



CENTRE FOR QUALITY ASSESSMENT IN HIGHER EDUCATION

STUDY FIELD OVERVIEW REPORT

MEDIA ART

2023

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Report language – English

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I. INTRODUCTION

This report is based on the external quality evaluation of the *Media art* study field in Lithuanian Higher Education Institutions (HEIs): *Vilnius Academy of Arts, Vytautas Magnus University, Kauko kolegija, Vilniaus dizaino kolegija, Vilniaus technologijų ir dizaino kolegija, Socialinių mokslų kolegija*.

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

Based on the findings of the *Media art* study field evaluation, expert panels have come to a decision to give a positive evaluation to all six evaluated HEIs.

II. STUDY FIELD OVERVIEW BY EVALUATION AREAS

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

3.1. INTENDED AND ACHIEVED LEARNING OUTCOMES AND CURRICULUM

Personalisation is an issue for students. They also face difficulties with workload and work outside of studies, and midterm examination factors in.

By and large, curricula would benefit from more clearly defined sets of generic competencies such as for project work (that would be articulated as relevant for the field in its various specifics, i.e. in studios, hybrid settings, self-employment, start-up, public or EU tenders etc.), self-management and work placement or practical work as linked to the curriculum that should be more clearly (or at all) recognised with a clear portion of ECTS points, and dedicated programme and course outcomes.

The final work (final projects and theses) would need to be articulated in a more unified way, it would need to be made sure that the expected outcomes levels are actually observed, since currently, some schools feature an over-ambitious far-above-average level of scientific rigour in theses, or details and complexity of final work documentation, while others hardly meet the minimums.

3.2. LINKS BETWEEN SCIENCE (ART) AND STUDIES

Artistic activities are mostly focused on teachers and less on practice. Student involvement is low, and sometimes by selection only.

Artistic research as such has been intensively brought into Lithuanian HEIs that teach art/media. VDA stands the most out of these institutions. Both social scientists and artists are actively completing their degrees and writing for various publications, still predominantly on the national level. In particular, the members of the teaching staff who have social sciences and humanities educational backgrounds and teach theoretical subjects could try to get to international publications in social sciences, art, art history, semiotics, sociology etc. Organising international conferences, contributing to international scholarly magazines and bringing in more scholars from abroad would give even more breadth to otherwise excellent dealing in the area between art and science. The evaluation area that in general is developing excellent still needs improvement on the international level. Applying for EU funding is quite active in Lithuanian HEIs, however, applying for international research projects could be more active. A more systematic division of labour would be productive to establish between artist research with elements of scientific attitude and the "good old" social sciences.

A relevant part of artistic activity is often described as taking place during internships, classes, and projects, some of which may be accessed by selection only (only certain students), in other words as integrated in various more or less informal ways throughout the education. Because of the practical and artistic focus of the study field—from which follows that research, development, and artistic activity may take forms that relate to the practical and artistic—the integration of this type of educational function may work differently for some other types of education. For this reason, proper integration of research and development and artistic activities in art colleges (and perhaps in art schools in general) may require some additional attention or some more tailored approaches. A point of attention in this could be to ensure that all students have opportunities. At the teacher level, a point of attention may be to ensure that teachers who are primarily practitioners have opportunities.

3.3. STUDENT ADMISSION AND SUPPORT

Student mobility is an issue generally. Workload is a factor, but mostly financial support (cost of living in certain places too high to actually go).

3.4. TEACHING AND LEARNING, STUDENT PERFORMANCE AND GRADUATE EMPLOYMENT

Promoting diversity and inclusion in teaching and learning environments is a further step for fostering a rich and inclusive educational experience.

3.5. TEACHING STAFF

There is a low level of teacher mobility and art pedagogy, which is even more complex for practitioners. HEIs should be more supported here in dealing with these issues.

Teaching staff in Lithuanian HEIs where art/ media are taught has made a larger challenge. It is especially valid for VDA's Media-Photography department, where even 6 teachers have now Ph.Ds.. This is an achievement that has been reached by only a few similar departments in the whole of Europe. At the same time, it is obvious that like in most HEIs the teaching staff is in need of systematic pedagogical training in addition to the "teaching great personalities" concept. Some cooperation, at least on the basic level could be done with pedagogy/art pedagogy departments of the same or other HEIs.

The teaching staff is highly motivated, however, their income would need to be increased. The mobility of teaching staff, especially after COVID-19, would need to be reactivated. Like in most HEIs in the Baltic region, more funds could be applied to bringing in visiting teachers from the EU and other countries to share different teaching experiences. Attestation systems of teaching staff could be more efficient and the examination of both the achievements and problems of teaching staff could be more frequent with good feedback. The average age of teachers appears to be middle-aged, and there are young teachers with Ph.D. degrees. However, the issue lies in the limited presence of teaching staff from abroad, which does not positively impact the overall situation. Improvements are needed to raise the salaries, both to motivate the local and to bring in international teachers.

