find evidence of the collaboration between professors and students in the preparation of final work – the links of students' works to research areas of the professors were not presented. It would be recommended to develop certain topics in the design field in cooperation. There is also no evidence of collaboration in both study cycles with students from other study fields in the Academy and beyond.

As students write their final theses in the MA study cycle, they are encouraged to work with the social partners of the study programmes. In SER it is stated that due to the pandemic, the cooperation with social partners has decreased. The Panel highly recommends exploring, for example, virtual collaboration tools to ensure the consistency of the study experience despite the temporary crisis.

Strengths and weaknesses of this evaluation area:

(1) Strengths:

1. Functional pool of design study programmes in of both cycles is a valuable asset to the Lithuanian labour market.
2. Final student work is relevant, students demonstrate visualisation skills and are focusing on the communication material when representing their ideas.
3. The second cycle incorporates aspects of entrepreneurship and marketing within the curriculum.

(2) Weaknesses:
1. VAA should consider developing a standard set of curriculum principles and standards for example, based on knowledge, understanding, intellectual, professional, and transferable skills.
2. In the first cycle there is a subtle need towards design entrepreneurship through the context of design management and marketing. By doing so, students may have the option to develop expertise in these areas and may have the chance to research and provide solutions towards this direction.
3. The issue in Graphic design programme regarding the teaching of computing pertaining to absence of design software instruction and inconsistency of technical support across various programmes.
4. The quality of BA and MA thesis works should be the same in all 4 faculties of the Academy and across all study programmes - the Panel noticed an inconsistency in the quality of final works as well as scope and research tools/skills.
5. Student collaboration with external partners, which was reduced due to the pandemic, and collaboration with students from other study fields within Academy and beyond with the aim of interdisciplinarity, as well as links to research agendas pursued by professors could be strengthened.

3.2. LINKS BETWEEN SCIENCE (ART) AND STUDIES

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

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

According to the Research Council of Lithuania evaluation results, in 2019 VAA was a leader among Lithuanian higher education institutions. VAA is continuously promoting diverse forms of creativity of both academic staff and students. Research and experimental development is a prior and obviously successful area for VAA. According to SER BA (p. 30), it comprises from 400 to 520 hours each academic year, and various activities are supported by the Rector's fund with an annual budget of €40,000.

The Expert Panel observed that VAA demonstrates a very strong research environment and culture, along with operative collaboration with external partners, resulting in the development

of 62 projects under research and development (R&D) (SER BA, p. 30). There is also international activity in the R&D, and one of the distinguished projects worth mentioning is the project "Plastic Justice: A New Dimension in Art and Design Education." (2020-2022) related to the environmental pollution of micro plastic and other smaller projects dedicated to the theme of green design (SER BA, p. 32). The local partners of the school are key players in the area of design in Lithuania.

Staff are ambitious and develop their own research outputs as well as participate in international conferences and gatherings related to their respective disciplines. For example, the current Arsenal museum exhibition on 'Nematomi' and related artefacts was curated by an academic member of staff from VAA. The Academy provides support for the development of its staff who are able to attend conferences, develop their research, and engage in a variety of scholarship activities.

In the meeting with the Expert Panel, it was clear that staff is aware of each other's research and scholarship activities and this collegiate shared understanding and investment in the research culture of VAA provides an excellent forum for sharing best practices in design. Although the SER BA (p. 34) identifies the need for "Closer cooperation with business partners [...] to attract financial investment and develop innovative design products", this is a challenge which faces many schools of design and an opportunity exists for alumni and social partners to be embraced for their advice, support, and influence in attracting further funding into VAA.

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

The senior leadership team and staff at VAA are ambitious for their institution and its students in terms of their focus on contemporary innovation in international best practice, through professional standards and their links with many social partners, and in the context of international and exhibition opportunities. Over the past three years, students of the VAA Design programmes won 72 awards in various international and local competitions (SER BA, p. 34), for example, a gold and silver medal in the A'Design Award points to the excellency of students' final work. Table 2.4 in the SER shows the students' achievements in exhibitions, competitions, and scholarships received, totalling 81 for the first cycle.

For the exponential growth of digital content and trends, there is ongoing investment in staff and workshop equipment. Staff are enthused about their subject and freely converse about current trends and contemporary issues in design. Similarly, the support offered by social partners in respect of current developments and the design professions is an excellent bridge between academia and industry. The Expert Panel strongly encourages VAA to develop their influence with national policymakers as they state in their SER (SER BA p. 35, SER MA p. 34), as this could also help to develop their national influence and international profile.

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

VAA offers an excellent intellectual and physical environment for students to develop their research and innovation skills. There are ample opportunities for students to develop highly creative research-based work both in the first and even more in the second cycle studies and VAA also offers opportunities to develop PhD work in design (although PhD was not subject to the Expert Panel's review).

The Expert Panel also valued the richness of organised activity: Table No. 2.3. in SER has listed 102 workshops, internships, exhibitions, conferences, projects, etc. where more than 1073 students from all departments and faculties took an active part. Students are supported and encouraged to participate in conferences and competitions, although the second cycle SER did raise issues regarding 'long-term' (p. 34) opportunities for students and in developing industrial links, a challenge that could be addressed through a formalised industrial/professional advisory board and alumni association.

Strengths and weaknesses of this evaluation area:

(1) Strengths:
1. The ambition and interest in global issues, for example, sustainability and climate action is a strength.
2. The provision of an intellectual and physical environment for learning, practice, and research.
3. Instructive network of galleries contributes to the dissemination of design in local areas and strong involvement in international design competitions.

