



CENTER FOR QUALITY ASSESSMENT IN HIGHER EDUCATION

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**EVALUATION REPORT**  
**STUDY FIELD AREA STUDIES**  
At Vytautas Magnus University

**Expert panel:**

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*Report language – English*

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## Study Field Data\*

<b>Title of the study programme</b>	<b><i>Cultures and Languages of East Asian Countries</i></b>	<b><i>Cultures and Languages of Scandinavian Countries</i></b>
State code	6121NX049	6121NX050
Type of studies	University studies	University studies
Cycle of studies	First cycle	First cycle
Mode of study and duration (in years)	Full time (4 years)	Full time (4 years)
Credit volume	240	240
Qualification degree and (or) professional qualification	Bachelor of Humanities	Bachelor of Humanities
Language of instruction	Lithuanian, English	Lithuanian, English
Minimum education required	Secondary education	Secondary education
Registration date of the study programme	5 <sup>th</sup> of March, 2012	4 <sup>th</sup> of April, 2016

*\* if there are joint / two-fields / interdisciplinary study programmes in the study field, please designate it in the foot-note*

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# I. INTRODUCTION

## 1.1. BACKGROUND OF THE EVALUATION PROCESS

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

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

The evaluation process consists of the main following stages: 1) *self-evaluation and self-evaluation report prepared by Higher Education Institution (hereafter – HEI)*; 2) *visit of the review team at the higher education institution*; 3) *production of the evaluation report by the review team and its publication*; 4) *follow-up activities*.

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

The study field is **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 is **accredited for 3 years** if one of the evaluation areas was evaluated as “satisfactory” (2 points).

The study field **is not accredited** if at least one of the evaluation areas was evaluated as “unsatisfactory” (1 point).

## 1.2. THE REVIEW TEAM

The review team was completed according to the Experts Selection Procedure (hereinafter referred to as the Procedure) approved by the Director of Centre for Quality Assessment in Higher Education 31 December 2019 [Order No.V-149](#). The Review Visit to HEI was conducted by the team on **25<sup>th</sup> of November, 2020**.

**Prof. dr. Jean -Luc Lamboley (team leader)**, *Bologna expert, former head of the Faculty of History and Geography at the Lumière University Lyon 2, France.*

**Prof. dr. Kazimierz Musial**, *University Professor at the Institute of Scandinavian Studies, University of Gdańsk, Poland.*

**Dr. Griseldis Kirsch**, *head of department of East Asian Languages and Culture and senior Lecturer in Contemporary Japanese Culture at the SOAS, University of London, UK.*

**Mrs. Gabija Kaunelienė**, *deputy director of the public body “Jukaris”, Lithuania.*

**Ms. Renata Rachmanovaitė**, *student of Klaipėda University study second cycle programme Baltic Region History, Lithuania.*

### 1.3. GENERAL

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

No.	Name of the document
1.	<b><i>1 priedas_VDU_Regiono studijos_I pakopa_patikslinta.pdf</i></b>
2.	<b><i>1 annex_VMU_Regional studies_Bachelor studies_updated.pdf</i></b>
3.	<b><i>Resources_VMU_Regional studies.pdf</i></b>
4.	<b><i>VMU Visit Questions.docx</i></b>

### 1.4. BACKGROUND OF STUDY FIELD/STUDY FIELD PLACE AND SIGNIFICANCE IN HEI

East Asian Studies are confronted with a paradox it is not easy to resolve: on the one hand there is a low number of students engaged in this study field, and similar programmes in Vilnius university create a concurrence which could be considered expensive, and on the other, the countries of East-Asia -and China in particular - have an increasingly important place in international relations, with strong geopolitical, geostrategic and economic consequences. Therefore, it is important that Lithuania can maintain a sufficient number of specialists able to deal with intercultural issues and establish a positive dialogue with these countries. It is clear that an enlightened citizen of the 21<sup>st</sup> century must be aware of the crucial issues that contacts between the Orient and the Occident give rise to. Universities must take into consideration that studies of regional cultures develop enlightened citizens, and thus – all the more so in the context of globalisation where East Asian countries are more and more active – constitute a strong pillar of democracy.

The review team confesses some embarrassment because two different study programmes were to be assessed altogether, one of which (Scandinavian studies) is much newer than the other (East Asian studies). This unbalanced situation made more difficult an expected balanced judgment...

Lastly, it is important to point out the unusual conditions in which the evaluation has taken place due to the Covid19 pandemic. It is clear that virtual visits were the only acceptable solution, and the team would like to express their warm thanks to all the organizers and technicians who allowed the reviewers to work in the best possible conditions. Nevertheless, technology cannot replace direct human contacts and we are sure that all our colleagues who are confronted with this difficulty when teaching online will share our feeling; conviviality and live dialogue are main components of academic tradition. Consequently, the quality of this peer external evaluation may lack something. Because of technical problems, the meeting with students in particular took place in poor conditions.

## II. GENERAL ASSESSMENT

*Area studies* study field and **first cycle** at Vytautas Magnus university is given **positive** evaluation.

*Study field and cycle assessment in points by evaluation areas.*

<b>No.</b>	<b>Evaluation Area</b>	<b>Evaluation of an area in points*</b>
1.	Study aims, outcomes and content	4
2.	Links between science (art) and study activities	3
3.	Student admission and support	4
4.	Studying, student performance and graduate employment	4
5.	Teaching staff	5
6.	Learning facilities and resources	5
7.	Study quality management and publicity	4
	Total:	<b>29</b>

\*1 (unsatisfactory) - there are essential shortcomings that must be eliminated;

2 (satisfactory) - meets the established minimum requirements, needs improvement;

3 (good) - the field develops systematically, has distinctive features;

4 (very good) - the field is evaluated very well in the national and international context, without any deficiencies;

5 (exceptional) - the field is exceptionally good in the national and international context/environment.

