



CENTER FOR QUALITY ASSESSMENT IN HIGHER EDUCATION

STUDY FIELD OVERVIEW REPORT
DESIGN STUDY FIELD

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I. INTRODUCTION

This report is based on the external quality evaluation of the Design study field in Lithuanian Higher Education Institutions (HEIs): Vilniaus dizaino kolegija, Vilniaus kolegija, Kauno kolegija and Šv. Ignaco Lojolos kolegija.

The external evaluation was organised by the Centre for Quality Assessment in Higher Education (SKVC), Lithuania. Comprehensive external evaluation reports that include discovered strengths and weaknesses, as well as recommendations, were prepared for the ... study field for each evaluated. Reports contain evaluation marks (separately for the first and second cycles). This overview focuses on the main findings of the external evaluation of the Design study field from a general point of view.

Based on the findings of the Design study field evaluation, the expert panel has decided to give a positive evaluation to all evaluated HEIs and first cycles.

On the basis of the external evaluation report of the study field, SKVC took a decision to accredit the Design study field for 7 years at all evaluated HEIs.

II. STUDY FIELD OVERVIEW BY EVALUATION AREAS

This section of the Overview contains overall observations by the expert panel regarding the most positive aspects of the study field of Design in Lithuanian HEIs, as well as areas in need of improvement.

3.1. INTENDED AND ACHIEVED LEARNING OUTCOMES AND CURRICULUM

Overall, the study programmes in Fashion, Interior and Image design and cycle of study are in line with the legal requirements. They meet the needs and expectations of the students and are in line with the needs of the labour market. The aims, learning outcomes, teaching methods and assessment methods are in line with the Design field, with a focus on craft skills, creativity and critical thinking.

Most of the programmes have recently incorporated entrepreneurship and digital tools and pay serious attention to sustainability on top of a strong foundation of design skills and critical thinking, to stay on top of the current changes in the industry and discipline. It highlights that the programmes are forward-thinking and keeping up with the changes in the disciplines, which is very important in a changing world and industry. The panel underlined this as a very good practice, that was reflected in the mission and vision of the colleges as well as in the operational level.

The engagement of social partner networks in events, partnerships, internships, curriculum and final theses is also strong, which is important to stay up to date with industry and society

that are in transition due to digitalisation, innovation and sustainable needs and, therefore, requesting graduates with new skills. This is also reflected within the mission and vision of the HEIs who are aiming to train highly qualified designers who are able to create an inclusive and sustainable environment, contributing to positive changes in the cultural, social and economic world.

Also noteworthy is a strong focus on the **final theses**, where the research component has become important and strong. Since the last accreditation, HEIs have made a serious effort to include and hire more research staff to improve this part of the curriculum, which was noted and evidenced by the panel.

3.2. LINKS BETWEEN SCIENCE (ART) AND STUDIES

Since the last accreditation, it is evident that all colleges have made a serious attempt to improve the relation between education and (applied) science and artistic research. Some of them are allocating a percentage of the basic funding for research and artistic activities, which is underlining a serious commitment and could be followed by the others.

Next to a strong engagement with social partners, they all encourage mobility and exchange with international HEIs to keep informed about the latest achievements and insights in research, fashion, art, and technology. The knowledge and input of visits and scholarly seminars are used to update the curriculum, especially around digitalisation. At all colleges, students are actively invited to take part in these exchanges (via Erasmus a.o) but, also, in cultural and artistic national events, competitions and seminars.

The research output and the output of teaching staff who have been visiting other institutions feed back into the content of the study programmes such as the latest knowledge on sustainability and the digital transformation of the fashion industry, which is important and is functioning well.

The visited HEIs are all serious and effective in executing and aligning research to the study programmes where students, lecturers and supervisors are encouraged to work together on relevant topics in art and design innovation. Students' research skills are systematically developed concluding with the final thesis. The student is encouraged to explore socially relevant topics, aligned with one's own practice and related to the field of expertise of the supervisor to maximise the relevance of the research of the final thesis, which is excellent.

The panel encourages the HEI's ambition to further develop and deepen the research and the international scope. The panel would like to recommend more teachers to take part in international mobility and international seminars. Therefore, **English language skills for staff and students** are essential. This is strongly recommended by the panel as a next step. Also, a **personalised and operational research development** plan for all staff for each HEI is recommended as the next step in strengthening the relationship between art and applied

sciences, making sure design thinking and artistic research are leading to strong and relevant outputs in theses, teachers' practices and research.

