# CENTER FOR QUALITY ASSESSMENT IN HIGHER EDUCATION

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## EVALUATION REPORT

## STUDY FIELD LITERARY STUDIES

## at VILNIUS UNIVERSITY (higher education institution)

**Review' team:**

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Report language – English
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Vilnius
2021

# Study Field Data*

| Title of the study programme | Programme "*Intermedial Studies of Literature*" | Programme "*Literary Anthropology and Culture*" | Programme "*Lithuanian Literature and Creative Writing*" |
|---|---|---|---|
| State code | 6211NX016 | 6211NX015 | 6211NX022 |
| Type of studies | University studies | University studies | University studies |
| Cycle of studies | Second cycle | Second cycle | Second cycle |
| Mode of study and duration (in years) | Full time, 2 years | Full time, 2 years | Full time, 2 years |
| Credit volume | 120 | 120 | 120 |
| Qualification degree and (or) professional qualification | Master of Humanities | Master of Humanities | Master of Humanities |
| Language of instruction | Lithuanian | Lithuanian | Lithuanian |
| Minimum education required | Bachelor degree | Bachelor degree | Bachelor degree |
| Registration date of the study programme | 6 of March, 2009 | 24 of April, 2008 | 29 of May, 2003 |

# CONTENTS

# 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 external evaluation report of the study field SKVC takes a decision to accredit study field either for 7 years or for 3 years. If the field evaluation is negative such 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 evaluation areas was evaluated as "unsatisfactory" (1 point).

## 1.2. THE REVIEW TEAM

The review team was completed according he 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 *08/12/2020*.

**Prof. dr. Andrew Goodspeed (team leader)** *Professor at the Faculty of Languages, Cultures, and Communications, South East European University, Macedonia.*

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**Ms. Sonata Bortelytė,** *Student of Klaipeda University (English and others foreign language (German / French) and business communication (Masters).*

## 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.  | VU pre-visit questions_answers11.7 |
| 2.  |                      |

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

Vilnius University—commonly referred to in this report as VU—is a long-established higher educational institution, having been established in 1579 (SER, p.7) It offers degree instruction in all three study cycles, inclusive of undergraduate, Master's, and Doctoral study. The governance of the university is shared by three main individuals or bodies, specifically the Rector, the Council, and the Senate (for university governance structure, see the Statute of Vilnius University, publicly available on the VU website: https://www.vu.lt/en/about-vu/documents). Although these three individuals or bodies have oversight and managerial responsibility, some managerial and decision-making authorities are devolved to other bodies, such as Faculty management or program management (for specific details, see again the Statute of Vilnius University, as above).

The program under review in this report is the "Literary Studies" M.A. program. It is delivered in the Vilnius campus as well as in the Kaunas branch. The program is delivered by the VU Faculty of Philology. It is primarily intended to produce graduates who will participate in particularly literary or literature-oriented professions or services, among which may be noted: writing; editing; teaching; research/scholarship; proofreading; museum curatorship; library or archival work; and other allied professions or engagements. The program seeks to attract students from philological or humanistic undergraduate backgrounds, but is not exclusively restricted to such applicants.

The program is structured in a unique, tripartite form. There are three study programs (SP)—perhaps "streams" or "areas of specialization" might be more clarifying terms—by which students enrolling may choose to focus on one of these three areas: "Intermedial Studies of Literature"; "Literary Anthropology and Culture"; and "Lithuanian Literature and Creative Writing." The SP "Lithuanian Literature and Creative Writing" is open for admission on an annual basis, while the programs "Intermedial Studies of Literature" and "Literary Anthropology and Culture" are open for admission on an alternative basis. This offers admirably broad opportunities for students to personalize the focus of their interests and research, although it does also imply that a student interested in "Intermedial Studies of Literature" or "Literary Anthropology and Culture" may be required to wait an academic year to enrol in the program of her or his choice.

Students of all three programs, however, are required to demonstrate subject and field competence both through coursework and individualized research. The result of the study programs is a supervised Master's thesis, defended in public, and examined by an examination committee consisting of five members, several of whom are social partners or other stakeholders. The intention is therefore to require students to demonstrate a consistent ability to learn through lecturing, seminars, workshops, and individual research; the thesis is intended to demonstrate research ability, academic self-motivation, and student research autonomy.