## III. STUDY FIELD ANALYSIS

### 3.1. STUDY AIMS, OUTCOMES AND CONTENT

*Study programmes' 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 (not applicable to HEIs operating in exile conditions);*

*(1) Factual situation*

The aim of the two study programmes is to develop skills requested by all the fields of economic and cultural activities and to give linguistic competence related to Scandinavian and East Asian languages and cultures. This objective fits the needs of the Lithuanian society that has strong economic and cultural links with these two areas and needs specialists able to understand the historical, ethnical and social processes of these crucial partners. This is also the case for other European countries where interest in regional study programmes has been increasing. Graduates can work as educators, translators/interpreters, language teachers, business consultants, project administrators, curators etc. both in the public and the private sector.

VMU is the only university to offer Scandinavian region studies that are not limited to the philological and linguistic approach as it is the case at Vilnius University. It is also the only university to offer courses in Korean language and to consider East-Asia as a whole with a comprehensive and comparative approach.

*(2) Expert judgement/indicator analysis*

The two study programmes do not make use of the traditional scholastic approach, but actually take into consideration the employability of the graduates, with a focus on applied research and the generation of knowledge that can be immediately applicate in concrete vocational situations. Those responsible for the study programmes are aware that a good understanding of foreign cultures needs a good knowledge and practice of the local languages, so that they occupy a large space in the programmes, even though Danish is not currently taught. The learning outcomes are defined with care and match both the academic exigencies of multicultural anthropology and the skills adapted to the professional activity areas of which the SER gives a good panorama overview. Much attention is paid to internationalisation.

The number of students interested in these regional studies has adapted to the needs of the labour market. Students work closely with stakeholders from the very beginning of the programmes so that they can hear first-hand what skills are needed to succeed in their chosen profession post-graduation.

*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.*

*(1) Factual situation*

The programmes have been reviewed to match the strategic plan adopted in 2012 by VMU which is based on five very broad fields. The SER lists five learning outcomes which are considered to match the strategic plan of the University

*(2) Expert judgement/indicator analysis*

The SER does not go into great detail about this indicator...The analysis remains short, general and a bit evasive. It should be indicated, for instance, if Scandinavian and East Asian countries are considered to be a priority when VMU signs bilateral agreements, or what the rate of financing research activities in this field is. What is the weight of the Department of Cultural studies within the faculty of Humanities?

If the five listed learning outcomes are compared to the five fields of the strategic plan, it is difficult to find equivalence. The general feeling is that the members of the self-evaluation group have not been convinced by the pertinence of this indicator, or have met some difficulty in answering it in a convincing or convenient way.

However, during the visit, the evaluation team was convinced that interdisciplinarity and internationalisation actually meet the strategic goals of the University.

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

#### *(1) Factual situation*

The scope of the two first cycles programmes is 240 ECTS (=60 ECTS for a full-time year).15 ECTS are allocated for the final thesis; the total scope of internship is 15 or 16 ECTS; ECTS allocated to the study field are 184 or 186 (no less than 120) ; the ECTS for studies specified by the University or optional studies are 76 or 78 (no more than 120); contact hours are no less than 30% of learning, and individual learning is no less than 40% of learning. 1 ECTS corresponds to around 25 h workload and the number of ECTS allocated to the courses depends on the workload necessary to achieve the attended learning outcomes; this number is periodically revised taking into consideration the students and teachers requests.

#### *(2) Expert judgement/indicator analysis*

All legal requirements are met and the programmes fit the main standards of the Bologna process. However, it should be recommended to allocate 30 ECTS strictly to each semester, not 28, 29, 31 or 32 because it may be an obstacle to student mobility. If students wish some flexibility, they can obtain it through a personalisation of their study plan.

There are some problematic statements in the tables 2 and 3; for instance, the total of ECTS for the study field (184 or 186) and ECTS for University specific studies (78 or 76) do not match 260. In the text p. 9, the University specific studies comprise 55 ECTS which is more convenient but do not fit the table numbers. During the visit, no clear explanation has been given.

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

#### *(1) Factual situation*

The elaboration of the study programmes is based on the VMU study subject certification procedure introduced in 2017 and reviewed in 2019.

The learning outcomes of the two programmes focus on the development of foreign language skills and the requirements of interdisciplinarity which matches the descriptor of the study field. There are special education courses that provide skills more oriented to further professional activities.

Each course is described in terms of learning outcomes and all the results of the courses cover the expected results and goals of the whole study programme. The expected study results are defined clearly according to the five criteria as presented in annex 4.

The study methods are diversified and adapted to the study subjects. The assessment method based on a cumulative grade system, is always selected according to the specificity of the study method.

### *(2) Expert judgement/indicator analysis*

The subjects of the two study programmes cover all the expected study results; therefore, these programmes are coherent and consistent according to the goals of the study programmes. The cumulative grade system is efficient and there is a good balance between final exam, mid-term exam and continuous assessment. Language courses have a cumulative grade different to non-languages courses because it is important to monitor the linguistic progression of the learners.

Good attention is paid to the adequacy of study methods and study results as shown in table 5. The diversity of the assessments reflects the diversity of the teaching/learning methods that appear well adapted to the achievement of the expected learning outcomes.

The SER should have given an example of a course description (from the syllabus) so that it would have been possible to check how the expected learning outcomes of the course and the aims of the study programme correspond to each other.

It would be recommendable to provide more jointly-taught courses common to all students across the degree, so as to give greater visibility to the programmes and reinforce the bonds between the students. The experts are aware that the degree has to be in line with university guidance on freedom of choice, thereby limiting the possibility to access such broad common modules, but middle ground could be found.

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

#### *(1) Factual situation*

Each semester has no more than 6 courses and the volume of each course is not lower than 4 credits. The study programme is divided into two parts: the general university education part (=23) % and the speciality part (=77%). Students have the possibility to have between 24 and 36 % ECTS per semester. Speciality courses are concentrated during the 3<sup>rd</sup> and last year so that students during the 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> years can choose courses from the general university list. Most speciality courses are mandatory, but students can choose some optional courses, for instance to deepen their area of interest. They have the possibility to choose their speciality language and to finish the six levels of this language.