2) Weaknesses:
1. There is a challenge and valuable opportunity for VAA to activate and embrace the advice, support, and influence of alumni and social partners in attracting additional funding into the institution and in developing student-industry links.
2. VAA could benefit from further developing its influence with national policymakers to explore the potential of enhancing its national influence and international profile.

3.3. STUDENT ADMISSION AND SUPPORT

Student admission and support shall be evaluated according to the following indicators:
3.3.1. Evaluation of the suitability and publicity of student selection and admission criteria and process

Admission procedures are clear and based on Lithuanian regulations for both BA and MA. It is worth noting that candidates applying to study in one of the study programmes in the field of Design at the VAA have to have graduated from school and pass a motivational interview as well as submit a portfolio of creative works. The level of preparation of applicants to the VAA, even though it depends on the study programme (applicants with the highest level choosing

studies in Vilnius faculty), has been steadily increasing over the last three years. This suggests that increasingly well-prepared and motivated candidates are applying to the VAA and that reflects on study results. The entrance examinations are an opportunity for students to display their motivation and competencies in the design field whilst also allowing them to understand the culture and environment at VAA. From an admissions compliance perspective, the process is really clear and affords applicants to understand the institution beyond the visual and text information contained on the VAA website.

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

Partial studies, under the orders of the Minister of Education, Science and Sports, are integrated into the structures of VAA whereby learning is credited and recognised and study achievements and competencies are acquired by students through non-formal and informal learning routes or partial studies (SER BA p. 40 and MA p. 37). VAA also operates a system of accreditation of prior learning either from their own institution or another institution provided it has been achieved through partial study. Further, Erasmus+ also afford students the opportunity to study in another country via partial study. During the past 3 years, students undertook partial studies in a range of countries including Portugal, France, Spain, Germany, Cyprus, Israel, Slovakia, and Sweden amongst others. Over the past 3 years, students have continued to study Design abroad under partial study agreements. At the undergraduate level in total 16 Graphic Design students have studied abroad, with 12 interior design, and 5 fashion design students have done the same (SER BA p. 41). At the Masters level, over the past 3 years, outward mobilities for partial study and internships have included 2 Graphic Design students, 5 Visual Communication Design students, and 2 Design students with a total of 10 incoming students from other European countries taking partial study at VAA (SER MA p. 37).

3.3.3. Evaluation of conditions for ensuring academic mobility of students

According to SER BA (p. 41), The Academy has signed 162 Erasmus+ agreements with universities in art, design, and humanities across participating countries. They actively pursue international mobility, establishing new academic contacts and agreements. Erasmus+ academic mobility extends to partner countries, including collaborations with institutions in Mexico, Israel, Montenegro, and Argentina. Agreements have also been made with universities in Brazil, Japan, the USA, Switzerland, Ukraine, and more. Students have opportunities for Erasmus+ studies, internships abroad, and can benefit from the Nordplus programme. The VAA Nordplus programme is administered through networks of higher education institutions in Baltic and Nordic countries.

Whilst mobility exists, overall numbers are modest (for an institution the size of VAA) and there appears to be an imbalance with combined outward mobility across BA and MA of 42 and an inward mobility of 10 students (SER BA, p. 41 and SER MA, p. 37). Although students can choose to go on Erasmus to study in another country, the project has not reached its full potential due to a range of inhibitors including finances, paid work, or other responsibilities. The Expert Panel

noted Lithuanian is the language of instruction which will have implications for students from other countries as the common (international) language of English often breaks down international communication barriers. It is recommended that VAA reviews its support for inward mobility students.

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

Students receive support in different ways from VAA including, for example, pastoral advice from professional counselling and guidance services staff which are available free of charge to students. Also, it appears that there is excellent communication between students and staff which altogether fosters a supportive and creatively productive working environment. The atmosphere in the institution is progressive and challenging, yet at the same time fosters a culture of creative endeavour, one where students feel listened to and that they can participate or make positive contributions to the running of VAA. Those students who satisfy the institution's requirements for academic/creative endeavour can receive support in the form of scholarships which helps to support their studies.

The students' knowledge, intellectual, professional, and transferable skills are well supported by the lecturing and professional services staff, a point that was repeated during the meetings with the Expert Panel. However, some students (notably BA Design) experienced difficulty in finding and securing internships and some students felt that placement opportunities were easier for some disciplines than others. Thus, there appears to be inconsistency in the ways that internships are accessed and supported across the courses.

3.3.5 Evaluation of the sufficiency of study information and student counselling

Students have access to all of the information about the studies they need and beyond the academic staff are supported by a counselling and guidance service. The lecturers inform students about their module requirements and their academic timetables for tests or examinations as required. However, in the student meeting with the Expert Panel, some students felt they needed more information about the projects and grades suggesting that post-submission feedback could have been more comprehensive. The institution should look at ways of standardising marking and assessment schemes of work in order to provide thorough feedback that highlights strengths, weaknesses, and points for discussion. This provides a framework for justification of the mark given.

Strengths and weaknesses of this evaluation area:

(1) Strengths:
1. Admission procedures are clear and in line with international best practice.
2. The quality of student information and support.

(2) Weaknesses:

1. The volume of outward and inward student mobilities does not appear to be operating at a level expected of a large provider.
2. Support for students wishing to secure placement/internships.
3. The thoroughness and consistency of formative student feedback.