3.3. STUDENT ADMISSION AND SUPPORT

Regarding the admissions and support policy, all visited institutions do have a clear admission process in place, and procedures for foreign qualifications are adequate. Student mobility is encouraged via Erasmus exchange and internships including a substantial number of (inter)national companies. Financial, psychological and personal support is available. Student information is available in briefs, manuals, and websites and is explained in class. In all colleges, the panel noticed a very open, informal, flexible culture between staff and students, where not only questions but also all personal problems can be addressed easily.

Despite the open and informal cultures in all the (small-scale) colleges, the panel would like to recommend nominating a dedicated person (teacher or psychologist) on top of the counsellor for **social safety issues**. An area of concern since "Me too" and 'Covid-19' are internationally recognised.

3.4. TEACHING AND LEARNING, STUDENT PERFORMANCE AND GRADUATE EMPLOYMENT

Overall, the programmes are well designed and structured. There was clear evidence that they provide a comprehensive and well-structured learning experience with a variety of relevant teaching and learning methods, including reflective study methods that support the students in achieving the intended learning outcomes. Especially bridging theory and practice, the integration of existing and new knowledge and experience is strong as well as the focus on social and personal competencies of the student. All institutes regularly update their curriculum, adapt the workshops and offer bespoke support for socially vulnerable groups.

The panel noticed that institutes have made a serious effort around academic integrity. All colleges have a clear policy in place about integrity, tolerance and non-discrimination. Students must sign an agreement of integrity to ensure academic integrity and avoid misconduct.

Due to the arrival of ChatGTP and 'deep fake', colleges are facing new challenges of academic integrity. This was discussed during the visits and concerns were shared. The panel would like to recommend **the government help the institutions deal with these challenges and set up new standards of academic integrity related to ChatGTP and 'deep fake'**.

Graduate employability is high on the agenda of every college and a close network of alumni and social partners is helping here to make sure the students find their way to the industry. Quite a few students find their way into self-employment. **This should be recognised in the surveys and alumni metrics as an official form of employment.**

3.5. TEACHING STAFF

The panel appreciates that the colleges employ highly qualified and experienced professionals to provide their students with the best possible design education. It is noteworthy that in most colleges a majority of the staff members are still actively engaged in their respective professional fields. During the visit, it was discussed that ‘these experts’ need additional guidance and **pedagogic training** when they start their teaching in the programmes. This is also recommended for all starting teachers. **A governmental policy and guidelines here could be beneficial.**

All colleges had a robust mobility system in place to support their teaching staff in their professional development, research, knowledge exchange and international cooperation. The panel recommends that mobility opportunities should be further developed and the panel emphasised the importance of continuing to encourage academic staff to participate actively in international (artistic) research activities. Therefore, it is essential **that teachers are supported in improving their English language and presentation skills.** The employment of professionals leads in some small programmes to a team of very fractional staff, which is, according to the panel, a risk. **For a long-term, strategic solid curriculum and programme development colleges need dedicated members of staff.**

3.6. LEARNING FACILITIES AND RESOURCES

Overall, the physical, informational, and financial resources in all colleges are adequate and suitable for an effective learning process. Some of the HEIs have studios with impressive facilities with up-to-date digital tools and a very well-equipped library with collaborative workspace whilst the smaller ones hold less equipped studios using sometimes external suppliers. Not all of them had an up-to-date and well-used library, which is in the field of (fashion) design and image design is an essential resource.

Since the industry and discipline are in transition due to new digital tools, the expert panel recommends:

- 1) **To stay up to date with the latest software and to invest in more diverse digital technologies, such as AR and VR.**
- 2) **As a consequence, the colleges should train teachers in this area to prepare students for the future demands of the design profession.**
- 3) **Update the library’s collection regularly, and develop formats and (research) services to make the library attractive to students since it is an important resource, which students need to learn to use.**

3.7. STUDY QUALITY MANAGEMENT AND PUBLIC INFORMATION

It was evidenced during the visit that all programmes collect a wide range of data to analyse for the implementation and improvement of the programmes. They all have an internal quality assurance model in a PDCA cycle of improvement through a selection of measures such as annual *self-assessment* and *benchmarking*. The study quality assurance process includes periodic surveys and active participation of stakeholders in the study processes, in order to promote a

culture of continuous improvement and dialogue. The expert panel noticed during the visit that the involvement of stakeholders is effective and the feedback of social partners influences the decisions made in further developments. The experts would like to make a small recommendation here: **it would be even stronger to involve the social partners directly in the development of the SERs.**