3.6. LEARNING FACILITIES AND RESOURCES

In the field of Media Art, the spaces and resources made available to staff and students are key to the quality of titles. In general, this area has a good evaluation in all aspects. Classrooms and laboratories have sufficient material resources and space for students to develop their artistic practice and have the right bibliography. Special mention should be made of the improvements made in recent years by the institutions in terms of improving and updating material, digital and bibliographical resources. The systems for collecting opinions and proposals from different groups work well since they take into account the needs of both students and teachers. Of course, this is an area that must be constantly improved and maintained so that titles can be consolidated.

3.7. STUDY QUALITY MANAGEMENT AND PUBLIC INFORMATION

With notable exceptions, some institutions' QA systems still largely depend on the rigour and motivation of a single or very few of the management or senior staff. The QA system needs to be promoted on all levels, and among students as well – in the correct way of course.

Some institutions feature a strong and dominant central QA system, that then however somewhat unsharpens or even suffocates the local, school-level QA process that seems to

function rather bottom-up. For these kinds of study programmes self-organisation and self-care are very natural, thus this would need to be considered in setting up and consolidating university-wide agreements and protocols in QA. Publication of the study process and the surveys (quality control) could also be more strategic.

III. RECOMMENDATIONS

MAIN STRATEGIC RECOMMENDATIONS FOR THE IMPROVEMENT IN MEDIA ART STUDY FIELD

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

Rapid changes in the study field of media art require constant revision of equipment, which is a budgetary risk for HEIs.

The study field does not support the public sector and interests to the same level as it does the commercial sector. The relevance of media arts to the public (media awareness, proper conveyance of information, diversity, representation in media, ecological impact of media production and consumption) should be developed more strongly.

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

The pedagogical level and preciseness could be stronger and more support from the ministry might be helpful, considering how the study field is asked to meet the legal requirements, for instance, how to divide study points and study credits between the practical and theoretical. This works in theory, however, is difficult in practice.

The pedagogical level in relation to studies that have a lot of practitioners requires more support. In addition, mobility for educators who are primarily practitioners needs clear structure and support.

Quality of education in the study field (and perhaps in general) could be helped by more ongoing collaboration with SKVC and HEIs, also outside of the evaluation process (for instance, *help desk*).

Expert panel compensation should be improved. Although the expert panel understands that compensation may be determined through national European policies and acquisition regulations, and economic contexts may differ for individual panel members, the expert panel does not understand why the compensation for various panel members ranges to the degree it does. Experts from the country itself seem to be compensated much less than international ones, even when travel costs are not considered. This especially goes for the student panel members. If the accreditation values all panel members equally for the quality of the accreditation process (because it needs all their specific contributions), and if all committee members are to have an equal position in the panel in terms of contributions and speaking power, then why is compensation differentiated to the degree that it seems to be. The expert

panel recommends finding more equitable ways to compensate all panel members, and to organise travel cost compensation (for all panel members, including those from the country) separate from compensation for the actual accreditation.

Compensation also does not seem to consider that experts who are not currently under contract with a university (freelancers, non-academics, artists, students etc.) may not have the same possibilities to free time as experts who are (as they may have the possibility to work on accreditation as part of their academic work with compensation for their time). This difference between employed and non-employed academics may be relatively specific to (practical studies such as) the study field, as many teachers primarily work on their own practice, outside of the HEI. In some cases, an additional issue may be that one's own practice does not allow sufficient additional time to participate in such activities. In the Lithuanian context, many of these teachers need multiple jobs, possibly allowing them even less paid time for such activity. These things all factor into the quality of the assessment. Teachers who are practitioners are important for the quality of the process in this study field, but in reality, do not have the same opportunity to be involved.

As can be seen in the reports, similar issues impact the study field itself, with practitioners (as teachers) running into the same type of obstacles in their teaching work. And so, issues that the study field encounters in this regard, and which may be specific to the arts sector, seem to also extend to the accreditation of the study field.

The workload expectation is not managed well by the content of intake, contracts and the indication of compensation. The actual workload on this is much higher than can be expected based on such things, and on the general information available before accepting the task. Especially the workload on report writing. The exact workload is also too unclear in advance because the quality of each SER may impact it, and the procedure may vary per HEI (e.g., when a procedure for corrections is asked for by the HEI). These things contribute negatively to the above-mentioned issues.