3.4. TEACHfNG AND LEARNING, STUDENT PERFORMANCE AND GRADUATE EMPLOYMENT

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

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

According to SER, teaching, learning, and assessment methods, monitoring of progress and safeguarding of academic integrity at the Vilnius Academy of Arts are regulated according to Lithuanian law and internal documents of VAA - VAA Study Regulations (2017), Design Study Field Descriptors (2021), the VAA Strategy for Study Quality Assurance, Management, and Fostering a Culture of Excellence (2018), the VAA Code of Academic Ethics (2015), as well as resolutions of the Government of the Republic of Lithuania and the orders of the Ministry of Education, Science, and Sport that regulate study processes.

The programmes possess a robust infrastructure that facilitates the development of studio-based teaching and learning systems, providing students with the necessary creative environment to accomplish diverse tasks.

At the end of each semester, public exhibitions and project reviews in the form of seminar or public discussion take place, with the participation of internal and external guests. Students present their work and receive feedback from the course instructor, other academics, and guests. The SPC (with the representatives of students in it) discusses achieved study results and the quality of course curricula, students' and academics' feedback, needs, preferences, and critique, and formulates changes for the course content, scope and a number of assignments, and assessment timetables.

During the field visit, it was understood that surveys are the main tool used for getting feedback from the students. Surveying is implemented consistently. According to SER MA (p. 62), for the second cycle on average, 43–54% of all second-cycle students in the field of Design participate in surveys. According to SER BA (p. 70), for the first study cycle, "one of the priority goals was to increase the number of respondents. Survey respondents during the assessment period constituted 55% of all students." The Panel agrees that a higher number of survey respondents would bring more transparency and knowledge on the students' needs and how VAA meets them. As students indicate in their answers to survey questions more attention has to be paid to the emotional environment, innovative teaching methods, and the additional lecture material provided and less to the study content, the study process, evaluation criteria, the feedback from

academic staff and ethical behaviours. The Panel welcomes the idea to shorten surveys as they provide tendencies rather than on-the-ground understanding, which has to be collected with other means. Cooperation with the Student Association and regular email reminders are positive signs that demonstrate that the school is striving to ensure students' feedback collection.

Logically, the second-cycle study programmes in the field of Design offered at the Vilnius Academy of Arts focus on students' opportunities to adapt studies for individual needs content wise and time planning wise. Starting at the application stage, candidates submit their Master's thesis plans to the admissions committee, build an individual study plan, and propose artistic-scientific research on a topic of their choice. Study processes and individual consultations are adapted to students' needs - interviews confirm that there are opportunities to make individual study paths. The elective courses, provided by Academy from humanities or practical-creative fields help students achieve the outcomes identified in the study programme. As interviews point out, students of both study cycles receive regular feedback from the supervisors on the practical and research parts of their thesis.

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

As stated in SERs, the study process - conditions and learning methods - can be adapted (according to the VAA Strategy for Study Quality Assurance, Management, and Fostering a Culture of Excellence (2018)) for students with special needs and socially vulnerable groups. The VAA also provides social, psychological and financial support for students with special needs. They are eligible for two types of benefits: financial aid and targeted benefits (Disabled Students' Allowance). The Academy's buildings are accessible for students with mobility issues. Trust-based, non-discriminatory communication during lectures is encouraged. The Panel did not find any proof of the opposite.

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

SERs point out that students in both study cycles receive feedback on their learning achievements and advice on the planning of their study progress regularly, during lectures, consultations, seminars, mid-term and final reviews, and exam sessions. Feedback is provided to students by both coursework and thesis supervisors during individual consultations and by other faculty during public exhibitions and reviews. Assessments of MA students' works are public, with the participation of all Master's students, their supervisors, and students in other years.

Even though there are opportunities for individual feedback to be provided for students on their study progress during individual mentoring processes, reviews, etc. the Panel got the impression that the planning and assessment of individual study progress might be measured in the second cycle study programmes, even though public reviews could hardly count as a good

ground for the analysis of personal progress - they are rather good to showcase the results. No formal system for individual progress indicators and their measuring was mentioned in SERs as well as during field visits to the institution. Individualised, mentorship-based attention to students promoted by VAA might reduce opportunities for the students to learn from their peers and follow the progress of others. As well it can be an ineffective way for the achievement of the requirements for the basic study level, dissemination of knowledge created in the study process, etc.

Due to the fact that students entering the Academy demonstrate a high level of preparedness their learning outcomes could be more individual as well. The self-assessment system of students assessing their own work or their peers could be strengthened. No evidence was gathered that there are practices of self-assessment but it would be recommended to develop more independent self-critique.

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

VAA highlighted a number of their design programmes as being highly relevant for employment for example, they note in their SER (BA, p. 13) about the high demand for graphic design specialists and the growing demand for graphic designers in particular. Further, they also identified the Interior Design programme and the demand for interior design specialists in the market. Surveying graduates, they found that 73.68% of respondents indicated they have a job related to their studies or are engaged in individual artistic/creative and scientific activities which are their main source of income (SER BA, p. 52).

Collegial relations with the graduates and social partners were well revealed during interviews. It was generally agreed that the staff of VAA is interested in further careers of graduates, sharing information with alumni about job vacancies and design competitions and other field-related events. Some of the study programmes also include projects and topics of final theses proposed by companies and in doing so introduce students to potential employers.

