



CENTRE FOR QUALITY ASSESSMENT IN HIGHER EDUCATION

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**EVALUATION REPORT**

**STUDY FIELD of History**

at Vytautas Magnus University

**Expert panel:**

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2. **Dr. Stavros Lazaris**, *academic member*;
3. **Ms Natalia Greniewska**, *students' representative*.

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Report language – English

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## Study Field Data

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

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# I. INTRODUCTION

## 1.1. BACKGROUND OF THE EVALUATION PROCESS

The evaluations of study fields in Lithuanian Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) are based on the Procedure for the External Evaluation and Accreditation of Studies, Evaluation Areas and Indicators, approved by the Minister of Education, Science and Sport on 17 July 2019, Order No. V-835, and are carried out according to the procedure outlined in the Methodology of External Evaluation of Study Fields approved by the Director of the Centre for Quality Assessment in Higher Education (hereafter – SKVC) on 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 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 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).

If study field and cycle were previously accredited for 3 years, the **re-evaluation** of the study field and cycle is initiated no earlier than after 2 years. After the re-evaluation of the study field and cycle, SKVC takes one of the following decisions regarding the accreditation of the study field and cycle:

To be accredited for the remaining term until the next evaluation of study field and cycle, but no longer than 4 years, if all evaluation areas are evaluated as exceptional (5 points), very good (4 points) or good (3 points).

To not be accredited, if at least one evaluation area is evaluated as satisfactory (2 points) or unsatisfactory (1 point).

## 1.2. EXPERT PANEL

The expert panel was assigned according to the Experts Selection Procedure as approved by the Director of SKVC on 31 December 2019, [Order No. V-149](#). The site visit to the HEI was conducted by the expert panel on 28th February 2024.

**Assoc. Prof. Peter D'Sena, panel chair**, Associate Professor of Learning and Teaching at University of Hertfordshire; United Kingdom;

**Dr. Stavros Lazaris, panel member**, Professor of Byzantine History at the Catholic University of Paris; Researcher at the French National Centre for Scientific Research; France;

**Ms. Natalia Greniewska, students' representative**, Doctoral student at the Faculty of Oriental Studies, University of Warsaw; member of ESU Quality Assurance Student Experts Pool; Poland.

## 1.3. GENERAL INFORMATION

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

No.	Name of the document
1.	Module descriptors
2.	Examples of final theses

#### **1.4. BACKGROUND OF HISTORY FIELD STUDIES AT VYTAUTAS MAGNUS UNIVERSITY**

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

The department was evaluated just over three years ago (in 2021). Then, the principal recommendations asked for developments to be made in: staff engagement with pedagogic training; the optimisation of international mobility for both staff and students; the opportunities for increasing students' digital capacities; and how actions taken in response to student surveys and feedback were clearly demonstrated. Naturally, the expert panel explored these aspects but was also charged to inspect all other areas. Therefore, the following report and gradings reflect their in-depth considerations against all seven Evaluation Areas, below.

## II. GENERAL ASSESSMENT

History study field and *first cycle* at Vytautas Magnus University 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	3
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	4
7.	Study quality management and public information	3
<b>Total:</b>		26

\*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.

History study field and *second cycle* at Vytautas Magnus University 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	4
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	4
7.	Study quality management and public information	3
<b>Total:</b>		27

\*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*

Having examined the array of documentation made available to the panel, other resources available on the departmental website, and through information-gathering via discussions with various stakeholders, it is clear that the study programmes have been designed based on appropriate standards and have a mission to provide high-level graduate education in the scientific field of History.

The purposes of the History Department's study programmes, according to the SER's authors, are determined by a combination of the relevance of subject content and enquiry methods and the dynamics of the contemporary labour market. Additionally, the relevance of the learning outcomes in both study programmes is strongly justified by their relationship to the needs of Lithuanian society. Through a range of teaching and learning opportunities, students are given the chance to gain in-depth knowledge (via the development of theoretical and practical skills) which presents them with opportunities to either pursue postgraduate studies or make them desirable to a variety of potential employers, whether in academia as junior researchers, or in cultural and civic life.

The evidence from interviews with the department's social partners emphasised the very close collaboration between teaching staff and students. Social partners - which include alumni and employers across the region mainly in the heritage sector - play a very active role in University life, especially in providing work-based placements.

##### *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 SER is convincing in its demonstration that both the first and second cycle programmes are well aligned with the VMU's mission, objectives, and strategy (as defined in the Strategic Plan). Specifically, the SER provides information about the measures taken to guarantee that students will become highly skilled, adaptable specialists who develop, over the course of their studies, to meet a variety of societal demands and be attractive to different sectors in the labour market.

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

The SER is clear in showing how the structure of both study programmes is in compliance with

the legal requirements of Lithuania's Ministry of Education and Science. Additionally, it also provides a clear overview of the principles underpinning the ways which have determined how units of study have been composed and accredited.

**Table No 1.** Bachelor's degree programme's in the history field of study compliance with the general requirements for first-cycle study programmes.