Although these programs are relatively small, they are of a size congruent with similar programs in other European or North American universities. The programs attract a relatively small pool of applicants—the SER notes that "possibilities for further development of the field, designing new SPs, are limited by the demographic circumstances and restrictions of public funding" (SER, p.9)—yet there has been an encouraging increase in enrolments in 2020 and 2019, after a worrisome under-application pool in 2018 (which resulted in no student intake that year).

Despite the relatively small size of enrolment in the various SPs of the "Literary Studies" program, the graduates' skills position them to fill uncommonly prominent roles in cultural discourse. The primary employment opportunities available to such graduates—teaching, writing, reviewing, and similar professions—are cultural mediation positions, often promoting, defending, or defining important elements of national and international culture.

# II. GENERAL ASSESSMENT

Study field and **second cycle** at Vilnius University is given **positive** evaluation.

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

| No. | Evaluation Area | Evaluation of an area in points* |
|-----|-----------------|-------------------|
| 1. | Study aims, outcomes and content | 3 |
| 2. | Links between science (art) and study activities | 3 |
| 3. | Student admission and support | 3 |
| 4. | Studying, student performance and graduate employment | 3 |
| 5. | Teaching staff | 3 |
| 6. | Learning facilities and resources | 4 |
| 7. | Study quality management and publicity | 3 |
|  | Total: | **22** |

*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:*

- *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 objective of the study program is to train qualified specialists of literature and culture. The assessment of the labor market needs and requirements is mainly based on close contacts that the teaching staff and the program committee members have with Lithuanian cultural and scholarly institutions. The three study program committees maintain such contacts also through alumni and social partners who are involved in final thesis defence commissions or serve as committee members. In the program LLCW, professional writers, critics and translators have been invited to help students develop skills of practical creative and critical writing. The Career Tracking Information System and Government Strategic Analysis Center provide the study committees with more general information and recommendations concerning the needs of society and the labor market. Furthermore, Vilnius University has recently conducted a labor market needs analysis to identify the transferable skills that all graduates should have developed during their studies.

The review team (hereinafter the team) noted that the study aims and competences of the three SPs, emphasize the principles, methodologies, and concepts of research in the humanities, and focus heavily on theories of literature, art and culture. While the team thinks that these are important and worthy objectives, the team is also concerned whether the theoretical emphasis conforms to the definitions of the professional competences (Appendix 1, 6.1 and 6.2) and, further, whether this orientation effectively builds the practical job skills necessary for the wide variety of positions where the graduates can find employment (SER, p. 10). The team recommends that the study unit seeks to further balance the theoretical aims of these study programs with practical competences and specify the professional competences that the SPs develop.

The team also noted that the SPs' graduates' current employability is good, and that the recent rise in admission numbers can also be an indicator of employability. However, the team is concerned whether the large drop out of students in 2018 was in part caused by changes in the labor market needs and whether sufficient measures, beyond improving MA thesis supervision, have been taken to prevent this from happening again. The team, moreover, learned that the majority of students in these study programmes have jobs while studying. The team thus recommends that the core academic unit, with the SPCs, would monitor how these jobs relate to the studies, how the skills and knowledges that the students

learn can be applied in their work, and how the second-cycle degree affects the graduates' professional situation and work prospects.

*(2) Expert judgement/indicator analysis*

The team assesses that the aims and outcomes of the field and cycle study programs to the needs of the society and/or the labor market is adequate.

- *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 aims and achievements of these SPs conform to the Vilnius University's general strategy of strengthening Lithuania's social and cultural capital, educating active and responsible citizens and social leaders, training professionals and potential researchers, and developing skills in cross-cultural communication. The SPs contribute to the University's mission also by developing terminology and conducting research in Lithuanian language. Furthermore, the SPs seek to build an international milieu by researching Lithuanian literature and culture within a multilingual and multicultural framework, and in the context and as part of European culture.