This is accompanied by the VAA Study Service, which conducts regular surveys of graduates. Data provided in SER MA (p. 43) demonstrates that the number of graduates stating that their employment related to the completed degree programme is slightly declining - 2019-2020 69.4% indicated that their employment is related to the completed degree programme, 2018 - 80% indicated that their employment is related to the completed study programme. It is recommended to look into this tendency more closely.

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

SER MA (p. 40) states that "the compliance with the principles of academic fairness and integrity in the VAA is ensured in accordance with the VAA Code of Academic Ethics. SER MA (p. 44) indicates that a feedback survey is conducted each semester that allows students to offer their feedback and opinions so that any violations of academic integrity may be promptly

addressed. The VAA Senate has an Ethics Committee, which deals with ethical issues that could not be resolved at lower levels of VAA self-governance." The Panel determined that no issues were detected within this area.

3.4.6. Evaluation of the effectiveness of the application of procedures for the submission and examination of appeals and complaints regarding the study process within the field studies

In VAA, "if an examination was assessed by one member of academic staff, a student may submit an appeal to the Dean of the Faculty, providing a thorough rationale for the basis of the appeal. Appeals will not be accepted if the examination was conducted by an examination commission" SER BA (p. 53). In the last three years, 2 appeals were filed, one by a student enrolled in the Interior Design study programme who lodged an appeal in 2021 pertaining to the evaluation of their BA examination and one by a student in the MA in the field of Design, and the students' appeals were upheld. The Panel understood that VAA is striving for a culture of constructive feedback and focuses on collegial informal disputes.

Strengths and weaknesses of this evaluation area:

(1) Strengths:
1. Programmes have well-established infrastructure to develop studio-based teaching and learning systems - students have a creative space needed for the completion of various tasks.
2. The role of SPCs in developing the curriculum taking cognizance of industry developments via social partners.

(2) Weaknesses:
1. Student survey response rate and form.
2. Self-assessment system of students assessing their own work or their peers could be strengthened. No evidence was gathered that there are practices of self-assessment.
3. The decreasing number of employment related to the completed degree programme.

3.5. TEACHING STAFF

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

3.5.1. Evaluation of the adequacy of the number, qualification and competence (scientific, didactic, professional) of teaching staff within a field study programme(s) at the HEI in order to achieve the learning outcomes

The staff complement offers expert discipline-specific knowledge across the range of degree programmes at first and second cycle. Both in the SER documents and in meetings with the Expert Panel, staff outlined VAA's support for research and teaching visits abroad, becoming acquainted with current issues in the field of Design (p. 59 of the SER BA states 337 professional development activities 2018-2021), and having flexible work schedules. VAA's senior leadership team also outlined the development of online training resources to enable staff to develop their pedagogical competencies which included evaluations. The Expert Panel felt that the strong leadership team had put in place a variety of evaluation mechanisms (surveys, cyclical monitoring, and staff training) which were designed to develop staff competencies in line with the ambition of the institution. During the Expert Panel interactions the staff teams displayed ambition, dynamism, excellent understanding of contemporary issues in the design disciplines, and enthusiasm for delivering a high quality student experience.

3.5.2. Evaluation of conditions for ensuring teaching staff's academic mobility

VAA has set in place arrangements for the support of staff development, their research, and scholarship. During the meetings with the Expert Panel, staff outlined an array of visits and activities outwith the institution. It appeared that staff were well networked and familiar with contemporary (global) issues in design. However, their SER identified the need to make better use of Erasmus+ resources and for both greater outward staff mobility (to give lectures and lead workshops) and the development of international networks via inward mobility of academics from universities in other countries.

The Expert Panel believes that although staff mobility is featured in the data and text of the SER (Table 13 and elsewhere on page 59), greater effort is needed to truly internationalise staff and student mobility at VAA.

3.5.3. Evaluation of the conditions to improve the competencies of the teaching staff

Each department has a good mix of staff and includes professors, associate professors, and lecturers which makes for a positive environment for supporting and developing early career researchers and academic staff. VAA has focused on developing staff in a number of ways, via pedagogical training, through flexible work schedules, access to funding opportunities for professional development, and through encouraging staff to seek Erasmus+ exchanges.

Furthermore, VAA operates annual reviews (SER BA, p. 59 'attestation'), annual report writing and submission by staff as well as a 5-year cycle review.

Strengths and weaknesses of this evaluation area:

(1) Strengths:
1. A strong team ethos at the departmental level with appropriate staff profiles that creates a diverse academic environment focused on teaching, research, scholarship, and enterprise.
2. Evidence and an ambition to support, strengthen, and develop staff mobility through a number of initiatives.

(2) Weaknesses:
1. Further work is needed to strengthen and extend outward staff mobility and to attract inward mobility for academics from other universities throughout Europe and beyond.

3.6. LEARNING FACILITIES AND RESOURCES

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

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

Design study programmes and design laboratories in Vilnius are located in the 'Titanikas' building (Maironio St 3). Design study programmes are also available in Kaunas, Klaipėda and Telšiai faculties. According to SER BA (p. 61), the total study and teaching area of all Design programmes is 3386 m^2, i.e. 6.55 m^2 per student. Design study programmes use facilities and resources of campuses, departments and faculties, as well as shared general resources and premises of VAA. Also, external resources of social partners are used in the study processes.