<b>Criteria</b>	<b>General legal requirements</b>	<b>In the Programmes</b>
Scope of the programme in ECTS	180, 210 or 240 ECTS	240
ECTS for the study field	No less than 120 ECTS	184
ECTS for studies specified by University or optional studies	No more than 120 ECTS	56
ECTS for internship	No less than 15 ECTS	15
ECTS for final thesis (project)	No less than 15 ECTS	15
Contact hours	No less than 20 % of learning	1472 hours (more than 30% of learning)
Individual learning	No less than 30 % of learning	4928 hours (more than 60% of learning)

**Table No 2.** Master's degree programme's in the history field of study compliance with the general requirements for first-cycle study programmes.

<b>Criteria</b>	<b>General legal requirements</b>	<b>In the Programmes</b>
Scope of the programme in ECTS	90 or 120 ECTS	120
ECTS for the study field	No less than 60 ECTS	120
ECTS for studies specified by University or optional studies	No more than 30 ECTS	No more than 30 ECTS
ECTS for final thesis (project)	No less than 30 ECTS	30
Contact hours	No less than 10 % of learning	750 hours (more than 20% of learning)
Individual learning	No less than 50 % of learning	2450 hours (more than 75% of learning)

In each case, both the BA and MA programmes of studies are organised into credit-bearing modules which comply with the European Credit Transfer System (ECTS). For both programmes, courses and seminars are organised by semester, offered weekly; and students investigate a variety of research topics in history and become familiar with current research

tools and methods, as well as with the principles of academic writing.

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

The learning outcomes of the Bachelor's and Master's study programmes are described by the SER and shown to be coherent in their construction. Both programmes provide students with high-quality training in specifically researching the history and more generally researching the humanities. The expert panel noted the SER's claim that each programme's learning outcomes and objectives serve as a basis of the content and approaches in their modules. This type of mapping is, of course, a logical way to construct educational provision, however, a greater level of detail and some examples about this would have been welcome. Furthermore, the SER's descriptions about methods of assessment lacked clarity and seemed difficult to follow. It will be useful to build a mapping approach that provides a structured and strategic view of how the framework has been designed to enhance student learning, assessment and progression. Moreover, after reading the documentation and concluding the site visit, the expert panel considered that even though there is growing variety in the forms of assessment presented to students, there is still scope for increased innovation in assessment practices. Another conclusion is that the History Department should discuss ways how best to develop a comprehensive plan that guarantees every student receives consistent direction and organised assistance whilst conducting the research and the writing of their dissertation.

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

Importantly, the subject matter in each programme is well matched with tutor expertise; students have great confidence that their teachers are highly qualified and their centres of expertise are relevant. Moreover, a welcome innovation is the history didactics module, which will be offered in the next academic session.

The coherence and progression of the subject content in the modules throughout both programmes is well suited to achieving the development of relevant competences among students. The expert panel noted that the SER explained the potential of subjects studied in modules to have interdisciplinary connections, thus providing students with a diverse set of competences associated with understanding and engaging with the broader Humanities. The SER also outlines, in a credible manner, the opportunities provided to students to engage with a good chronological and geographical range of materials.

However, the expert panel concluded that there was often an imbalance between the teaching of theoretical and practical components in some modules; and that for a well-rounded education, learning in modules should more consistently ensure that students can apply theory to practice in real-world scenarios.

Importantly, the plan for inculcating deeper learning of so-called soft skills, including critical reflection, which helps historians approach their subject matter with a discerning and

thoughtful mindset, is credible. The expert panel considered this to be significant, as (so-called) soft skills enable historians to engage with and appreciate diverse cultures. This understanding is crucial for presenting history in a way that respects and accurately represents different cultural experiences and, more generally, ensures that historical narratives are nuanced, inclusive, and relevant. The expert panel noted that initiatives to address an array of skills, such as the *Transform4Europe* Alliance, were available to VMU personnel; and it would be useful for senior managers to show what opportunities such as these have to offer to staff and students.

### *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*

The expert panel appreciates the flexibility offered to the students to create their own individual study plans to meet their specific learning needs and ambitions. The SER describes how students can choose modules based on their interests and career aspirations, and this support for more 'personalised learning' contributes to a more meaningful educational experience. However, two aspects would benefit from departmental discussion in order to create greater clarity and transparency in processes relating to personalised learning. First, according to the SER, only highly motivated students are selected for individual studies. Greater transparency and clarity about the criteria which determine how students are chosen (and by whom) would be useful. Second, developing a clear plan about how to give students more chances to study foreign languages is desirable. The expert panel noted that although there is a high level of proficiency in English, there is the potential for the acquisition of and interaction with other languages. By doing so, students would be able to broaden the scope of their historical research both within and outside of the region, especially in the Master's programme.

In conclusion for this section, the expert panel are happy to report that during the visit, students reported their great satisfaction with the teachers and the course programmes, though some expressed a desire for more field trips.