  The team notes, however, that there is relatively little international mobility and co-operation in these SPs. Most staff members attend international conferences, but only some are involved in international research co-operation or have regular contacts with other European academic institutions. Few students have been involved in international exchanges.

  The team also notes that while the SPs welcome the impact of visiting translators, and try to support the students' multilingual reading skills, the question of translation, including also the issue of how translations should be incorporated into the study programs' curricula and syllabi, remain somewhat unclear.

  *(2)   Expert judgement/indicator analysis*

  The team assesses that the conformity of the field and cycle study program aims and outcomes with the mission, objectives of activities and strategy of the HEI is adequate.

- *Evaluation of the compliance of the field and cycle study programme with legal requirements;*

  *(1)   Factual situation*

  The composition and the study plan of the study program, and the qualifications for a master's degree comply with general Lithuanian requirements of studies for the second study cycle.

  *(2)   Expert judgement/indicator analysis*

The team agrees that the study program meets all the necessary legal requirements.

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

*(1) Factual situation*

The teaching methods and learning activities, as well as the assessment tasks, are aligned to the intended learning outcomes. How this is done is carefully detailed on a course-to-course basis (Appendix 3). The SPCs of the programs ascertain the cohesion between teaching methods and goals, learning strategies, and the learning outcomes, also by a yearly review of the SP plan and the matrix of competences, as well as by consulting the lecturers about their pedagogical choices.

The team notes positively that the description of course unit learning outcomes (Appendix 3) nicely balance theoretical and practical outcomes and systematically emphasize the value of problem-based learning. The description of constructive alignment in the courses of the SPs does not detail, however, how the chosen assessment methods contribute to the overall cohesion between the intended learning outcomes and the courses. It was also brought to the team's attention that the assessment methods have not always been aligned with the teaching goals in all the courses, and that some students' impression is that some courses use varying criteria of assessment. The team also would have liked to know more about the kinds of active teaching-and-learning methods that have been used at seminars organized at museums, archives, and other cultural institutions, or through participation in research and cultural events (SER, p.35).

*(2) Expert judgement/indicator analysis*

The team assesses that the compatibility of aims, learning outcomes, teaching/learning and assessment methods of the field and cycle study programs is adequate.

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

*(1) Factual situation*

The compulsory course units of the three SPs constitute the unique orientation of each SP. In each program, these compulsory modules integrate three dimensions of knowledge and learning that are shared across the SPs: methodological knowledge, historical knowledge of artistic and cultural traditions, and the ability to apply the acquired knowledges in research.

The team noted that while the emphasis and the objects of study in the three SPs are clearly distinguished, many of their methodologies are identical, some of the courses are the same across the three SPs, and furthermore, the intended subject-specific competences and

learning outcomes in these programs are the same (Appendix 1). In addition, it is not clear from the provided information (Appendix 5) how the members of the permanent teaching staff divide their duties between the different SPs. The only distinguishing feature among the SPs with regard to subject-specific competences is competence 5.3. (this area is less frequently covered by individual courses, as can be seen in Appendix 2).

In general, the team is concerned whether the tripartite structure (ISL, LAC, and LLCW) is a useful separation of foci for a relatively small academic unit. The team observed the overlap between the three SPs, and is concerned about the fact that each program only runs every other year. It seems that, at least in some cases, this biennial arrangement forces prospective students to wait for a year to begin their studies. The SER emphasizes the uniqueness of each program in terms of the SPs' research focus, but more consideration could be given to the possibility of harmonizing these options into one SP in order to help the beginning of studies and facilitate the students' progress toward degree completion.

(2)   *Expert judgement/indicator analysis*

The team assesses that the totality of the field and cycle study program subjects/modules, which ensures consistent development of competences of students is adequate.

- *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 students have a number of opportunities to personalize their studies, including the choice of 15-25 credits of optional studies, the option to take modules at other departments of Vilnius University or elsewhere, and participate in academic exchange. Recently, the scope of optional courses has been considerably increased, and the measures taken by the Faculty of Philology has also encouraged the students movement between the programs.