The Academy owns a museum (SER BA, p. 60), galleries and exhibition spaces (9 in total), a publishing house, technological, creative, and production laboratories (10 in Vilnius, 7 in Kaunas, 5 in Klaipėda, 6 in Telšiai), the Nida Art Colony, a studio in Paris, a student workshop base in Mizarai (Druskininkai district), and exhibition and museum spaces in Vilnius, Kaunas, Klaipėda, Telšiai, Panemunė Castle. The Academy is a shareholder in the Audiovisual Arts Incubator and the founder of the Arts Incubator in Telšiai. This is an excellent infrastructure for Design studies and research. Each student of the VAA Design study programmes has their workspace, there are almost 500 workspaces for students in the field of Design. The auditoriums are well equipped. The Department of Design in Vilnius Faculty has a Food Design Lab - an auditorium with functional kitchen equipment created through a collaborative effort with Electrolux.

There is the Library of Materials, designed to collect and present to students the widest possible range of material samples and their processing technologies. There are outdoor terraces with excellent views from 'Titanikas', which has a 'Design Greenhouse' - a space for exhibiting students' works. During the visit, the Expert Panel saw an experimental design exhibition there and as well socialising students on the terrace.

The Expert Panel visited two exhibition spaces in 'Titanikas' and there was a lot of evidence about very good student work and excellent learning outcomes, exhibited all over the building. According to SER BA (p. 61), students of Interior Design cal also exhibit their works in the Chess Hall (Malūnų St 5, first floor), which has special exhibition equipment. In fact, all auditoriums, halls, and studios of the VAA Design programmes are adapted for exhibiting students' works. While the design campuses undertake interesting projects and receive funding, the Expert Panel has noticed that there is a shortage of resources allocated to effectively communicate the outcomes and achievements.

Design studios are well-equipped and professional software is in use. According to SER and site visit interviews, students in the Graphic Design programme use Adobe, Figma and Unity, programming tool Processing, and animation programmes Maya and Cinema 4D. Fashion Design students use Gerber and Affinity. Interior designers use Graphisoft Archicad for Education and Autodesk AutoCAD 2022. For scanning 3D objects, Telšiai Faculty uses Artec Studio 16 software, which is updated annually. Under an agreement with the In Re design company, VAA has received 200 Solidworks Premium licences for faculty and unlimited access for students with personal computers. Google products such as Blender 3D and SketchUp for Schools are widely used because of their easy accessibility. Whilst students have access to computer licences on-campus, more generally, there were students from different disciplines who raised the matter of off-campus software access. Another student mentioned that computers are slow to render.

VAA Art and Design laboratories have different equipment and the practical work of student projects realisation takes part there. The most complex and advanced equipment is concentrated in Vilnius Faculty but there are labs also in other campuses. Students learn with the support of professional masters to work safely with complex mechanisms and have direct access to various materials and their processing methods. The labs have equipment for prototyping and experimentation with wood, plastic and metal, electronics, jewellery, furniture restoration, reproduction graphics, ceramics, textile, glass processing, and digital printing. Design Labs are financed from the VAA funds allocated for running study programmes. This funding is used for purchasing materials and updating equipment according to the annual maintenance plan. Leftover materials are free of charge and students have some financial support to buy materials, however, students must pay for additional materials for undertaking practical work, although this is the same for the design disciplines across the sector. The labs are open for all VAA students to experiment and complete the practical work of their study programme. Students can also use labs for their independent creative work. According to SER BA (p. 63), up to 60 students can work in the laboratories simultaneously. Design Labs are accessible, have good technical support and friendly workshop leaders. Laboratories are busy

at the end of the semester. Opening times of Labs differ but it is possible to apply working longer on work days or on the weekends.

Laboratories are the strength in Vilnius and across different campuses (Telšiai, Klaipėda, Kaunas): alumni, teachers and social partners report huge development since 2003. Workshops look to be managed very well and are accessible to students. Transportation between faculties is available by vehicles owned by faculties.

Students the Expert Panel met during the site visit were very happy about their facilities which they find relaxing. Students had a clear understanding of the organisation of using studios and workshops, library resources and other facilities. Students from others than Vilnius Faculty knew well they have access to Vilnius and other campuses' workshops, library resources and databases.

According to SER BA (p. 62), the VAA library is the only Lithuanian higher education institution library specialising in art, design, and architecture resources. The Library subscribed to 135 periodicals in Lithuanian and other languages. The VAA Library has a Rare Books Department, which houses prints from the 16th century. The network of VAA libraries consists of the central library in Vilnius, the library of A. and A. Tamošaičiai gallery "Židinys", and libraries in Kaunas, Klaipėda, and Telšiai. All reading rooms in the libraries can be used by students of all study cycles, regardless of the faculty they are studying at. Students can use the electronic catalogues of the VAA Library, which are freely accessible on the Internet, and the catalogue of the Lithuanian Virtual Library. There is an excellent library system in VAA.

VAA Vilnius Faculty has The Health and Sports Centre. The Student Association has its own room. Telšiai Faculty has its own gym. The VAA communities in Kaunas and Klaipėda use the sports bases of other higher education institutions. Also, accommodation is available in other higher education institutions' dormitories.

The VAA Metal Workshop is located in a building with great historical value but is not fully accessible to people with special needs due to its monument protection requirements. The Metal Workshop (Malūnų str. 5) is well equipped but clearly too small and could be moved to new premises or expanded if possible.