Students are also actively involved in evaluating the course and teacher, mostly informally, in panel discussions and through surveys. The panel is convinced that the right student evaluation processes are in place, although the experts would like to underline that **a higher percentage of students participating in the feedback surveys is essential to get hard data. The experts realise this is difficult, but redesigning the format of the feedback survey or giving awards after completion, might make it more attractive.**

III. RECOMMENDATIONS

MAIN STRATEGIC RECOMMENDATIONS FOR THE IMPROVEMENT IN DESIGN STUDY FIELD

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

The panel was impressed how, as a follow-up of the last accreditation, all colleges have made a serious effort in improving the research component in the curriculum, the balance between theory and practice, and the research knowledge and output of staff. The panel encourages the HEIs' ambition to further develop and deepen the research and the international scope through a **personalised and operational research development** plan for all staff as the next strategic step in strengthening the relation between art and applied sciences, making sure design thinking and artistic research is leading to strong and relevant outputs in theses, teachers' practices and research. To achieve this, **English language and presentation skills** are essential.

All colleges have counsellors in place and as evidenced by the panel there is an open and informal culture on the ground. However, due to "Me too" and 'Covid-19' awareness around inclusivity, racism, bullying, and sexual misbehaviour, the panel recommends the colleges appoint a dedicated person (teacher or psychologist) on top of the counsellor for **social safety issues.**

The panel appreciates that all visited colleges employ highly qualified and experienced professionals who are still actively engaged in their respective professional fields. The panel advises developing a **pedagogical policy and pedagogical training** for all teachers (experts as well as teachers coming from other institutions).

Since the industry and fashion and image design fields are undergoing a digital transition, the expert panel recommends to:

- 1) **Stay up to date with the latest software and invest in more diverse digital technologies, such as AR and VR.**
- 2) **Train teachers in this area to prepare students for the future demands of the design profession.**
- 3) **Keep updating the library's collection regularly, develop formats and (research) services to make the library attractive to students since it is an important resource, which students need to learn to use.**

Overall, the quality management in all colleges is excellent. The panel wants to share some small suggestions for improvement here. **Quality management could become even stronger with the direct involvement of the social partner in the development of the SER. A higher percentage of students participating in the feedback surveys is required in order to get quality data. Redesigning the format of the feedback survey or giving awards after completion, might make it more attractive.**

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

Due to the arrival of ChatGTP and 'deep fake', colleges are facing new challenges of academic integrity. This is a very difficult and challenging matter. Therefore, the panel would like to recommend **the government develop national guidelines and policies and help the institutes deal with these challenges by developing and setting up new standards of academic integrity related to ChatGTP and 'deep fake'.**

Graduate employability is high on the agenda of every college and a close network of alumni and social partners is helping them to make sure the students find employment. However, in this area of design, more and more students start their own companies and are self-employed. Government statistics should be aware of these new tendencies **recognising 'self-employment' in the surveys and alumni metrics as an official form of employment.**

Finally, **a clear governmental policy and guideline for required pedagogical training for all teaching staff, especially for experts from the industry, is recommended.**

Recommendations on the evaluation process for SKVC

The process of quality assurance is bureaucratic with a lot of paperwork before and after the visits. The Self Evaluation Report (SER) is a helpful and useful tool for the panel but needs quite a lot of time to digest to prepare the questions especially when the panel has to visit 4 HEIs. Also, the completion of the reports takes a lot of time from the panel and especially the chair. Therefore, it is recommended to make sure all panel members arrive well in advance – ½ day before the visits to start. It will be also beneficial to reserve a slot of ½ day after the visits to have enough time to discuss the content of the report. Of course, initial work and completion work can be done in advance and online, but it is important for the panel to have enough time to discuss the matter in person.

The visits worked most effectively when the panel could start the visit with an on-campus overview. SKVC should consider starting each on-campus review. It provides great insight, allows for informal questions to be raised, and helps the expert panel understand the operating context of the disciplines under review.

The organisational and content-related support of the expert panel by the nominated SKVC representative was excellent and very helpful.