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

With regards to students' dissertations, the expert panel were satisfied with the SER's description of the formal processes from the initial proposal submission and approval, to the ultimate defence of their thesis. Compliance with processes seemed to be good and standards of student work are high. The dissertation gives students the chance to deepen their knowledge of a specific field of historical enquiry. It was not fully evident, though, if in the process of choosing their research topic students were made aware of the necessity of adhering to ethical protocols for data collection, analysis, and reporting.

### ***Strengths and weaknesses of this evaluation area:***

#### ***(1) Strengths:***

1. Both programmes are strongly representative of VMU's goals, strategy and mission.

2. The learning objectives of the Bachelor's and Master's programmes are clearly formulated and coherent.
3. The modules of both programmes are coherent and are carried out appropriately in order to help students develop their competencies.
4. The module History Didactics, which is scheduled to be offered from the next academic session, is a welcomed innovation.

***(2) Weaknesses:***

1. Students have reported insufficient opportunities to further develop the provision of language skills for Master students.

***Recommendations:***

1. There is a need to further develop the provision of language skills for Master students.
2. It is crucial to encourage all teachers to use innovative teaching methods and new technologies, especially in BA.
3. The module descriptors (of BA and MA programmes) should give more accurate representations of the balance between theoretical, teacher-led, and practical, student-centred tasks.
4. Students expressed a wish for more opportunities for field trips - this should be discussed by the department.
5. Students (and staff) should be made aware of how external agencies and bodies, such as the *Transform4Europe* Alliance, can provide supplementary courses and workshops.
6. The department should create a plan that guarantees students receive consistent direction and support whilst conducting the research and the writing of their dissertation.

### **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***

The SER also convincingly demonstrates that staff in the History Department have a wealth of experience and expertise in the field of historical studies. All are highly qualified, some with a distinguished record of publications. The research centre on diaspora studies has developed enormously over the past few years and its contributions to scholarship are now making an impact internationally. However, the SER would benefit from more detailed information about international research cooperation and funded scientific European projects (e.g. Marie Skłodowska-Curie Actions; ERC projects).

An external evaluation of the department of history's research quality between 2020 and 2022 acknowledged the very good scientific/academic level of attainment and reach of its staff

members' research and publications. The expert panel would like to note at least two positive aspects in relation to the department's research. First (and commendably), research is generally related to the content of taught modules in both study programmes, to projects and to research centre activity. Second, the successful involvement of departmental staff in a number of scientific clusters increases the likely potential for future broader collaborative research.

The External Panel noted that the department's collaboration with partners outside the institution places a great emphasis on collaborations with other Lithuanian institutions; and while we acknowledge that there some international collaborations already take place, we recommend that there is scope for an increase in this area of activity..

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

There is variety in the use of pedagogic methods and approaches including, for example, mentoring and the integration of e-learning, which is at the developmental stage. The expert panel noted that in devising strategies for teaching and learning, staff are aware and respectful of the diversity and individuality of students.

The SER states that module content is updated in accordance with cutting-edge theories in the field of Historical Studies, and they inform the planning of themes, reading lists, evaluation processes and assignments. However, the SER is less detailed in a number of other areas, such as: the interdisciplinary approaches used by historians; software used to analyse data (and we would recommend that this becomes evident in teaching the forthcoming Digital Humanities module); and, as well as more opportunities for interdisciplinarity, more modern methodologies of historical research, such as postcolonial and intersectional perspectives be taught, particularly in the BA programme. The expert panel believes that there is still scope for the department to strengthen its ability to connect the most recent pedagogic and other advancements in science, art, and technology with the subject matter studied.

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

Students have the opportunity to participate in the (sometimes international) research activities of their supervisors and, at Masters level particularly, students are encouraged to disseminate their research findings to the broader public. Some academic staff encourage students to attend conferences, seminars and other academic events, but it would be useful to make this a common practice. The best of the masters' theses are put forward for publication. More information about what the criteria are for choosing ('the best') students for the *academia cum laude* programme would have been welcome. Indeed, clarity and transparency about this important opportunity would be useful for students and staff alike.

### ***Strengths and weaknesses of this evaluation area:***

#### ***(1) Strengths:***

1. The department has well-qualified teachers, and they produce good publications based on robust research and scholarship.
2. Curriculum design and content bears a good relationship to the department's centres of expertise.

#### ***(2) Weaknesses:***

1. The cooperation of the department with external partners is heavily weighted towards collaborations with Lithuanian institutions.
2. Opportunities for interdisciplinarity and engaging with software to study history are limited, particularly in the BA programme.

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

1. It is strongly recommended that the department consider ways to involve more students in the research projects carried out by their supervisors and that there is transparency about the Academia cum laude programme.
2. More students should be encouraged to take part in academic events and publish articles in foreign languages.
3. The department should ensure that its new Digital Humanities module offers students opportunities to fully engage with appropriate software.
4. Methodologies to teaching and learning history, such as interdisciplinary, postcolonial and intersectional approaches should be further explored and utilised.
5. The department should devise strategies to develop more collaborations with international partners.