Three types of practical work assignments develop skills that prepare students for the labour market; the introductory one is done at the university, and the two others outside the university. The most important one is the pre-diploma internship done in a company. Last year there was also a mandatory course titled "project management".

The final thesis must be related to the studied region. The research is based on the study of written, audio, or visual sources in the language of specialization.

#### *(2) Expert judgement/indicator analysis*

There is a good balance between mandatory and optional courses. Good attention is paid to skills and competencies that prepare students for the labour market. The fact that most

students do their internship in companies or institutions that have interest in their language specialization is a very positive point. The two programmes seem flexible and attractive for beginners. The Asian programme seems to fit the current trend among teenagers on contemporary Japanese and Korean (pop) culture.

The inclusion of Korean among the offerings is a very good initiative, but it seems that Danish, Sanskrit and Hindi are not taught which is a pity. Is it because of the concurrence of Vilnius University or of a low interest of students in these fields?

The programme is not too much prescriptive, so the students have the freedom of choice, thereby making them more self-sustained.

### *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.*

#### *(1) Factual situation*

The process is regulated by the Description of the Procedure for providing the individual Study schedule and the Order on Organization of Individual studies which is part of the VMR Study regulations.

Several possibilities are offered to the students: adjustment of the timetable, individual study plan following *Artes Liberales* principles in order to acquire additional knowledge or competencies necessary for further academic and professional activities, opportunities to take freely elective minor studies or optional speciality courses, and opportunities to choose different foreign languages. Applicants have to be motivated and prepared, and the personalisation of the study programme must be based on specific and well identified learning needs.

#### *(2) Expert judgement/indicator analysis*

The two programmes offer broad possibilities to choose specialisation and free elective subjects, especially in foreign languages or courses more oriented to professional activities. The students in the Asian programme have a lot of connections with universities in the regions the regions studied and almost all students are offered the possibility to spend at least half a year in their country of speciality which is a good opportunity to reinforce their foreign language skills.

It should be recommended that applicants unable to go abroad can be helped by a tutor; this possibility is not present in the SER.

The personalisation should take into consideration different categories of students whose learning needs are not always the same: disabled students, part-time students who are likely to constitute the major part of the cohorts, students who have already a diploma and look for additional qualifications, students who want to enrol a joint honours study programme.

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

#### *(1) Factual situation*

The thesis advisor is chosen by the students from the list proposed by the teaching team. The supervisor must be knowledgeable in the thesis topic area. Several theses have been prepared after receiving inquiries from social partners. Many of them deal with contemporary social phenomena. The reception of Asian and Scandinavian culture in Lithuania is also taken into consideration.

The expected learning outcomes match the main research skills that are supposed to be developed by writing a BA thesis.

Students receive methodological guidelines and there is a presentation of the interim findings, resp. the thesis progress in the Department to ensure that the thesis contents match the aims and exigences of the study programme.

The Qualification Defence Committee proposed by the Department of Cultural studies is approved by the Rector.

#### *(2) Expert judgement/indicator analysis*

The preparation and defence of the final thesis meet all the legal requirements. There are positive aspects: the list of the theses shows a good diversity of the subjects, with a good balance between the different regions and attention paid to contemporary issues. The fact that several theses respond to social partners' requests is actually excellent.

The guidance of the students seems efficient, but the SER does not indicate if feedback from alumni and external stakeholders is taken into consideration to improve the quality of the thesis.

Due to the importance of language competence for ethno-cultural studies, it would be recommendable for Scandinavian Studies to include a substantial summary in the language of the studied country, if the student has reached a sufficient level to do so.

Some students pursue their thesis on comparative method and in many cases their marks are very low. Because comparative viewpoint is one of the most popular fields in the context of Asia, appropriate attention should be paid to the methodological basis in this field.

#### ***Recommendations for this evaluation area:***

- 1. Allocate 30 credits, no more, no less for each semester.*
- 2. Try to improve mobility towards Asia both for students and teachers.*
- 3. Reinforce links between the two areas as they are two parallel programmes, for instance through methodological and/or intercultural communication modules.*
- 4. More courses should be done in the language of specialisation. Give more teaching hours to native speaker teachers to reduce the gap between internationally mobile students and those required to stay at home.*
- 5. In the next SER more attention should be paid for giving more data to back up statements that are made.*
- 6. Explore the possibility to introduce Danish in the Scandinavian programme.*

### **3.2. LINKS BETWEEN SCIENCE (ART) AND STUDY ACTIVITIES**

***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.*

#### *(1) Factual situation*

It has been ascertained that professors who teach in the programmes conduct research in the relevant fields and are involved in cultural/social activities of that sphere. A number of international projects and publications bear witness to the sufficiently comprehensive and structured activities, especially in Asian Studies.

In Scandinavian Studies, some cooperation with the Swedish Institute is noted, though it lacks the dimension and comprehensive approach when compared to Asian Studies.

### *(2) Expert judgement/indicator analysis*

The focus on Asian Studies when compared to the Scandinavian Studies creates an imbalance which may have a detrimental effect on the understanding and appreciation of the ambitions of the Area Studies field among the staff teaching and researching in this field. It is recommended to further develop the activities of the Scandinavian Studies by, for instance, aligning activities with the student club of Northern Countries and with a practical focus on annual editions of the Scandinavian Days. Language training not only in Swedish and Norwegian but also Danish should be made available, to enable students' choice to be educated also in this language. To this end, links with the Danish Cultural Institute and Danish government agencies responsible for teaching Danish abroad should be established.

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

#### *(1) Factual situation*

The students are encouraged to use their regional language skills in research and their final thesis by analysing sources written in, for example, Japanese or Swedish, which is in line with descriptors for Regional culture studies (and from 2017 the field of Regional studies).

Activities of the Centre for Asian Studies and the initiative to expand the Asian Books Space contribute sufficiently to updating the knowledge and the library holdings/subscriptions.

There is no comparable institutional framework to link the content of Scandinavian Studies with latest developments in the field.

An encouragement (with a few incentives) for academic staff to participate in academic conferences is profound, though it does not seem equally attractive to all members of staff due to a rather high teaching load.

