



CENTER FOR QUALITY ASSESSMENT IN HIGHER EDUCATION

OVERVIEW REPORT FOR HISTORY STUDY FIELD

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Prepared by the chairperson of the expert panel:

Prof. dr. Jolanta Choińska-Mika (team leader), *academic*

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I. INTRODUCTION

This report is based on the external quality evaluation of the *History* study field in Lithuanian Higher Education Institutions: *Klaipėda University*, *Vilnius University* and *Vytautas Magnus University*.

The external evaluation was organised by the Lithuanian Centre for Quality Assessment in Higher Education (SKVC).

Comprehensive external evaluation reports including strengths and weaknesses and concluding with some recommendations were prepared for *History* study field in each evaluated Higher Education Institution (separately for first and second cycle) and included evaluation marks. This overview focuses on the main findings of the external evaluation of the *History* study field from a general point of view.

Based on the findings of *History* study field evaluation, expert panel have come to a decision to give **positive** evaluation to: *Klaipėda University (first and second study cycles)*; *Vilnius University (first and second study cycles)* and *Vytautas Magnus University (first and second study cycles)*.

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

II. STUDY FIELD OVERVIEW BY EVALUATION AREAS

Overall observations by the review team regarding the most positive aspects of the study field in Lithuanian HEIs as well as areas in need of improvement.

3.1. STUDY AIMS, OUTCOMES AND CONTENT

All programmes meet formal requirements imposed by the Ministry and Lithuanian legislation and are also aligned with visions and ambitions declared by their home universities. The evaluated institutions demonstrated good understanding of the labour market needs and designed their programmes accordingly. The programmes aim to equip the students with a relatively broad basis and subject-specific knowledge along with a range of transferable and soft skills which help graduates to navigate local and international labour markets effectively. The master programmes (2nd cycle) are more research-oriented and focus on developing research and analytical skills, along with deepening and broadening the content knowledge related to the subject of study. In addition, all of the evaluated universities have formed a strong relationship with local partners, prospective employers who represent a range of sectors such as: culture, media, education, military forces and military institutions, among others. The launching of the military history module by the University of Klaipėda can serve as a perfect example of the cooperation between external stakeholders and the HEI. The employers investigated during the online visit in December 2020 expressed satisfaction with the competences of the graduates.

On the whole, the evaluated programmes were attractive to students, especially those interviewed by the panel, who also demonstrated a high level of satisfaction with their studies – knowledge they acquired, as well as skills they were able to achieve and develop in the course of their studies. However, as the expert panel could notice, the teaching assessment methods could be much more diversified and include to the greater extent the elements of formative assessment on daily basis.

3.2. LINKS BETWEEN SCIENCE (ART) AND STUDY ACTIVITIES

The HEIs which were evaluated are regarded as leading research centres in Lithuania. This is reflected in the results of the assessment provided by MOSTA (Research and Higher Education Monitoring and Analysis Centre) as well as by international experts. The academics working there have significant research achievements in their respective fields (in the field of Baltic History, to name one example), and many of them are widely recognized and highly esteemed by historians in other European countries. They carry out research projects funded by external institutions, and successfully compete for funding. The results of their analyses are published not only in Lithuanian, but also in English, German, Russian, and other languages which allows wide and international research dissemination. Their research expertise in the field of study lays a solid foundation for their teaching in both first cycle and second cycle programmes. The academics involved in teaching in the programme integrate the results of their research into the curricula (research informed teaching) and upgrade them in response to the latest developments in the field. As such, students can benefit from that in terms of their own research related especially to the Master thesis. However, the expert panel recommends that the aforementioned HEIs develop a set of incentives to encourage more students to participate in various research activities at the departmental and university level.

3.3. STUDENT ADMISSION AND SUPPORT

Admission criteria to the programmes, which were under scrutiny, are established by the respective University Senates. They are described in a detailed manner, published on the HEIs' websites, and are known to the prospective applicants in advance. The candidates have sufficient time to get acquainted with formal requirements and the admission timetable. The admission procedures meet the rules of transparency and equity. Access to both programmes is through public competition. The ranking of the candidates and the list of those admitted are made on the basis of the scores achieved by each applicant. However, taking into account demographic trends, the HEIs have to develop more robust recruitment strategies in order to encourage more young people to study humanities.

The Universities offer various forms of financial and social support, some of which are regulated externally, by state bodies and distributed among the students according to the set of criteria. Moreover, all three universities have an internal policy of awarding various forms of student achievement and activities. They also aim to provide careers assistance, for example, in the form of individual career counselling, available to all and tailored to each student's needs. However, it is necessary to design a form of survey which could verify to what extent the measures offered and declared by the universities are effective, accessible to socially vulnerable groups in particular.

The Universities are also encouraged to extend, as the expert panel remarked during the evaluation visits, their understanding of additional learning and support needs which, at the moment, is rather limited. The emphasis was put on mobility issues and physical impairments (and the building infrastructure these might require, e.g., lifts), while mental health issues as well as psychological conditions (e.g., disorders) were not recognized by staff and students as 'additional learning needs.'

The implementation of this wider definition should be considered at the at the university level, in all of the evaluated institutions.