### **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***

The requirements for admission to the study field programmes and how this information is made public are transparent for both the first and second cycle studies. Access to both programmes is through open, public competition; and admission procedures are underpinned by a combination of Lithuanian Law and VMU's own regulations, as described annually by the Rector's decrees. An array of admissions data was made available to the expert panel from, for example, the number of applicants and whether they are state or non-state funded, to an analysis of enrolment trends across individual study programmes within both cycles. The expert panel could also see, in terms of absolute numbers, the lowest, highest and average numbers of students admitted over the past three years.

Even though there seems to be some stability in terms of recruitment, the expert panel suggests that the department should liaise with the University's Marketing and Communication Department to explore ways to best promote the content and approaches of both study programmes. This is, in part, because the diversity in terms of study content does not seem to be reflected by the degree programmes' names (which is therefore likely to be the sole focus of potential applicants' attention).

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

The University's policy on academic recognition and its accreditation covers the following areas: the recognition of qualifications acquired abroad; the recognition of competences acquired in partially completed studies; and the recognition of competences acquired through non-formal and informal learning. Recognition and non-recognition data for the last three years was provided by the SER's authors. Even though only a small number of students applied for recognition of learning outcomes, the expert panel considered that it would be useful to know more about the University's policy regarding the recognition of learning outcomes and, in particular, those from microcredentials/short courses.

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

The SER gives information about opportunities for students to participate in mobility programmes. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic and the difficult geopolitical situation in the region after 2022, only a few students (3 in total) have taken advantage of short and/or long-term academic exchanges/foreign internships in recent years. The data shows that there have been no foreign students in the last three years, though this may be due to the fact that classes are only available in Lithuanian. The expert panel acknowledges the difficulties faced by all higher education institutions in the past four years but considers that while opportunities for international mobility exist, there is a scope for greater engagement. Initially, this may be done by presenting students with exchange opportunities offered by schemes already utilised by the University, such as the *Transform4Europe* alliance. Moreover, it is also well worth presenting students with information about how their programme's flexibility can accommodate learning outside of VMU; and how that learning can receive formal recognition and accreditation.

### *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*

The SER gives up-to-date information about the University's policies, practices and systems for student support, extracurricular opportunities, career opportunities and other activities for enhancing personal and intellectual development.

The expert panel were pleased to find that systems to support students at key points in their academic careers are in place. For example, there are regular consultations with teachers to clarify topics and assignments, discussions about academic progress, and information sessions about financial and scholarship opportunities. Importantly, there are also one-to-one sessions



to support students with specific social, scientific or individual learning needs. However, there was no data about how many students take advantage of these different sessions and what their effectiveness is. It seems that the University does not have a specific survey to evaluate the level or quality of the services offered to the students and so there is no systematic or accurate evaluation of student perceptions about them. Certainly, the department should improve the current communication channels to better inform students about the criteria for scholarships, research opportunities and career development.

The expert panel could see that some teachers encourage their students to participate in scientific activities (conferences, publication of papers and so on), however, discussions about ways to spread this good practice across the department would be useful. At the university level, there should be an increased provision of services to students to support psychological needs, because students reported that access was limited to just once a month and that the waiting time for an appointment could be several weeks.

Other aspects of student support emerged after our site-based meetings. After the meeting with students, the expert panel suggests that the University Library reviews its policy on the time limits imposed on student bookings for private study areas. After the meeting with social partners, it appears that the 'Alumni Academy' could be deployed more effectively by not only enabling students to meet graduates but, more specifically, showcasing what work looks like after graduation and how to develop their careers.

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

Students admitted to the first cycle are introduced to their study programme, and informed of its requirements, content and processes during the annual Introduction to Studies event. It is worth considering organising such an event also for those entering the Master's programme as not everyone completes a Bachelor's degree at the same university, and the content and processes are quite different. The expert panel commends the department for the mentoring programme that has been introduced to support students at the initial stage of their studies, which students seem to appreciate. Ideally, this support will be made available throughout their time as a student.

#### *Strengths and weaknesses of this evaluation area:*

##### *(1) Strengths:*

1. Opportunities for mobility are extensive.
2. There is a variety of support available to students.

##### *(2) Weaknesses:*

1. The library should review its policies on time in terms of duration (more than 4 hours) students can book private study areas.

### ***Recommendations:***

1. Opportunities for mobility are extensive, but students should be told more about how to access them.
2. The department should improve the communication channels to better inform students about the criteria for scholarships and opportunities for research and career development.
3. The department should liaise with the University's Marketing and Communication Department to explore ways to best promote the content and approaches of both study programmes.
4. At the university level, there should be an increased provision of services to students to support psychological needs.
5. The department should implement surveys to systematically assess and improve the quality of services provided to students, ensuring accurate evaluation of student perceptions.