The team noted positively that lecturers in these SPs welcome students with a first degree in other languages (such as German, French, Italian, and Scandinavian languages), individualise the set reading for these students, and encourage them to use the libraries of respective departments. However, the team would like to recommend that the SPs make it more evident how they acknowledge the heterogeneity of the students' background and facilitate the integration of those students who have completed their first cycle of studies in other fields. The team would also like to recommend that relevant language courses in English, German, Spanish, French, and Russian, which are completed outside the three SPs and the Faculty of Philology, could be credited.

*(2)   Expert judgement/indicator analysis*

The team assesses that opportunities for students to personalise the structure of field study programs according to their personal learning objectives and intended learning outcomes is adequate.

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

*(1)    Factual situation*

The preparation, defense and the assessment process of MA thesis, including a reviewer's written report and the evaluation of the open defense, is regulated according to the Vilnius University study regulations and the academic units that run the SPs. The SPCs approve of the students' thesis topic and the work's supervisors. To enhance the quality and transparency of thesis evaluation, the defense committee includes at least five staff members from Vilnius University and is chaired by a researcher, or a social partner, from another institution.

The team notes that the evaluation of final theses complies with the general field and cycle requirements, and also that the definition of a Master's thesis work in these SPs reflects well the general and subject-specific learning outcomes that the SPs are set to follow. The team also notes positively that in the SPs operated by FPhil Faculty (ISL and LAC), the Master's thesis project extends over three semesters, including a continuous thesis seminar of two semesters, and that in these programs the integration of the thesis project in the study plan is well outlined. The team recommends that the SPs closely monitor developments with regard to Master's thesis completion also in comparison with the LLCW SP that follows a different approach, and further develop thesis supervision in the seminars and through individual student contacts in order to reduce students' drop-out rates.

The team notes that the production of MA theses has been consistent since 2018 (5-11 theses per year, Appendix 6). However, the provided materials do not explain how the completion of the theses, or the supervisory work, is divided between the SPs and among the staff members.

(2)    *Expert judgement/indicator analysis*

The team assesses that compliance of final theses with the field and cycle requirements is adequate.

## Recommendations for this evaluation area:

1) The team recommends that the study unit seeks to further balance the theoretical aims of these study programs with practical competences and specify the professional competences that the SPs develop.
2) The team recommends that the core academic unit, with the SPCs, monitor how the jobs available to program graduates relate to the studies, how the skills and knowledges that the students learn can be applied in their work, and how the second-cycle degree affects the graduates' professional situation and work prospects.

## 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:*

- *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*

The study field of literary studies belongs to the scientific field of Philology in in the scientific area of Humanities. The scientific field of philology includes also linguistics, philology by language, and translations. Research and studies in these fields are carried out both by Faculty of Philology (Fphil) and Kaunas Faculty (KNF), among other fields. The researchers teaching in the SPs in literature run by FPhil contribute to the research areas of Lithuanian Studies: Philological and Interdisciplinary Aspects" and "Multilingual Discourses: Linguistics, Literature, and Culture." They specialize in subject areas such as the history of Lithuanian literature, 20th-21st c. Lithuanian and Central European literature, intermediality and intermedial discourses theories of literature and culture and methodologies of their research, cultural history and anthropology, textual scholarship and editing. Those teaching in the SP run by KNF (LLCW) are affiliated with the Institute of Languages, Literature and Translation Studies and conduct research in the area of "Poetics, rhetoric and linguistics: fundamental and applied research of artistic and non-artistic texts". Most of them work in the research group "Relationships between Text and Context" (SER 21-22).

Researchers use their competences in their specialties not only during course units, compulsory or optional (such as the modules of Narratology and intermediality, Drama between Literature and Theatre, Ancient Aesthetics and Art Theory, Literature and Political Thought, Urban Discourses: Society and Culture, Religious Thought in Lithuania: Early Modern Times), but above all, by preparing students for scientific work at seminars where each student does his proper original research in a chosen field ("Scholarly Research" and "Master's Thesis" modules). Their achievements contribute to ensure high level scholarly content.

The LLCW teaching staff includes also writers, critics of literature and culture, journalists and translators, all with an international experience and reputation; their works and (or) translations are published in Lithuania and abroad, in many literary periodicals and anthologies. These professionals are supposed to help students to build and develop, during practical sessions (workshops of creative and critical writing or literary translation) specific skills and competences of text production needed in the real-life settings (SER 23-24, 35).