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

The design programmes are run in accordance with the Description of the Procedure for Using and Managing VAA Funds and Assets (2017), approved by the VAA Council. According to Rector, improving infrastructure depends on money. VAA looks at their budget each year and VAA Council collects needs from departments. The need to upgrade the equipment is assessed in the faculty councils, proposals are sent to the VAA budgeting working group. After the approval of the budget by the VAA Council, the necessary equipment is purchased, and the study environment is improved (SER BA, p. 65). During the site visit, the Expert Panel were told that the needs of design study campuses were fulfilled 100% in the year 2021. Study programmes

had to work together to make corresponding conclusions as life is different on different campuses. Together the campuses and Design area can better change the cons and have a system to share. For further improvement, it is advisable for VAA to assess its multi-campus strategy regarding design in order to ensure uniformity, unity, and adherence to standards. Additionally, the promotion of a distinct and easily recognizable campus identity should be taken into account, with a focus on visibility to external stakeholders. Moreover, due to the ownership of the Klaipeda campus premises by the City, determining responsibility for renovation works becomes a complex task.

According to SER BA (p. 64), the VAA faculties approved the Accessibility Improvement Plan on September 11, 2020, which outlines modifications aimed at enhancing the accessibility of VAA premises for individuals with disabilities across all faculties. The plan encompasses various measures, including deadlines, funding sources, and accessibility improvements, to be implemented before 2025. Many of the simpler accessibility measures, such as marking disabled parking spaces, eliminating thresholds and steps, and raising pavements, have already been executed, while more resource-intensive actions like installing lifts will be completed by 2025.

Continuous enhancement and improvements must still be on the agenda of the Academy that match the development of new technologies in industry and professional practice.

Strengths and weaknesses of this evaluation area:

(1) Strengths:
1. Facilities and generally physical resources including studios, laboratories, workshops and the library were found to be of an excellent standard.
2. The facilities and workshop access for students are excellent. Technical support in studios and in workshops is excellent.
2. Opportunities for students to work outside normal timetable hours exist and procedures for independent work in studios are well-defined.
3. Richness of the library and remarkable collections.
4. Social partners are involved in developing facilities and making them user-friendly.
5. There are not a lot of design education institutions with such well-located and open-for-public galleries, such as VAA. This is an excellent opportunity to show student works but also art and design work on an international level to inspire and educate VAA students.

(2) Weaknesses:
1. VAA should review its multi-campus strategy for design to ensure consistency, cohesiveness, and standards. A clear and externally visible promotion of campus identity should also be considered.
2. The premises of the Klaipeda campus belong to the City, therefore it is complicated to define who is responsible for carrying out the renovation work when needed.

3. Students with special needs still don't have access to all the premises and facilities. While a lot is done but there is a great need to fulfil the Accessibility Improvement Plan in the coming years to achieve the goal in 2025 set in the Plan.
4. Design campuses do interesting projects and they are financed but there is a lack of resources for communication of results.
5. Students face restricted availability of computer licenses for use at home.
6. Students encounter financial difficulties in covering the costs of additional materials required for practical work.

3.7. STUDY QUALITY MANAGEMENT AND PUBLIC INFORMATION

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

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

VAA has developed its quality assurance systems in accordance with international best practice. There are many policies and procedures in place to deal with the necessary matters in areas like admissions, student retention and progression, support and guidance, staff and student mobility, research and scholarship, capital and recurrent funding, and the various matters of governance and staff development in line with approved quality procedures (SER BA, p. 67). The Academy's internal study quality assurance system has been developed in accordance with European Standards and guidelines for Quality Assurance, the Common Assessment Framework, the Common Assessment Framework, the European Foundation for Quality Management (EFQM) Excellence Model and conforms to several, and the international quality management standards (ISO 9001, ISO 9001: 2008, ISO 9004: 2010 SA 8000). Nationally, VAA confirms to the Science and Education Act of the Republic of Lithuania and the Design field is part of its wider institutional Integrated Development Strategy 2012-2020 (SER BA, p. 67) and its Strategy for Study Quality Assurance, Management, and Fostering a Culture of Excellence (2018) as well as its three-year Strategic Action Plan. Meetings between the Expert Panel and the senior leadership team, SER authors, staff teams, students, and social partners reinforced the effectiveness of the various governance and quality frameworks.

VAA's Senate approves its Study Regulations for creating new programmes, student selection and attainment, and progression and examination including that of the final thesis. Internal quality assessment is based on the principles of autonomy and accountability, contextualisation, evaluation, reflection, and partnership (SER BA, p. 67). Within these, there is provision for academic and institutional independence, strategic and operational development, a whole-institution collaborative approach, a system of continual improvement, and one based on partnerships within and outside the institution.

Structurally, SPCs normally meeting on a monthly basis, are responsible for quality management and decision-making in each course and across all four campuses. SPCs are a key

aspect of the management and governance structure of VAA, are approved by the Rector, are bound by SPC regulations, and include academic representatives as well as students and social partners. SPCs are also responsible for reviewing and discussing student projects following their submission and assessment. VAA runs a Study Quality Services Department which oversees quality management across 3 of the four campuses with a different arrangement in Telšiai (SER BA, p. 68). VAA also monitors the annual reports of academic staff focusing on several areas including teaching, scholarship, research, professional development, and administration. Whilst the Expert Panel did not have the opportunity to explore quality management in detail, it might be helpful to present comparative performance data across programmes and campuses where similar courses are offered.

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

SPCs involving students and social partners are integral to the VAA study quality assurance system as was stated in the SER analysis and was evidenced in the Expert Panel interviews with various groups during the field visit. SPCs consist of academic staff, students, alumni, and social partners (at least 6 persons in total). The structure of the Committee is approved by the Rector and renewed annually. Analysis of the SPC provided in the SER shows that SPCs operate in a diverse manner, in most cases having the same members for three years, with changing student representatives. Two positions on the SPC are alumni and social partners (often the same person fills both the social partner and alumni role), although it was not explicitly stated as to how long or how many terms of office these external representatives might hold.