### **3.4. TEACHING 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*

Financial stability is one of the essential ingredients for successful study and the SER goes into some detail about how students are informed, via an online portal, about different forms of support, including monetary support following University guidelines. As well as finances targeted at subsistence and specific needs, funding is available for academic purposes, such as attending conferences. There is a case, however, for the department to begin discussions with senior managers in the University to see whether a funding stream can be created to support those who have issues in being able to take on an internship. The SER also claims that there is good provision for distance learning, and this was corroborated through general discussions with staff and students about online teaching and learning. Surveys have been created by the University to evaluate teaching and learning in each module. In the meeting with students, they stated that modules were properly geared towards meeting the intended learning outcomes.

In the interview with staff, the expert panel found that some tutors deployed mid-module surveys in order to gauge student perceptions of their learning experience. This allowed them to respond to needs in a timely way and before the module concluded so that students could directly benefit from their input. This approach is commendable and could be piloted across the department with a view to cascading it, should it prove to be effective.

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

The library has dedicated facilities for students and staff with particular learning and physical needs, and the History Department's premises in the new building are well-designed and allow easy mobility for students of all abilities. Data is collected about students' individual needs and in the interview with staff, it became clear that they were informed in advance about who they need to give support to. What was not entirely evident is how many students are effectively identified by the disability coordinator and whether cultural stigmas may militate against self-reporting.

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

The department aims to develop autonomous learners and part and parcel of doing this is to monitor progress towards that end. The SER outlines the systematic and regular opportunities for monitoring and assessment that take place each year and, crucially, identifies and analyses issues such as non-participation and low attendance. Additionally, the SER states that the University monitors 'social integration' (which the expert panel found to be a rather vague term). Importantly, it is not altogether evident how weaker students access support and whether students were led to identify needs through self-reflection rather than a more systematic self-evaluation when progress is monitored on the Moodle site. However, students expressed that they know what to do if they have dissatisfaction with any aspect of their learning experience.

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

The expert panel noted that the SER mentions the use of alumni in mentoring students in the development of graduate attributes and employability skills and, certainly, the relationship with social partners is strong.

The students expressed satisfaction with the ways in which they felt they were being equipped for the world of work. There is a case, however, for making the connections between students and alumni more systematic, and also a case for engaging with a broader set of social partners, as they seem, at present, to be concentrated in the heritage sector with a strong emphasis on museologists and archivists.

Data is collected about graduate destinations and employment. It might be useful, as the expert panel suggests elsewhere in this report, for data such as this to be used in marketing the programmes.

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

The expert panel is satisfied that the department utilises the protocols and regulations issued by the University, as described in its Code of Academic Ethics. Students are made aware of academic integrity in their introduction to studies and throughout their experiences of being assessed in modules. The SER further describes the processes for disciplining students who breach the University's regulations. Although the faculty has not had any reports of molestation in recent years, it should inform students more widely about the rules for dealing with acts of intolerant and discriminatory behaviour.

### *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*

The expert panel is contented with the University's regulations about disputes, appeals and complaints; the processes are clear.

Additionally, the expert panel could see that in section (4.6) referring to appeals, there was a table showcasing ways in which actions had been taken in response to the last evaluation's recommendations about student employment and graduate employment. The expert panel suggests that it would be worth the SER team meeting with the requisite department members to get into the fine details, for example, how do teachers pay attention to students with lower grades and so on. That will make the self evaluation process and its documentation more useful to the department.

### ***Strengths and weaknesses of this evaluation area:***

#### ***(1) Strengths:***

1. Some academic staff have introduced mid-module evaluations, in order to act on student suggestions for improvements and targeted support before the module is completed.
2. Students report that academic support systems, to give advice to students about assignments and other module-related work, are effective.
3. Module tutors are informed in advance about students with individual learning needs and can therefore adapt resources accordingly.

#### ***(2) Weaknesses:***

1. Some students found it difficult to take on internships, because of domestic commitments.

### ***Recommendations:***

1. Senior managers should analyse data of educational outcomes of vulnerable groups and explore the potential of policies to support equitable access to resources and equal opportunities for carrying out assessments.
2. Best practice in mid-term evaluation, carried out by some staff, should be piloted and analysed, with a view to implementation across the department.

3. The department should initiate discussions with senior managers in the University about the possibility of creating some paid internships.
4. More systematic connections between students and alumni should be facilitated, while also establishing a broader engagement with various social partners beyond the heritage sector, museologists and archivists.

### 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 teaching staff in the History Department are highly qualified, with very good proportions of them being at the professorial level and/or having a strong research profile (as also evidenced by another systematic external evaluation). Additionally, and importantly, in relation to their teaching obligations, there are good staff-to-student ratios in both the Bachelor's and Master's programmes (5.8 students per teacher, according to the SER's data). Each of these factors contributes to the department's capacity to satisfactorily achieve each programme's learning outcomes. The expert panel also wish to note one other significant contributory factor - there is great stability in the department, with the average length of service at VMU exceeding sixteen years. One consequence of this is that in general, staff members' deep institutional knowledge of academic and support systems and sense of collegiality, embedded over time, can be of benefit to students. There is still potential, however (as mentioned above as well), for scientific relationships to be developed between historians from VMU and other Lithuanian universities and research institutions.