#### *(2) Expert judgement/indicator analysis*

With regards to Asian Studies, it is seen as a positive development that the Centre for Asian Studies is active in facilitating teaching and, increasingly, also research in the field. Thereby the latest developments in science, art and technology have a chance to become a part of the learning process and they can be sustainably linked to the content of studies.

A lack of a similar Centre for Scandinavian studies that could assist in creating such links between the study content and the latest developments in science, art and technology is seen as a drawback. It hinders the visibility of the programme, also with respect to its output that for the most part is delivered in Lithuanian only (with summaries in English). While sufficient to meet current requirements of the study programme and its indicators, it is recommended to prioritise the internationalisation of the academic practice, research and publications.

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

#### *(1) Factual situation*

Apart from academic skills being geared towards the preparation of the BA theses, students are able to contribute to organizing and participating in various academic professional training seminars, conferences and public lectures organized by the Department of Cultural Studies, the Faculty of Humanities, or the University. Students are active as conference organizers, summer schools and cyclical events like "Time for Asia" or "Scandinavian Days".

#### *(2) Expert judgement/indicator analysis*

It is crucial to have students participate more in the activities in line with their study cycle, with the aim of nurturing their prosumer mindset and enhancing their prosumer working culture regarding their study fields. Activities of student clubs should be encouraged even more and greater attention should be paid to including opportunities of language learning beyond the fixed syllabi.

### ***Recommendations for this evaluation area:***

- 1. Ensure a more sustainable involvement of external stakeholders*
- 2. Give space and empower external stakeholders to participate as consultants in the construction of the study programmes – for example through the institutionalisation of a stakeholder council or a similar advisory body.*
- 3. Students as internal stakeholders should not only be encouraged but required to participate and get involved in the activities consistent with their study cycle. The institution offering the programme should work for including these activities as internships and other relevant interactions with the external stakeholders.*
- 4. Encourage institutional change and create opportunities for nurturing a prosumer mindset and prosumer culture among the internal and external stakeholders. For example, introduce regular consultations with students, teachers, employers and other social partners outside the university.*
- 5. Provide greater visibility of the academic output and research production by stimulating a greater number of deliveries of BA- and MA-theses in foreign languages, particularly in English. Develop incentives and offer translation support also to publish in the target languages of the studies.*

## **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.*

##### *(1) Factual situation*

The admissions criteria for the first cycle degree programmes are clear and consistently applied. The intake of students fluctuates little and is stable overall. There is no second cycle degree programme.

##### *(2) Expert judgement/indicator analysis*

The awareness of the team that grades obtained under a very different system (schools) and those obtained at university are very different, is commendable and speaks of their commitment to the subject area as well as to the success of their students.

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

##### *(1) Factual situation*

The criteria for recognition of foreign degrees is in accordance with the Lisbon Recognition and in cooperation with the Centre for Quality Assessment in Higher Education. If students embark on a study abroad programme, they first agree on a study plan with their advisors so

that credits obtained abroad can be recognized at VMU. Students entering with higher language levels will be able to take alternative credits.

*(2) Expert judgement/indicator analysis*

The system is fair and transparent for the students and potential applicants. The recognition of credits obtained abroad (if not within the ECTS scheme) follows clearly established procedures. Agreed study plans are a very effective way to ensure students remain on track. That said, it is surprising that in spite of the rigorous system, still some students seem to take matters into their own hands, even if it means that credits cannot be transferred. It would be good to see how these cases are tackled, and whether continuing conversation with the students abroad is maintained to avoid this.

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

*(1) Factual situation*

VMU takes part in the Erasmus+ agreement, enabling a large share of its student body to study abroad for any period of time. Mobility grants enable the students to also study outside of the EU at one of the partner universities, or do internships abroad. The information is disseminated through various channels and the students in Asian Studies and Scandinavian Studies benefit greatly from the opportunities on offer.

*(2) Expert judgement/indicator analysis*

VMU is to be commended for the wide availability of study abroad programmes and the uptake that there is for the offer. The language attainment of the students usually benefits greatly from a prolonged period of time spent in the country in which the language they study is spoken. The internship possibilities make the degrees more attractive, as they have clear career benefits for the students, as evidenced by the two examples given. The inclusion of some modules in English, and the English-language requirement will furthermore enhance their mobility, also post-graduation.

*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.*

*(1) Factual situation*

Student support (financial, wellbeing, careers) is coordinated centrally through relevant departments within VMU, whereas academic support is provided locally. Students can apply for a fee reduction, or a delayed payment and are directed to clear webpages. Scholarships are also available for both students from disadvantaged backgrounds as well as motivational scholarships. Accommodation fees can also be reduced. Social support is provided through the student council.

*(2) Expert judgement/indicator analysis*

The system follows clearly established procedures and the division of labor is clear between the departments, however, what is not so clear is to what extent academic advisors are trained to point students into the right direction, should the need arise. The report speaks of a good awareness of the students' needs and a clear engagement with them.

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

#### *(1) Factual situation*

Students have access to various portals in which they can find all necessary information. Although (as above), services are provided by several departments, the dissemination of information is disseminated and available centrally. Students receive introductory sessions and regular updates via email. Students are vocal and well aware of the support available to them.

#### *(2) Expert judgement/indicator analysis*

Students can be overwhelmed with information, particularly in the first year. Looking at the available services, it can easily risk that the students switch off because they might get too much information in too short a time. It needs to be clearer how the email traffic is managed and students should be surveyed to what extent they actually make use of the services, as this data was missing. More data needs to be raised in order to find out where the needs of the students are and what can be done to improve the flow of information.