The senior leadership team at VAA outlined their vision and strategic priorities to the Expert Panel and explained how the institution links to industry and the professions, the partnerships with social partners, and the value of VAA to the wider society of Lithuania. Social partners are involved in examining final BA and MA theses and help evaluate/improve study programmes (SER BA, p. 69). However, course teams identified the need to 'increase the involvement of social partners in individual study programmes (SER BA, p. 29).

Students participate in all key relevant university committees and their various management chains shaping study processes and content. Student representatives participate in the VAA Council, the Senate, Faculty Councils, and SPCs; they are well integrated into the governance framework of VAA. Similarly, alumni of VAA are also kept abreast of developments. With regard to surveys and feedback mechanisms, students are able to complete assessment forms regarding how they perceive their studies, progress, and learning environment.

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

With regard to the collection of data, whilst the external Panel was reassured of the integration of key stakeholders in the governance arrangements, it was unclear how performance data and gathered student feedback is reviewed, evaluated, and developed in such a way as to improve

the student experience. For example, how are underperforming courses tasked with improving the quality of their provision.

VAA has a comprehensive website that includes information related to the Academy, its vision, values, mission, structures, and details of each study programme. The SER BA (p. 69) also highlights the use of a range of other media outputs including e-newsletters and social media as well as an institutional annual report and feedback from external reviews. For applicants, the website provides clear information for new applicants, academic recognition, timetables for the various programmes of study, and information for international students. Further, there is extensive information on research facilities, exchange studies, and VAA galleries. All information is available in Lithuanian and English, is clearly set out, and logical in navigation.

VAA operates numerous quality procedures (SER BA, p. 67) which create and contain current information related to the quality of their provision and ultimately contribute to the richness and authenticity of information used to promote and elucidate publicly available information.

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

VAA uses a standardised feedback procedure (SER BA, p. 70) which, according to the staff meeting with the Expert Panel, happens twice per academic year although they stated that not enough students are engaging in the process.

In the Expert Panel meeting with students, they stated that they had completed anonymised feedback forms in each semester and that in general feedback was 'extensive'. VAA uses feedback to assist programme development. However, the graphic design students felt that whilst grading contained 'pretty clear' feedback, it was unfull and that feedback for 3 courses happened in one day resulting in limited time to discuss work. For the graphic design discipline, this is contrary to the SER BA (p. 70) which states that "a lot of attention is paid to informal discussions with students during reviews and assessment". However, all students did feel there was good ongoing formative feedback on a regular basis.

VAA were proactive in developing feedback mechanisms for distance learning (prompted by the Covid pandemic) and noted many strengths, some weaknesses, and further points for development in the SER BA (p. 70), which is particularly gratifying given the applied nature of the design disciplines. However, although VAA noted the prioritisation of feedback (constituting a 55% return of all students), it would be helpful to report respondent percentages per course, setting response targets, and student satisfaction targets.

Strengths and weaknesses of this evaluation area:

(1) Strengths:
1. A clear and inclusive quality management structure and system that takes account of student views and those of other stakeholders.

2. The student-facing SPCs that take responsibility for curriculum development and quality enhancement

(2) Weaknesses:
1. Lack of clarity around how the centralised and systematic approach for collecting student feedback with regard to their experience at module or programme level is used to improve the quality of the student experience.
2. Not enough students are engaging in the course feedback process.

IV. EXAMPLES OF EXCELLENCE

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

1. The ambition and interest in global issues, for example, sustainability and climate action.
2. Strong pedagogical training with a significant uplift in participation in pedagogical, collaborative, and general development activities, including online learning.
3. The strong links with industry and social partners and the opportunities for students to engage in extra-curricular activities are excellent.
4. Staff and students are motivated and student projects provide excellent evidence of the institution's ambition.
5. The facilities and workshop access for students are excellent. Technical support and opportunities for students to work outside normal timetabled hours are to be commended. Students were unanimous in their appreciation of the facilities.
6. Students and staff are proud of VAA and its cultural context: the local, national, and international understanding and appreciation of design - being of value and strong impact.

V. RECOMMENDATIONS

Evaluation Area	Recommendations for the Evaluation Area
Intended and achieved learning outcomes and curriculum	VAA offers an excellent teaching and research environment for students and to ensure greater consistency in delivery and across campuses, they should consider developing a common set of curriculum principles and standards, for example, based on the core themes of knowledge, understanding, intellectual, professional, and transferable skills. VAA should consider ways to ensure greater parity in assessment across courses offered on any one, or across different campuses. Course data, external examiner reports, assessment descriptors, and a common set of curriculum principles should also be reviewed. Also, VAA should ensure uniformity in the quality of both BA and MA thesis works across all four faculties of the Academy and throughout all study programmes leveing the scope, research tools and skills utilised. The Expert Panel was unable to establish if there were consistencies in approach regarding student assessment forms and parity across programmes, which is a potential area for further development. VAA should consider ways to build on the existing strengths to develop student entrepreneurship, design management, and marketing at the undergraduate level. This could be achieved through, for example, the establishment of a one-year paid industrial placement, placement/social partner awards, a Director of research and Enterprise role, mandatory competition submissions, or formalising links with business schools or engineering faculties in other universities. Likewise, the issue of the lack of teaching of computing and design software instruction should be explored. As a priority for enhancement, VAA could foster collaboration with external partners and among students from different study programmes of design and study fields within the Academy and beyond, with the goal of promoting interdisciplinary approaches, as well as strengthening connections to research agendas pursued by professors.