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

All academic staff have the entitlement and eligibility to apply for mobility programmes, such as Erasmus+. The expert panel could see that, in general, where academic staff took advantage of this or other mobility schemes, the tendency has been to travel to nearby countries, though some staff have also taken the opportunity to go further afield to Italy and Spain. The SER claims that 'academic mobility contributes significantly to the quality of teaching', however, presents no hard evidence by way of examples, changes to practise, or tangible outcomes. The expert panel would counsel the department to cast its geographical net further than neighbouring countries for exchanges to experience a more diverse set of teaching and learning environments. Additionally, as well as undertaking academic research to support their historical studies, the expert panel suggests that on visits, staff should: negotiate and allocate time to observing and participating in teaching practices that can stretch and extend those currently provided at VMU; be systematic in disseminating findings to others in the department; and, wherever implemented, should use appropriate educational tools to evaluate

the impact on teaching and learning. That will make any further claims and reporting more robust, detailed and, hence, convincing.

Finally, the expert panel realises that the Covid-19 pandemic and the war have, for many, suppressed exchange and travel opportunities. The expert panel also notes that the department has a strategic goal to double the number of visiting lecturers. To support this and other related initiatives to increase collaboration both within Lithuania and abroad, we ask the department to initiate internal discussions in liaison with the University's senior managers to explore ways to use funding streams in addition to Erasmus+, for example, *Transfor4Europe*, to support this aspect of academic activity. It is important that the University recognises that its senior managers and specialised central units have a role to play in providing targeted support to improve the department's ability to access funding from bodies outside the university.

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

The expert panel are pleased to see that there have been a number of positive responses to the last report's recommendations about the necessity to improve staff engagement with professional development in teaching, learning, assessment and associated competences. Now, according to the SER, at least 20 academic hours are recommended as the annual allocation to staff for teacher professional development; and in January the University's Professional Competence Development Centre offers staff an array of training opportunities. At other times, the University's Centre of Innovative Studies provides short courses to develop didactic skills. The expert panel suggests that a useful discussion should take place, amongst senior University managers, about whether that recommendation should be transformed into a mandatory requirement; and develop greater clarity about the ways in which the VMU Professional Development Fund can be of benefit to staff engagement with the scholarship of teaching and learning. The expert panel also notes that, since the last evaluation three years ago, the number of history staff participating in professional training, in the period 2022-23, has increased from 25% to 80%. As well as listing training courses attended, the expert panel suggests that the department take this further and find ways to evaluate the benefits of the implementation of any new ideas on the student learning experience. Moreover, the university should consider ways to recognise and reward excellence in teaching. There are many ways that could be considered, for example, establishing an annual departmental award for teaching excellence (the criteria for which might take into account the student voice).

#### *Strengths and weaknesses of this evaluation area:*

##### *(1) Strengths:*

1. Academic staff are well-qualified and dedicated.
2. There is a strong spirit of collegiality between staff - both administrative and teaching.

##### *(2) Weaknesses:*

1. There is scope for an increase in the number of academic collaborations between historians at VMU and those at other Lithuanian research institutes and higher education institutions.

### ***Recommendations:***

1. The department should consider recognising and rewarding teaching excellence in the form of an Excellence Award.
2. Senior management should give targeted support to staff to improve their potential to access funding from bodies outside the University.

## **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***

There is an excellent built environment and very good access to learning resources. There is a good internet connection across the University and its dormitories. Data in the SER showed that the premises used for teaching and learning, including study rooms, at the University is good. The premises and hardware available for teaching and learning are adequate for the current number of students and suitable to achieve the programmes' learning outcomes. Moreover, the facilities and equipment to support learning are adapted to the needs of people with disabilities and individual needs.

The SER provided the expert panel with detailed information about teaching materials and electronic publications available in the University's library. The book collection is constantly being expanded, however, the expert panel recommends an increase in funding for bibliographical resources. There is also a need for more digitised and also 'niche' books about historical methodologies and geopolitics in English. Students reported that they currently do not have adequate access to a scanner in the library, nor do they play a part in the requisition of books and other resources and the expert panel recommends that this be reviewed and changed (e.g., by allowing students to submit requests to their academic teachers or to the library itself). Finally, there is a lack of a canteen or social room where students can heat their meals (as is the case for academics and staff).

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

As described above, much of the infrastructure utilised by the department is new; and the expert panel commends the History Department on its efforts to upgrade resources needed to carry out teaching and learning. However, in a similar vein as our comments about library requisitions, the department should find ways to take into account student requests, in particular regarding the availability of single copies of useful textbooks.

### ***Strengths and weaknesses of this evaluation area:***

#### ***(1) Strengths:***

1. There is an excellent built environment and access to learning resources.

#### ***(2) Weaknesses:***

1. Students currently play no part in the requisition of books and other resources, nor have access to a scanner in the library.

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

1. The expert panel recommends an increase in funding for bibliographical resources.
2. More digitised books in English and more individually requested books.