#### **Recommendations for this evaluation area:**

- 1. This section laid out a very clearly structured academic support system that gave opportunities to students to be heard through surveys and regular meetings, making the liberal arts approach of the University very clearly evident. The student intake is regular and stable, and the admissions criteria are clear. What lacked clarity was whether these students all graduate and what the drop-out rates were – respectively, which measures are taken to prevent drop-out. Asian languages are notoriously difficult to learn and require huge commitment. While the workload is thus necessarily high in the degrees, it was not clear how the students would be helped in adapting to the challenges.*
- 2. Additionally, it was not clear how the year abroad (or semester abroad) is administered and subsequently dealt with. As it looks like most students can go on a period abroad, and this period abroad is recommended, however, it is not compulsory. How are the various language levels that will invariably emerge thus dealt with in class? In line with the recommendations, students who cannot go abroad will need additional support.*

## **3.4. STUDYING, 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.*

#### *(1) Factual situation*

The Students' achievements are being assessed using the cumulative point system. Intermediate assessments (mid-term tests) are weighted at 50-70% and the final exam is worth 30-50% of the grade. Students and teachers interact on Moodle platform online – this was one of the innovations (brought to university by Covid-19) that helped interact teachers and students in a more diverse manner. Students have many possibilities to design their study plan including optional courses (1/4 of total credits are chosen by the student). After finishing

their BA programmes, students are encouraged to pursue second cycle studies. Some students continue their studies at VMU, some choose to study in the countries of their expertise.

*(2) Expert judgement/indicator analysis*

The cumulative point system with the high percentage of weighting on the intermediate assessment enables teachers and students to evaluate the progress, and identify problems occurring during the course of the semester. The usage of the web-based Moodle platform is a really modern way of interaction between students and teachers which is likely appreciated by the students. Students have good possibilities to continue their studies in second or third level studies in various fields.

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

*(1) Factual situation*

Students with special needs have a possibility to have individual study schedules, and students from socially vulnerable groups have various discounts and possibilities to obtain special scholarships. Furthermore, the premises of the university are constantly being upgraded for disabled people.

*(2) Expert judgement/indicator analysis*

The facilitation of the studying process for socially vulnerable groups and students with special needs is being carried out at a university as well as at departmental level. One case of student with limited mobility was successfully solved, providing staff with experience in handling such situations. As the difficult pandemic situation with Covid-19 has taught many new things relating to online teaching / learning, this new experience should also be taken into consideration to facilitate successful integration of such students into the study process.

*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.*

*(1) Factual situation*

According to the University regulations, there are four stages of monitoring learning achievements which includes student's enrolment in studies of each course, reasons of student non-participation in examinations, analysis of evaluations and student failure prevention measures.

*(2) Expert judgement/indicator analysis*

It is obvious that the Department takes very good care of the students' learning process as students are not left alone with their failures. If all what is written in the documentation also works in practice, the situation is very good.

*3.4.4. Evaluation of the feedback provided to students in the course of the studies to promote self-assessment and subsequent planning of study progress.*

*(1) Factual situation*

Students are encouraged to pursue the follow-up of their studying process, change their study plans if they feel the need, to follow their evaluations and improve their results. During the

semester, students are invited to use consultation hours with teachers to discuss their results and problems, get feedback on their homework or assessments. After the interim and final reports, time is allocated for each teacher's feedback. The online environment on Moodle also provides a good opportunity for teachers to give personal feedback in written form.

*(2) Expert judgement/indicator analysis*

The whole impression from SER as well as of the visit is that the Department fosters a close relationship between students and teachers who seems to be ready to help students throughout their study process constantly. Such positive cooperation is helpful in maintaining student motivation. The administration also works as a mediator if problems between teachers and students occur, which is also a very positive aspect.

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

*(1) Factual situation*

The alumni club of VMU is very active and organises various events for helping the students to decide their career. VMU has a Careers centre which is responsible for collecting information as well as job / internship position information. The career centre also carries out an online survey of the graduates one year after the graduation which includes their overall satisfaction with their studies as well as the University's contribution to the students' preparation for entering the labour market. Employment data is also collected through various state institutions. A new agreement with the Employment Service has been signed to get more statistical information about the career pathways of university graduates. According to the latest data, around 50% of the students are employed and acknowledge their studies as valuable for their employment.

*(2) Expert judgement/indicator analysis*

There is no information in the SER if surveys of Alumni/graduate employment give any data on the situation of graduates from particular programmes. As regional studies programmes are very specific, a more thorough analysis of employment of the graduates from Scandinavian and East Asian studies programs should be carried out. This would give more information for current students to assess their future career opportunities and possibilities, taking into consideration the idea of conducting an analysis of internship institutions in regard to possible employment areas. Getting more information in this field may help to improve study programmes, including some valuable courses on popular employment areas as well as foster students' motivation. Close communication with the Alumni and social partners as well as having places for internships is very important.

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

*(1) Factual situation*

Study ethics is being regulated by University as well as the academic misconduct procedures. Several cases were found, and students had to rewrite their papers.

*(2) Expert judgement/indicator analysis*

Continue already implemented practice, strengthen the students' awareness of this matter.

3.4.7. *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.*

*(1) Factual situation*

The procedures for appeal investigations are present and transparent. Several cases were solved for the students and teachers were changed as a result.

*(2) Expert judgement/indicator analysis*

The situation is good. Continue practice in the same way.

***Recommendations for this evaluation area:***

- 1. Continue good practices of the diversity of teaching and learning processes, fostering close relationships between students and teachers.*
- 2. Carry out more specific research of employability and graduate's career including social partners, host institutions for internship and Alumni to give students a better idea on how to implement their knowledge into practice as well as improving the programme.*

### **3.5. TEACHING STAFF**

***Study field teaching 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. entrance requirements are well-founded, consistent and transparent.*

*(1) Factual situation*

It is difficult to know exactly how many teachers are involved in the study programmes: 23 permanent teachers are listed in annex 3 (3 professors, 8 associate-professors, 3 assistants, 9 lecturers), but p. 32 the SER indicates that the number exceeds 40 among whom 37 teach courses specific to the programmes, and finally in the last paragraph of the same page 32 teachers work for more than 3 years among whose there are 21 academics. Which is the right number to be taken into consideration? The programme involves teachers from other departments or faculties who are not included in the annex. Due to the importance of regional languages in the study programme, the number of native speakers is high, and they are not academics. There are also some practitioners from the private or public sector. Young aspiring teachers are involved in internships in the department and can discover the possibilities of an academic career. Four young teachers are finishing PhD and three are going to start doctoral studies.