3.4. STUDYING, STUDENT PERFORMANCE AND GRADUATE EMPLOYMENT

The expert panel were impressed by the high level of students' loyalty to their home institutions. Those who attended the on-line meeting with the expert panel expressed their satisfaction with the programmes and the resources they could have at their disposal. They found their professors helpful and accessible and emphasised student-friendly atmosphere at their universities. The expert panel encouraged the Universities to create strategies for increasing a variety of types of assignments carried out by students during the course of their programmes. The objectives for this should include a general move away from 'exam heavy' assessment with an intention to more accurately assess students with a range of different learning styles; to improve student engagement through authentic assessment; and more fully utilise formative assessments to inform students' progression.

It also should be mentioned, that many of students, especially those of the 2nd cycle, combine their studies with regular, part- or even full-time job. The HEIs try to cope with this challenge by making their programmes more flexible – those efforts are very welcomed by the students. Each university has its rules regarding individual learning schemes, and offer many possibilities of tailoring programmes to the student's specific situation. The crucial issue, now, is to regularly inform students about the various channels of support that are available to them.

Sharing job and studies is also considered as the main reason for students' lower interest in international mobility. The universities address that problem by developing and promoting a virtual mobility, which can be effectively implemented e.g., within the European University alliances and networks (EU-Conexus, Transform4Europe, ARQUS) that they belong to.

All three universities place strong emphasis on maintaining standards of academic integrity, tolerance, and anti-discriminatory practices. They also have specific regulations and procedures to prevent and address plagiarism. Each university utilises external software to analyse students' submissions. It should be noted, that some cases of academic dishonesty had been registered in relation to the programmes of study, but none for discrimination. The expert panel could see from the Self-evaluation Reports that breaches of University codes and regulations were indeed taken very seriously.

As it was mentioned earlier, each programme aims to equip the students with the competences relevant to the labour market needs. As the results of the on-line meeting with social partners suggest, they are contented with the graduate profiles and the skills acquired in the course of their studies.

3.5. TEACHING STAFF

The teaching staff are all high qualified and meet the legal requirements set by the Ministry of Education and Science at all of the visited Universities. The levels of staffing, both in terms of numbers and academic quality, are suitable for the delivery of the programmes of both first and second study cycles. Staff are, as stated above, highly respected in their fields of historical enquiry, and students appreciate the opportunity to be taught by leading experts. The universities put strong emphasis on staff development, though this related mainly to teachers' research activities and not to teaching or student assessment or developing new pedagogical methods. The pressure to research and publish

and the lack of recognition for high quality teaching do not encourage staff members' ongoing development as academic teachers.

3.6. LEARNING FACILITIES AND RESOURCES

The Universities scored very well in this aspect of the evaluation. University Libraries cooperate with their peer institutions in various countries, developing an interlibrary loan system and networks for the exchange of scholarly publications. The teaching material, facilities and learning environment are monitored frequently in order to be able to react as quickly as possible to the needs of staff and students, as they become apparent in the course of study. The teaching staff can shape and update the library collection by recommending specific books or databases to be acquired. The Universities are also aware of the necessity of constant and systematic development, specifically the need to expand and upgrade library collections and digital resources relevant to the field of studies. It can be assumed that in the near future learning resources might be enhanced even more thanks to the international cooperation within the European alliances (Transform4Europe, EU-CONEXUS, ARQUS).

3.7. STUDY QUALITY MANAGEMENT AND PUBLICITY

All three Universities put emphasis on quality management and have comprehensive quality assurance procedures. The University of Vilnius can be regarded as the most advanced in this area. It was awarded 5 points (exceptional) in recognition of this. The expert team was pleased to learn that VU has a closed Deming cycle (Plan-Do-Check-Act) connected to the student surveys and carries out training related to Quality Assurance, also for students. During the online visit this aspect was particularly stressed by all the parties involved. The other two universities were encouraged by the expert panel to devise similar strategies for increasing student engagement with surveys, as well as create effective channels and methods to communicate the outcomes and principal findings from surveys to the students. Students are willing to receive a comprehensive analysis of the cohort's data. They should see how the results of the surveys impact on teaching practice at their home institutions.

The expert panel is very impressed by the regulations and requirements related to diploma theses – Bachelor's and Master's. Students are expected to defend their work in front of the Qualification Panel, and the wider public is welcomed to attend. Public defence is supposed to demonstrate student's competences acquired throughout the study. The expert panel finds the public defence procedure is a perfect example of "good practice" implemented in every Lithuanian University.

III. RECOMMENDATIONS

MAIN STRATEGIC RECOMMENDATIONS FOR THE IMPROVEMENT IN HISTORY STUDY FIELD

Strategic recommendations at institutional level (for Higher Education Institutions):

- It is recommended that the HEIs create a long-term plan for designing tailored assistance to the teachers, helping them to better understand, e.g., the need for more varied assessment, alternative methods of developing students' social and transferable skills.

- Academic staff, at all levels of seniority and experience, should engage more fully and effectively in continuing professional development with pedagogic training in order to inform curriculum design and their own development. The Universities should ensure that this engagement is valued and recognised.

Strategic recommendations at national level (for the Ministry of Education and Science):

- The Ministry should devise a nation-wide strategy for promoting high quality teaching and set of incentives for HEIs to implement innovative pedagogy in the field of Teaching and Learning.