Coordinator workload, as it appears to the expert panel, is a very lively process, and the quality of the SER factors into the workload for them, and the workload for both the coordinator and expert panel is unpredictable.

It is noted that the study field is encouraged (and relatively eager) to commercialise parts of their efforts (through relations with social partners, and also beyond). Some of the HEIs in the study field are for-profit private organisations (some with sole shareholders). Accreditation is used by them to improve, but also in their marketing. In practice, it may seem as if the personal or public human capital that is represented by the expert panel, is spent to (also) provide relatively cheap quality reports and marketing for the benefit of more or less commercial entities (and individuals who are shareholders). Perhaps similar thoughts could be had about the accreditation organisation and its workers.

The expert panel understand and appreciates that independent panel membership is not a commercial task, nor one that can be done under employment, but it considers the level of compensation and its context as described above as carrying risks for the quality of reporting, as well as for attracting (new and repeating) panel members, and so also for the continuity of the accreditation.

Consider introducing arts and/or media-specific QA trainings or materials, where both

(potential) expert panel members and the QA personnel at the institutions are invited and may suggest improvement in such a way that the SER and QA procedures (also on the national level) are more sensitive to the specifics of the field.

Recommendations on the evaluation procedure for SKVC:

There are too many, too precise indicators. Also, indicators are often rather similar. This adds risk for confusion at all levels, for expert panel, HEIs, and SKVC.

Consider rewriting indicators in a more human-readable (less legalese) style. In various contexts, rewriting official information in more accessible ways is considered as part of wider accessibility efforts. Rewriting might contribute to the quality of the assessment process, as well as to the dissemination and adoption of outcomes.

Differences in wording and numbering of indicators (between SER, EER template and SKVC documents) now lead to unnecessary work and more confusion and mistakes. Consider standardising the numbering system across all documents, for everyone. Providing standard English translations for indicators across all documents may also help. Providing standard English terms that are regularly used in the documents may also help. For example, HEI (instead of school, college, university) and expert panel (instead of committee, commission, international team).

If the SKVC wants to raise the quality of evaluations, then they could consider the following:

- Coordinators should be able (have time) to read the self-evaluation reports (SERs).
- The quality of SERs could be higher by controlling them before sending.
- There could be an additional role or person who coordinates SERs with HEIs (instead the committee now also has to do a technical assessment of the SERs, while this could be another role for SKVC or more coordinated training for HEIs by SKVC and especially consulting during the process).
- Consider introducing (obliging HEIs to use) such SER structures that are more lean and especially enable efficient monitoring of progress, i.e. they serve primarily as tools to the HEIs themselves. They may be more tabular and graphic, and less flow text-dense.
- Where relevant, SER should contain analysis at a study programme level to be able to compare study programmes within the same study field and more precisely track the study process. This should be textually and/or graphically clearly represented, as to allow a quicker diagonal (or searching) processing of the SERs.

More strict usage of QA terms and consistent usage of academic organisation concepts should be promoted (different HEIs or SER authors use different phrases for the same things).

Criteria cover some areas very well, but some are harder to fit observations into. For example, academic leadership (to capture dynamics between governing bodies, management, staff, teachers and so on) is very relevant but hard to capture or express in the EER.

Diversity and inclusion in the formulation of the indicators are limited. This creates a limited response in the SERs. It is mainly focused on physical ability, perhaps somewhat on cognitive ability, but the scope and impact of diversity are more complex and relevant. The lack of

updates on these indicators results in policies being there to some extent, but their formalisation and implementation being very low.

There has to be a more clear procedure for the evaluation of graduation work in practical studies. Student work is very relevant to the evaluation of practical fields, however, was at points difficult to integrate into the assessment. Submitting some final works beforehand could be useful to consider them (for example, films are hard to assess on the spot) or, the graduation work presentation could take place before the meetings.

Comments for improving site visits:

- It can sometimes be difficult to know who to ask questions if people refer to other groups.
- Translators slow down the process and create time constraints.
- HEIs should not select students and alumni, better if they were selected at random by SKVC.
- Tour of facilities first, questions about facilities are now too much out of the conversation. The tours also seemed less well prepared, not enough of a schedule, without wanting to give more work to the HEI. HEIs also need to understand to focus the tour on facilities related to what is being assessed (programme or field).
- Too little time to prepare endnotes (at the end of the day), especially if you run out of time.
- There is not so much time actually during site visits if they are one day, which makes it difficult to do all the activities that are needed and useful.
- Making sure all the involved are provided nametags (by the HEI) for each visit, round and situation, which include functions/roles.
- Avoiding the telepresence of interviewees at all costs (better find timely and relevant replacements), especially the students and lecturers.