Teachers are hired through a public tender and have to be recertified each 5 years. The certification is made on the basis of the "description of minimal qualification requirements for VMU teachers" and VMU statutes.

*(2) Expert judgement/indicator analysis*

The teaching-research staff meets all the legal requirements and VMU study programme regulation as no less than 50% of study filed subjects are taught by academics (65%). The public process of appointment and promotion of the teaching staff is strict and rigorous which guarantees that the best people are recruited and re-certified. All the members of the teaching

staff may be considered to be active researchers, as is shown by the list of the publications in annex 3, but the number of papers published in international journals of high impact could be improved.

The review 'team laments the lack of tables with statistical data in the SER; consequently, it is not possible to have a good idea of the composition of the teaching staff in terms of origin, age, gender, rotation. Fortunately, during the visit some more information could be given and confirmed the feeling of a rather young and quite dynamic team. It seems that good attention is paid to young people so that they can start an academic career. It means that the Department ensures the continuity of research and has sufficient human resources to replace professors when they retire. As statistical data is missing, it is not possible to check if the number of contact hours and the amount of financial support allow all the teachers to have sufficient time and means to conduct research.

Thanks to the good attention paid to interdisciplinarity and employability, the qualifications of the staff certainly correspond to the aims and learning outcomes of the programme as it is presently constituted.

### *3.5.2. Evaluation of conditions for ensuring teaching staff' academic mobility (not applicable to studies carried out by HEIs operating under the conditions of exile).*

#### *(1) Factual situation*

During the period covered by the SER, 85 % of teachers went abroad to European and Asian countries, thanks to many Erasmus+ programmes and bilateral agreements ensuring academic mobility, making both short term and long-term visits. During the same period, 19 visiting professors have been hosted by the Department of cultural studies. Lecturers from other faculties and departments contribute to interdisciplinarity and enhance the quality of teaching.

#### *(2) Expert judgement/indicator analysis*

The university offers a broad panel of possibilities for mobility, and the internationalisation of the teaching staff is effective and reaches a high level. There are some very positive consequences: professional networks, inter-institutional cooperation, development of joint research projects. Regional studies are a pillar of the international influence of the university

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

#### *(1) Factual situation*

Training courses for professional development are organised by the University according to eight groups of competencies; they are free of charge. Teachers can also choose training sessions outside of the university which can give them financial support. Non-native speakers are encouraged to participate in training sessions in the countries of the language they teach; during the period, five teachers could participate. The Institute for Innovative Studies has organised specific courses about distance learning t studies due to the situation of the Covid-19 pandemic. 80% of the staff participated.

#### *(2) Expert judgement/indicator analysis*

The university offers good possibilities to improve the competence of the teaching staff, but the SER does not give statistical data to check how many teachers are engaged and if there is an efficient feedback loop. The question has been asked during the visit, but it seems there is no follow-up on these actions. The development of competence in foreign languages with participations in summer courses in the relevant foreign countries works well and seems a

good practice to be developed. The initiative of the Institute for Innovative Studies was a great success which proves it met a real need. During the visit, the teaching staff said that it was difficult, especially for young teachers, to match research and the required contact hours in teaching.

#### ***Recommendations for this evaluation area:***

- 1. Most of the papers are written in Lithuanian and published in Lithuania; it is recommended to increase the number of publications in international peer-reviewed journals, which are not very numerous:*
- 2. Ensure that the number of contact hours is not too high, so that more time is available for research activities.*
- 3. Ensure that sufficient financial support is given to all teachers so that they can attend international conferences and create a good research environment for them.*
- 4. The teachers should get more involved in editing and translating foreign primary sources into Lithuanian and/or English.*

### **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.*

##### *(1) Factual situation*

The faculty has moved into a new big building that offers all modern facilities. There are 222 classrooms at the University. The size of the rooms varies from 5 up to 150 working places for students. Larger groups of students can have courses in VMU Grand Hall which has 725 seats. Library services are provided to more than twelve thousand users who are served in eight library departments. The library has created a total of 770 working places for them, and visitors can work with 237 computers, while 329 places are created to connect with personal computers. All the buildings and rooms are accessible for disabled people. All classrooms are computerised and have an internet connection as well as multimedia equipment. A virtual learning environment and collaboration systems are provided to students and teachers.

The department of Cultural Studies offers a local library. The central library is able to buy all the necessary documentation as well as resources specific to regional studies. In 2019 expenses related to regional studies were 35726 € (=5% of library expenses). Priority is given to electronic information resources because there is a growing demand and use for them.

VMU has a research Management System called CRIS. There is a specialised library dedicated to Asian Studies. ABS has also a Japanese manga corner (about 700 books) – the only such public collection in Lithuania.

##### *(2) Expert judgement/indicator analysis*

The situation is actually very satisfying, and during the visit, both teachers and students agreed that they were working in a very good environment. Working places for students are quite sufficient, all facilities and classrooms are modern, accessible for disabled people.

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

#### *(1) Factual situation*

About 20% of computers are renewed annually. An interactive document ordering service is installed on the Library website. Since 2012, when the development of regional studies gained a more rapid pace, the VMU library has been dedicating resources to purchase enough copies of key study materials, textbooks of regional languages, etc. The teaching staff of Asian and Scandinavian programmes can constantly express their needs when it comes to Library resources, and there is an annual budget designated to fulfil such requests. As a result, the Library resources fulfil the needs of the programmes and allow to implement the goals of programmes.

#### *(2) Expert judgement/indicator analysis*

The VMU library allocates enough financial resources to provide the necessary literature for the regional studies programmes. Thanks to the priority given to digital resources, information needed is quickly available. When writing their final thesis, students have no difficulty to find the requested documentation, even if the topic is very specialised.