(2)  *Expert judgement/indicator analysis*

The evidence given in the SER and the Appendix 4 (Content of course units (modules) studied in the field study programs) allows the team to conclude that the relation between the research and the teaching carried out by the staff members is adequate on the whole. However, some doubts are raised by the way students should acquire practical competences and skills (Learning outcome 6.2: [students] "reflect and appreciate one's role as a cultural worker and educator and participate responsibly in various discourses of cultural and social life"). They are stressed as important components of the program in the SER (p. 10-11) and were also mentioned during the meeting with teaching staff. However, any obligatory internship (or other formal arrangements reflecting program professional orientation) is not included in the study plan. The response to a supplementary pre-visit question concerning this problem states that all modules include an element of practical work: students are given written assignments, integrating theory with praxis, which include research essays, surveys and book reviews; thus, they should learn to apply the theoretical knowledge in works belonging various fields of cultural life.

In the same response, and also during the meeting with the Self-Evaluation group and teaching staff, the fact that a majority of students have already jobs while studying and they acquire practical skills *in situ* was also emphasized. What is more, as stated also in the SER, "Remarkably, the SPs of the study field also attract young creative writers with a publishing record in all literary genres – poetry, prose, drama, literary criticism, and essay writing – who enrol on the studies to deepen and expand their knowledge of literature, build theoretical and methodological self- awareness and other skills that are developed in the SPs" (SER, p. 26); this seems to be an explanation or reason of the discrepancy between the significant part of theoretical knowledge delivered by the SPs, and the lesser importance of practical matters.

The meetings with alumni and social partners revealed however that there is a gap between the theoretical competences and practical skills shown by the graduates (often, they lack some of the practical competences) needed in real work. It was stressed (by both private and public social partners) that a stronger link between university and the labor world (such as an internship) might be beneficial to students and their employability. Even if the education is focused on research, not all the students can be researchers.

After the analysis of the content of the program, and meeting with social partners and alumni, the team is of the opinion that a better balanced combination of a strong theoretical basis and special professional skills (that reflect the demands of the labor market) would help to introduce more congruence between the content of the program and the employment tendencies of the program's graduates. Thus the team would recommend to incorporate an internship or another formal element of practical skills into the program, and while doing so, to make better and wider use of existing ties with social partners and their involvement in the delivery of the program.

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

*(1) Factual situation*

According to the SER, the integration of the developments in the scientific area of Humanities is ensured by the fact that the course units of the SPs are taught by subject specialists and active researchers who regularly publish the results of their research in Lithuania and abroad; they also engage in top-level national project activities, some provided by external funding bodies (such as the Research Council of Lithuania). Thus, they have the opportunity to share and employ their scientific interests and knowledge, especially during seminars where, under their supervision, students conduct their proper original research (Scholarly Research and Master's Thesis modules). As shown in the APPENDIX 6 (Students' Final Theses), the subject matter and issues of research undertaken by students correspond to the relevant topics and/or methods of contemporary humanities. An important element of the SPs is the conviction that Lithuanian literature and culture are part of European culture which serves as the basic premise for the content of most of modules (with an element of comparative studies, translations, both theoretical and literary material in other languages as well as Lithuanian (SER p. 14-16).

New modules or subjects are also introduced in order to adapt the SP to the latest achievements in humanistic thought: for example, in the last couple of years, this aspect has been significantly strengthened in the modules Visual Studies (updated by a new lecturer in Spring 2019) and Phenomenology of Literature (updated and made compulsory from Autumn 2021 onwards).

(2) *Expert judgement/indicator analysis*

The detailed reading of the Appendix 5 (Permanent teaching staff (at least part time and at least 3 years in the University) of the field of literary studies) gives the impression that although many works have been published in foreign languages (English, Polish, Russian), in foreign revues or in conference volumes, there is still a tendency to publish in Lithuanian, not only by researchers in Lithuanian Philology but also by those specialized in other matters.