Links between science (art) and studies	VAA demonstrates a clear ambition and integration of global issues, an excellent intellectual and physical environment, and a well-connected network of social partners and external venues.

However, it is recommended that VAA actively engage and embrace the advice, support, and influence of alumni and social partners to attract additional funding into the institution and foster stronger student-industry links. Furthermore, VAA should prioritise the development of its influence with national policymakers to explore opportunities for enhancing its national influence and international profile. By doing so, VAA can leverage these resources and connections to propel its growth and activity in design. |
| Student admission and support | Whilst the procedure for recognising foreign qualifications is satisfactory, there does not appear to be the volume of either outward or inward student mobility one might expect. VAA should develop strategies to strengthen and internationalise the student experience by promoting greater outward mobility and review its arrangements for attracting, retaining, and supporting inward mobility students - particularly those with no grasp of Slavic languages. Constructs like an international student committee/convention which meets regularly and an active unit charged with attracting international students (via Erasmus or otherwise) would help to develop the international student culture. VAA should also clarify the approach regarding the language of instruction and any accommodation for inwardly mobile students who may have English language skills as well as their own native language.

VAA should also look towards formalising the role of Placement Tutor for each undergraduate degree programme as a means to establish a point of contact and to assist students in securing placements/internships.

VAA should consider implementing mechanisms to ensure consistency in feedback across different courses which might contribute to formative feedback practices. This might include developing clear guidelines and standards for academic staff to follow when delivering feedback to students. |
| Teaching and learning, student performance and graduate employment | VAA has a clear quality management structure which takes account of the student voice and integrates student feedback into programme development. VAA should consider ways to develop student understanding of the assessment regime through the integration of some aspects of self-assessment. VAA should also consider ways to develop peer learning perhaps through directed |

	group work projects and/or shared electronic presentation/display software (e.g. Padlet etc.).
Teaching staff	VAA has an ambitious and strong team teaching ethos and a diverse staff base across its campuses which is supportive to students. Further, VAA should review, evaluate, and develop its outward and inward mobility strategy of teaching staff across the disciplines as a means of internationalising its reach, international recognition and as a staff development activity.
Learning facilities and resources	Facilities and generally physical resources including the resourcing of studios, laboratories, workshops and the library were found to be of an excellent standard. With regard to ongoing investment in infrastructure, VAA should clearly state how the Klaipeda campus, which belongs to the City, is able to re-develop in line with changing student needs. VAA should review its multi-campus strategy for design to ensure consistency, cohesiveness, and standards. A clear and externally visible promotion of campus identity should also be considered. In the spirit of widening participation, equality, diversity, and inclusion, VAA should also review access across its campuses in order to fulfil the Accessibility Improvement Plan in the coming years to achieve the goal in 2025 set in the Plan. It is also advised to explore the measures that enhance the availability of computer licenses for students to use at home. This can be achieved through initiatives such as negotiating licensing agreements with software providers or establishing remote access solutions. VAA is encouraged to invest in the celebration of its achievements and in particular the resourcing of final theses for purposes of marketing and the communication of results/achievements to external stakeholders including and beyond social partners. To address the financial challenges faced by students in acquiring additional materials for practical work, it is recommended to establish support mechanisms such as a financial assistance program or grants specifically aimed at covering the costs of necessary materials. Collaborating with industry partners or alumni networks can help secure funding for such initiatives, ensuring that students have equal opportunities to engage in practical learning experiences without financial barriers.

Study quality management and public information	Whilst VAA operates a clear and inclusive quality management structure and system that takes account of student views and feedback and those of other stakeholders via its SPCs, there is a lack of clarity about how any centralised and systematic approach for collecting student feedback with regard to their experience at module or programme level is used to improve the quality of the student experience. VAA is encouraged to develop systems and approaches for developing both the quality and rigour of student feedback and might consider individual course targets (both percentages of students actively participating, and through quality indicators). VAA should also consider how it might best develop transparency in communication for example, via committee minutes, Senate and Council actions, and how full student cohorts are engaged, listened to, and points acted upon. The variety and effectiveness of feedback beyond the survey should be considered.

VI. SUMMARY

Vilnius Academy of Arts (VAA) has developed a learning, teaching, research, and enterprise environment that fosters innovation, nurtures new knowledge, supports intellectual rigour, promotes professionalism, and develops transferable practical and thinking skills with a design study field constituting approximately half of VAA.

Design study programmes are based on the needs of the society such as sustainability or green transition, there is a clear link to the needs of the labour market, the content of the programmes is contemporary and reflects newest trends in design. It is important to point out that VAA plans to use design thinking to make changes in the academy - and the Panel would have been impressed to have been presented with a concrete plan of implementation of such innovation. Implementation of the design process into strategic planning of the school could provide a practical example and help to reach interdisciplinarity across study programmes, higher consistency of students' learning experience across campuses.

Design field study programmes at VAA have well established infrastructure to develop studio-based teaching and learning systems - students have a creative space needed for completion of various tasks and this space is inspiring artistic development. VAA is an excellent example of studio-based teaching which has high standards across the faculties, however, the self-assessment system of students assessing their own work or their peers could be strengthened. Self-assessment system would enrich the well-established student feedback mechanisms too.

Expert panel chairperson signature:

Prof. Dr. Ian Montgomery