### ***Recommendations for this evaluation area:***

- 1. The main recommendation is to maintain the current situation which appears excellent.*

## **3.7. STUDY QUALITY MANAGEMENT AND PUBLICITY**

### ***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.*

##### *(1) Factual situation*

Studies are managed and decided on by the following parties: Faculty Council (hereinafter the Council), the Study Programme Committee (hereinafter SPC), Dean of the Faculty and Head of the Department. The SPC of Cultures and Languages of East Asian Countries programme is composed of seven members: five teachers, one social partner and one student. The SPC of Cultures and Languages of Scandinavian Countries programme is composed of seven members: five teachers, one social partner and one student. The SPC meets at least once a semester, usually at the end of it. Since 2012, the Asian programme's SPC is organizing extended its meetings to invite all teachers who were teaching that semester and student representatives from each year. The Scandinavian programme SPC is organizing extended meetings only in the case when larger decisions are proposed.

##### *(2) Expert judgement/indicator analysis*

There is a good balance between the different actors involved in the process of quality assurance. On the Study committee, both teachers and students contribute to the decision-taking processes on programme quality enhancement, by proposing suggestions from their own experience or from feedback they collated.

*3.7.2. Evaluation of the effectiveness of the involvement of stakeholders (students and other stakeholders) in internal quality assurance. Evaluation of the planning and upgrading of resources needed to carry out the field studies.*

*(1) Factual situation*

Significant information for decision-making and quality assurance comes from the results of periodic electronic surveys aimed at gathering information from different stakeholders:

- The survey on evaluating the teaching and learning of the study courses is conducted at the end of each semester. The students are asked about teaching regarding a list of criteria (organization of teaching, methods for student active participation, clarity of the course delivery, content illustration by examples, clarity of evaluation criteria, feedback on completed assignments, information delivery in distance environment, behaviour compliance with ethical requirements). Students are also asked about their own involvement in learning, and they are requested about completed tasks, class attendance and general self-evaluation of their own work.
- The survey of first-year bachelor students regarding the reasons for the choice of studies and their expectations as well as opinions about studies is conducted at the beginning of the second semester of studies.
- The survey of the graduates (EXIT) about the studies, final theses, and the preparation for the labour market are conducted at the end of the studies.
- The survey of alumni on their adaptation in the labour market and career is conducted 12 months after graduation.
- The surveys of employers are conducted to evaluate the preparation for work by alumni and the students who have completed internships as well as how alumni adapted into the labour market.
- A survey of teachers on teaching, professional development, student involvement in studies and working conditions was created in the spring of 2020, and the results will be made public in the autumn of 2020.
- Additional surveys are also performed under demand to find out specific information about studies.

The results of the analysis are discussed with the Head of the Department, the Dean of the Faculty and social partners, they are also presented during the meetings with students.

*(2) Expert judgement/indicator analysis*

All the members of the Faculty Council and Study Programme Committee have responsibilities and a role in the process, and all stakeholders are involved with the quality assurance process. The process is divided into three steps: the gathering of information from all the partners, the analysis of the collected data by the SPC, and the taking of decisions regarding the planning and upgrading of the requested resources according to the field of studies. This process is running well and gives good results. It should be noted that the Scandinavian programme SPC extended meetings are rarer than the Asian programme SPC ones.

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

*(1) Factual situation*

Measures for Quality assessment have been chosen to ensure effective results. Annual programme analysis involves the issues that should be assessed each year while a more comprehensive analysis of the programme is done through an external evaluation in more detail to cover various issues of the study programmes. Results of internal assessments (surveys, stakeholder discussions, statistical data, etc.) are applied to improve the study quality. The results of quality assessment for teaching are used to improve the quality and the professional development of the teachers. Teachers have online access to the survey results and get acquainted with the feedback for their study courses. The survey results are also obtained by the SPC chairperson, and the main issues arising out of the quality of teaching are discussed in the SPC meetings where decisions are taken about which improvements in teaching should be taken. All decisions regarding studies (including issues on assessment and improvement) are publicised to stakeholders. The chairperson of the SPC publicises information for the teachers, social partners and other stakeholders. The Student representative in the SPC publicises the decisions to the other students of the study programme.

*(2) Expert judgement/indicator analysis*

The process of the evaluation regarding the information available for the studies is transparent and efficient. All decisions regarding the studies (including issues on assessment and improvement of the offering) and all survey answers are made public for all the stakeholders to access.

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

*(1) Factual situation*

In 2019, it became clear that graduating students gave 2.65 points out of 4 for the overall quality of the Asian Studies programme. It must be mentioned, however, that when the same students evaluated twelve more specific separate indicators about the programme, the average evaluation was 3.6 out of 4. This shows that although students are satisfied with different characteristics of the programme, they have an overall impression that the programme does not entirely match their general expectations. Continuing with the EXIT survey, the students on the Asian Studies programme evaluated most aspects of the study programme in a positive way (more than 3 points out of 4): international study opportunities, the possibility to take secondary studies, active consultation with the teaching staff, the facilities available at the university, support from the administrative staff, the match between programme's goals and the courses on offer, etc. Only two aspects were evaluated lower than 3 points out of 4: study workload (2.95) and whether programme goals matched personal expectations (2.5). The SPC is constantly trying to address the issues indicated via EXIT and other surveys by facilitating discussions with the students about the areas that receive lower evaluation. The EXIT surveys were taken as an opportunity to make some changes in the programme as well.

*(2) Expert judgement/indicator analysis*

The study Quality management maintains a very good practice of the standards and Guidelines for Quality assurance in the EHEA. Systematic surveys, analyses of the data by all the stakeholders, and wide publicization and dissemination of the process and results are the main elements which guarantee the efficiency and the success of this management.

Some areas of improvement have been identified by the SER itself which confirms the quality of the self-evaluation: EXIT surveys do not have questions related with student's study efforts and participation in university life. Surveys of the teaching staff are non-periodic.

***Recommendations for this evaluation area:***

- 1. Carry on the EXIT surveys which give excellent results and are very appreciated by the students.*
- 2. Make the Scandinavian programme's SPC extended meeting at least once a semester as it is in the Asia programme's SPC.*
- 3. Faculty should expand student's surveys with more specialized questions for students and make surveys of teaching staff recurring.*

## **IV. EXAMPLES OF EXCELLENCE**

Several final theses are prepared according to requests received from social partners ; this is a good proof of excellent bonds between academic and employers.