Although the comparative element of the SPs is stressed both in the SER and in the response given to one of the pre-visit questions, there is a very weak evidence of international cooperation and participation of foreign lecturers in SPs teaching. The SER mentions only two (Table 14. FOREIGN LECTURERS WHO DELIVERED LECTURES IN THE PROGRAMMES IN THE FIELD OF LITERARY STUDIES IN 2017–2020). The Team would recommend considering a stronger use of existing possibilities of internationalization of teaching staff, even during short visits.

The SER emphasizes multilingual and multicultural dimensions of the SPs; however the language of instruction in all modules is Lithuanian; the dominant other language is English. The use of material in other languages is extremely rare, although, according to the SER (p. 43-44), almost all teaching staff of the SPs speak one or more foreign languages (English, Russian, German, Polish or Italian at B2-C1 level). Also workshops included in the program LLCW are conducted by translators who mostly translate from English. The answers given to specific pre-visit questions and comments during the meeting with the Self-Evaluation group seemed rather evasive; they stressed the fact that the SP has just started; in the future the translation module will expand the scope of languages beyond English if there is a demand from students.

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

*(1) Factual situation*

According to the SER, students of the SP have various opportunities to engage in research. (1) As an obligatory part of the curricula, they carry out relevant research for their Master's theses. In the last years, students researched and brought into public material from several Vilnius or Kaunas archives; they analyzed literary sources in Lithuanian and other languages and translated them; they tested the latest methodological approaches to analyze works of Lithuanian and other literature, cinema, and theater; they expanded the established understanding of the history of Lithuanian literature, especially in the fields of women's writing or discussed theoretical problems related to the essential concepts of literary studies, etc. (2) The teaching staff of the SPs also gives students actual research experience by involving them in research projects as young researchers. SER (p. 25) gives the example of a student who participated in two projects funded by the Research Council of Lithuania and the Ministry of Culture of the Republic of Lithuania ("Algirdas Julius Greimas: Ideas" and "Dissemination of Unpublished Egodocuments by Algirdas Julius Greimas"); the student's contribution was varied and rich: s/he co-authored with a lecturer an essay for cultural press, prepared his/her own presentation for a scholarly conference, collected and filed material for a digital archive, prepared and published a website for dissemination of Greimas's heritage. (3) The students, under the guidance of a teacher or independently, elaborate the results of their research and publish them in books and peer-reviewed journals or present them during scholarly and/or student conferences, academic summer schools, in Lithuania and/or abroad (Estonia, Poland, Sweden). (4) Students are informed about research seminars and lectures

organized by FPhil and KNF researchers and guest speakers and encouraged to participate in them.

Students can also develop their practical skills by participation in the organization of scholarly and/or literary events or organizing them themselves; they can also participate in the activities of student scholarly societies and organize them.

Some of the students who begin research activities during their studies continue them after attaining their master's degree. As the SER states, a significant proportion of the SP graduates (4 out of 23 graduates during the analyzed period) continue their scholarly research activities in doctoral studies after succeeding in securing competitive funding for third-cycle studies (SER 24-26).

*(2)    Expert judgement/indicator analysis*

Data given in the SER and in the Appendices clearly show that students are given good opportunities to develop their research skills and competences; international and national conferences they took part in and the published works confirm that the SPs create an appropriate environment conducive to the development of scientific competences.

### Recommendations for this evaluation area:

(1) The team is of the opinion that a better combination of a strong theoretical basis and special professional skills (that reflect the demands of the labor market) would help to introduce more congruence between the content of the program and the employment tendencies of the program's graduates. Thus the team would recommend the incorporation of an internship or other formal elements of practical skills into the program, and as doing it, to make better and wider use of existing ties with social partners and their involvement in the delivery of the program.

(2) Although the SER states that researchers participate in the projects and research groups, team activities seem absent. The scientific activities are real but seem rather individualistic. and not all the papers are being published in international reviews. A formal mechanism might be considered by the department and the university management in order to enable staff to produce more publications in foreign languages in peer-reviewed international journals. Wider participation in international competitive research projects and international conferences should also be considered. This is a crucial issue, especially to assure the quality of the master programs.