## **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***

There could have been greater clarity in the SER about how some of the quality assurance mechanisms work in practice. The impression, both from the information given in the documentation and via the interviews with students and staff, is that there is a need for students to be informed about actions taken in response to surveys. Transparency of this kind - closing the quality assurance loop - is likely to give students a greater sense that they have a voice.

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

There are very good relationships with social partners, though their involvement could be formalised through the active participation of their representatives in the faculty commissions. There are very good relationships with local and regional social partners; and in the meeting with them, the expert panel noted how they praised the study programmes, recognised the quality of the teaching staff and expressed their satisfaction with how they were able to cooperate with the department.

The SER presented data about stakeholder involvement in the processes of evaluating and developing the programmes of study. However, although there is guidance in the document 'Description of Procedure of Feedback for Improvement of Quality of Studies at VMU', neither students, teachers or social partners seem to receive sufficient feedback about the consequences of surveys they complete and did not seem to have sufficient information about their impact in terms of change and development. Hence, an improved, transparent system of reporting survey outcomes to teachers and students should be devised; and the department, too, would benefit from a more structured discussion with students and social partners about



curricular changes and academic developments (for example, about the use of Artificial Intelligence).

Finally, from the site meetings, the expert panel found some examples of co-creation of curricula (for example, the introduction of History Didactics in response to student demand), but insufficient evidence to be able to draw any firm conclusions about student engagement in Quality Assurance.

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

Processes regarding the collection, use, and publication of information about studies (and study materials), as well as their evaluation and improvement, are described in the SER with concrete examples of how the information has been collected. For both cycles, the Study Programme Committee uses survey information from academic staff, and other stakeholders to prepare an annual analysis of the programme.

### *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*

The department issues student surveys, to capture the opinion of students about the quality of studies, but it was not evident to the expert panel how survey data is analysed, what the feedback looks like, and how the conclusions from this feedback are implemented. More information about how students are kept in the loop, meaning informed afterwards about what actions were taken as a consequence, would have been useful. Students, in the interview with the expert panel, suggested that they are not adequately informed about the tangible outcomes from the surveys.

### ***Strengths and weaknesses of this evaluation area:***

#### ***(1) Strengths:***

1. The department, over time, has developed a set of very strong links with social partners, and these are of benefit to the student learning experience.

#### ***(2) Weaknesses:***

1. Students reported that they do not receive adequate information about the tangible outcomes from the surveys.

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

1. A systematic formalised and shared procedure, to better include the views and recommendations of stakeholders, external experts, students and graduates, should be integrated into periodic reviews in both study cycles (BA and MA).
2. A system of reporting survey outcomes to teachers and students should be devised.

3. The department should improve the channels for communicating actions taken in response to suggestions made by students in surveys and other forms of feedback given about teaching, learning and assessment.
4. The department would benefit from a more structured discussion with students and social partners about curricular change and academic developments, such as the utilisation of Artificial Intelligence.

## IV. EXAMPLES OF EXCELLENCE

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

1. The department is staffed by very highly qualified teachers, whose publications, based on robust research and scholarship, make a significant contribution to knowledge and understanding about Lithuanian history and culture.
2. Both the Bachelors and Masters programmes are strongly representative of VMU's mission and goals.
3. The department, over time, has developed a set of very strong links with social partners, and these are of benefit to the student learning experience.
4. There is an excellent built environment and very good access to learning resources.
5. The research centre on diaspora studies has developed enormously over the past few years and its contributions to scholarship are now making an impact internationally.
6. Module tutors are informed in advance about students with individual learning needs and can therefore adapt resources accordingly.

## V. RECOMMENDATIONS

Evaluation Area	Recommendations for the Evaluation Area (study cycle)
Intended and achieved learning outcomes and curriculum	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. There is a need to further develop the provision of language skills for Master students.</li> <li>2. It is crucial to encourage all teachers to use innovative teaching methods and new technologies, especially in BA.</li> <li>3. The module descriptors (of bachelor's and master's programmes) should give more accurate representations of the balance between theoretical, teacher-led, and practical, student-centred tasks.</li> <li>4. Students expressed a wish for more opportunities for field trips - this should be discussed by the department.</li> <li>5. Students (and staff) should be made aware of how external agencies and bodies, such as the <i>Transform4Europe</i> Alliance, can provide supplementary courses and workshops.</li> </ol>
Links between science (art) and studies	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. It is strongly recommended that the department consider ways to involve more students in the research projects carried out by their supervisors and that there is transparency about the Academia cum laude programme.</li> <li>2. More students should be encouraged to take part in academic events and publish articles in foreign languages.</li> <li>3. The department should ensure that its new Digital Humanities module offers students the opportunities to fully engage with appropriate software.</li> <li>4. Methodologies to teaching and learning history, such as interdisciplinary, post-colonial and intersectional approaches should be further explored and utilised.</li> <li>5. The department should devise strategies to develop more collaborations with international partners.</li> </ol>
Student admission and support	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. The department should improve the communication channels to better inform students about the criteria for scholarships and opportunities for research and career development.</li> <li>2. The department should liaise with the University's Marketing and Communication Department to explore ways to best promote the content and approaches of both study programmes.</li> <li>3. At the university level, there should be an increased provision of services to students to support psychological needs.</li> </ol>