The same course is taught by teachers of different specialities; this is the best teaching method for interdisciplinarity and intercultural studies, and it shows the diversity and complementarity of the teaching staff.

There is a strong financial support by the university to improve learning facilities; the Kaunas campus is highly appreciated by both students and teachers.

## V. RECOMMENDATIONS\*

1. Encourage research publications in other languages than Lithuanian.
2. Improve training on copyright and ethical study methods.
3. Provide greater access to native language speakers.
4. Try to establish a research centre for Scandinavian studies to improve visibility.
5. Improve support for students unable to go one year abroad.
6. Improve the publicity about the programmes outside the university and strengthen the bonds with the social partners and alumni
7. Make sure that the information available to prospective applicants is up to date.
8. Give more attention to feedback and communicate to students how feedback has been acted on.
9. Explore the possibility to introduce Danish in the Scandinavian programme.
10. Teaching workload should be reduced without loss of pay so that teachers could have more time dedicated to research activities, especially for young teachers who need more scientific outcomes to advance in their academic career. If it is not possible due to national rules, try to make this teaching workload flexible.

\*If the study field is going to be given negative evaluation (non-accreditation) instead of RECOMMENDATIONS main **arguments for negative evaluation** (non-accreditation) must be provided together with a **list of “must do” actions** in order to assure that students admitted before study field’s non-accreditation will gain knowledge and skills at least on minimum level.

## VI. SUMMARY

The evaluation team has been pleased to note that there was no discrepancy between the data provided in the SER and the information collected during the visit. Especially, it is clear that the University and the Faculty pay very good attention to internationalisation and give sufficient financial and human support to increase the international visibility of the regional studies programmes. Otherwise, the two study programmes meet all the requirements of level V of both the Lithuanian Qualification Framework and the European Qualification framework.

1. The evaluation team appreciated the clear outline of the study aims with a good focus on the context of the entire region and good attention paid to the needs of the labour market. The flexibility of the programme enables the students to make informed choices, thereby making them more self-sustained, and the university tries to be competitive with the other regional programmes with great self-confidence. Some aspects of the study programme could be improved, first taking into consideration that Asia is difficult to access from Lithuania, potentially hindering greater mobility of staff and students. Then, links are missing between the two areas as they are two parallel programmes. Methodological modules, or intercultural communication modules, should be shared across the two programmes, also to account for the BA in Regional Studies. Lastly, more teaching hours should be given to native speaker teachers to reduce the gap between internationally mobile students and those required to stay at home, leading to different graduate outcomes. With regards to the Scandinavian programme, explore the possibility to introduce Danish.

2. The link with research is strong and efficient due to the research centre for East Asian Studies which poses a clear advantage. However, there is no research centre for Scandinavian Studies; therefore, it is recommended to create such a centre so that the research profile of the staff can be strengthened. As teaching staff seems overburdened with teaching, especially young teachers, flexibility should be introduced in the teaching workload. It is recommended to increase the number of publications in international reviews and to be more involved in editing and translating foreign primary sources into Lithuanian and/or English.

3. Admissions criteria are well defined and publicized, and clearly applied. Students seem happy and the communication with the staff is easy and productive. In fact, the expert team was very impressed by the excellent relationships between teachers and students and the close collaboration among the teaching staff; the family-like atmosphere within the Department creates a very good environment, the main consequence of which is the high rate of employability. All the graduate students who choose not to enrol in MA programmes easily find employment, often in areas not directly connected with the subject field. More attention should be paid to students who cannot go abroad because this situation leads to lower language attainment among these students.

4. During the visit, all the present alumni could express their satisfaction with the education they have received, and all the employers agreed they have a solid background in language and culture. Graduates have no difficulty in finding a job quickly. It is recommended to

improve the visibility of the programmes outside the university and strengthen the bonds with the social partners and alumni. For instance, the faculty should set up better communication with employers so that they can engage in careers events. Additionally, the Faculty has to make sure that the information available to prospective applicants is up to date.

5. The teaching staff is very dynamic, enthusiastic and motivated. The average age is less than 48 years and there are good possibilities for academic promotion within the university. The diversity of the disciplines, reinforced by the visiting professors, makes the staff more competent to deal with intercultural issues. The teaching staff is highly qualified, the great majority being involved in research projects, both national and international. The devotion of the teachers, their passion for teaching regional studies, and their involvement not only in academic activities, but also in a wide range of cultural events explain the high degree of motivation and satisfaction of the students. The teaching load is high and university should consider greater flexibility in the allocation of the teaching hours to enable staff to achieve promotion.

6. With regards to learning facilities and resources, the situation is excellent thanks to the great support provided by the university that considers this aspect as a priority. During the visit, both teachers and students agreed that they were working in a very good environment. The Kaunas campus is highly appreciated. Working places for students are sufficient, all facilities and classrooms are modern, and accessible for disabled people, and they are well-equipped with IT systems. Thanks to the priority given to digital resources, information is quickly available when needed and students have no difficulty to find the requested documentation, even if the topic is very specialised.

7. The management of study quality is based on the Bologna standards as defined in the Guidelines for Quality assurance in the EHEA. The quality enhancement at programme level is more or less inspired by the Tuning approach that may be considered as a reference. There is a good balance between the different actors involved in the process of quality assurance. The EXIT system (systematic surveys organized for students at the end of each semester) is very efficient and is a good example of excellent practice. It could be improved by giving more room to learning-centred questions compared to teaching-centred questions. The surveys for teaching staff should be more frequent.

#### Expert panel signatures:

1. Prof. dr. Jean – Luc Lamboley (team leader) *academic,*
2. Prof. dr. Kazimierz Musial, *academic,*
3. Dr. Griseldis Kirsch, *academic,*
4. Ms. Gabija Kaunelienė, *representative of social partners'*
5. Ms Renata Rachmanovaitė, *students' representative.*