	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>4. The department should implement surveys to systematically assess and improve the quality of services provided to students, ensuring accurate evaluation of student perceptions.</li> </ol>
Teaching and learning, student performance and graduate employment	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Senior managers should analyse data of educational outcomes of vulnerable groups and explore the potential of policies to support equitable access to resources and equal opportunities for carrying out assessments.</li> <li>2. Best practice in mid-term evaluation, carried out by some staff, should be piloted and analysed, with a view to implementation across the department.</li> <li>3. The department should initiate discussions with senior managers in the University about the possibility of creating some paid internships.</li> <li>4. More systematic connections between students and alumni should be facilitated, while also establishing a broader engagement with various social partners beyond the heritage sector, museologists and archivists.</li> </ol>
Teaching staff	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. The Department should consider recognising and rewarding teaching excellence in the form of an Excellence Award.</li> <li>2. Senior management in the University and the department should explore strategies to spread the rewards of incentives across all teaching staff.</li> <li>3. Senior management should give targeted support to staff to improve their potential to access funding from bodies outside the University.</li> </ol>
Learning facilities and resources	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. The Evaluation team recommends an increase in funding for bibliographical resources.</li> <li>2. The University and the history department should look to source more digitised books in English and develop a system which allows for more individually requested books.</li> </ol>
Study quality management and public information	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. A systematic formalised and shared procedure, to better include the views and recommendations of stakeholders, external experts, students and graduates, should be integrated into periodic reviews in both study cycles (BA and MA).</li> <li>2. A system of reporting survey outcomes to teachers and students should be devised.</li> <li>3. The department should improve the channels for communicating actions taken in response to suggestions made by students in surveys and other forms of feedback given about teaching, learning and assessment.</li> </ol>

	<p>4. The department would benefit from a more structured discussion with students and social partners about curricular change and academic developments, such as the utilisation of Artificial Intelligence.</p>
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## VI. SUMMARY

The History Department at Vytautas Magnus University is made up of highly qualified staff, who, collectively, make a significant academic and intellectual contribution to the Lithuanian nation's understanding of its past and identity. Their publications, particularly those relating to the Grand Duchy of Lithuania and diaspora studies, are of national importance; while the staff in research centres are increasingly becoming engaged in international collaborations. It was very clear from interviewing students that they, too, are proud of their tutors' status within the profession, and very appreciative of the one-to-one and small-group support they are offered. They also acknowledged and praised local cultural repositories and institutions, such as museums, which offer them valuable placements. Students and staff work in an up-to-date built environment that offers good access to library resources. Finally, the expert panel was also impressed by the way that both students and staff demonstrated, via their interviews, that they embrace the University's principle of *Artes Liberales* as demonstrated through their ambitions for personal development and willingness to engage in the intellectual, cultural, and civic life of the region,

The department has built and nurtured very good relationships, over many years, with a large number of local and regional social partners, academic institutions, and employers. Social and other partners play an important role in departmental provision, as they provide a route for students to engage with work-based learning; and, in some cases, even provide future employment. In the interview with social partners and alumni, they demonstrated great enthusiasm and pride in their connections with the department. However, the connections are about far more than prestige – it became clear that two-way developmental benefits derive from these partnerships and the expert panel is keen for these relationships to be maintained and developed to increase opportunities for placements. With regards to international mobility, the expert panel acknowledge the difficulties posed by the recent pandemic and the ongoing war in neighbouring countries; but even so, the expert panel suggests that in this aspect, there is scope for development.

It is very appropriate, in this section, to acknowledge the very positive actions that have been taken by the department in response to the recommendations made in the SKVC report three years ago. The expert panel can see that academic staff are now far more proactively engaged with pedagogic training provided by the University, and this has led to more variety in the assessments presented to students and greater awareness of the importance of linking pedagogic theory to practice. Specifically, the expert panel notes that, as recommended, measures have been taken to improve students' digital capacities and bring global perspectives into the curriculum. The expert panel encourages the department to maintain this momentum and is very supportive of the planned introduction, next year, of modules on Digital Humanities and History Didactics. They will both be welcome additions to the department's portfolio.

Finally, the expert panel wants to thank staff in the History Department and others across the University for all the hard work that went into the preparation and writing of the Self-Evaluation document. The expert panel also takes this opportunity to thank the students, staff, and social partners involved in the interviews. Most especially, we want to thank and

acknowledge the work of departmental administrators, who made the documentation available and facilitated the site visit. We want to assure everyone involved that we have endeavoured to be scrupulous in our scrutiny of the evidence presented to us, and we have discussed and deliberated over our recommendations in great depth and they are presented with the sole intention of supporting the department's work in taking the student experience forward.

Expert panel chairperson signature:  
Assoc. Prof. Peter D'Sena