(3) Although there are certainly occasional opportunities to obtain modular or guest lecturers, a better strategy might be considered to form institutional or departmental agreements with specific institutions or individuals to guarantee continuity of interaction and foreign engagement.

(4) The Team would strongly recommend reconsidering a more systematic and planned use of foreign languages in the delivered teaching, using existing abilities and competences of the teaching staff.

### 3.3. STUDENT ADMISSION AND SUPPORT

*Student admission and support shall be evaluated according to the following indicators:*

- *Evaluation of the suitability and publicity of student selection and admission criteria and process.*

*(1)    Factual situation*

The procedures guiding acceptance into the program are largely governed by centralized VU policies, specifically the Rules of Admission to Vilnius University Second-Cycle Study Programmes, as approved by the University Senate. These are publicly available on the VU website.

Admission is based upon a mathematical calculation (expressed in the SER, p. 27), which allocates numerical values to—among other factors—prior performance in the Bachelor's work (thesis or final examination marks), and other applicable academic activities, such as the publication of scholarly work, presentations of papers at conferences, and similar achievements. In the period under review, an entrance examination for those with non-humanities undergraduate backgrounds has been eliminated.

Regarding these applicants from non-humanities undergraduate specializations, it is noted in the SER that "Persons with a Bachelor's degree in any field can apply to the field SPs." (SER, p. 27) The team queried this, as the policy seems potentially incautious. It may result in two potential difficulties: 1) students whose undergraduate work does not prepare them adequately for the rigors of a second-cycle program in Literary Studies, and 2) it may result in student cohorts of significantly differing competence and sophistication, thus possibly overwhelming the under-prepared and obstructing the progress of the most advanced. In discussion with multiple groups (8.12.2020), the team learned that this breadth of admission background was necessary given the numbers needed to run the program, but that care was taken to ensure that students are chosen for their possibility to excel in the program. It was also asserted that the numbers of students from outside the humanities (in their undergraduate work) remain small. The team accepts this, but notes that it may well be in the interests of both the program and the applicants themselves to reinstate the entrance examination for those applicants whose undergraduate specializations were outside the humanities.

It may also be noted again here, as above, that the ISL and LAC programs run on an alternating rotation, with students potentially needing to wait a year before her/his preferred specialization is opened for application. This report has already addressed this matter (see the section on "Study Aims, Outcomes, and Content"), but it is again noted here that the team remains somewhat concerned that the tri-partite structure of this program may not maximize student opportunity, given the relatively small size of this academic unit.

*(2)    Expert judgement/indicator analysis*

The policies for advertising for, evaluating, and admitting students to this program are adequate.

It is, however, recommended that it may not be optimal to admit students with a non-humanities undergraduate background, particularly without at least administering an entrance examination. The team accepts the view (as expressed in multiple discussions with program staff and students) that these students bring a valuable diversity to the program; yet it may be in the interests of the program, and the applicants, to reinstitute the entrance examination for those with "external" Bachelor's preparation.

● *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 procedure for the recognition of foreign qualifications, partial studies, and prior non-formal and informal learning is largely based upon centralized Vilnius University policies. These, specifically, include: the Description of Procedure for Admission of Persons who Studied at Other National or Foreign Higher Education Institutions and wish to continue Their Studies at Vilnius University; Procedure for Recognizing Learning Outcomes at Vilnius University; and the Vilnius University Procedure for Recognizing Competences Acquired by Students through Non-Formal Education or Self-Education and for Approving Course Units (Modules).

Such recognition is undertaken on a case-by-case basis, and is guided by certain policies excluding some recognition. Thus, not more that 50% of the SP credit load may be covered by external or non-formal qualifications, and final examinations or final theses are also excluded. As noted in the SER (p. 30), "the decision on the recognition of learning outcomes is made by the SPC," which means that the final decision remains appropriately the purview of the field-specialist SPC.

It is to be regretted that, for the Literary Studies program, there is little occasion for the recognition of foreign or non-formal learning. No students in the Literary Studies field applied for the recognition of foreign qualifications during the period covered by this review. The SER does, however, record that one student switched into this program from the

Classics program at VU, and the student's first semester of work was recognized as being sufficiently congruent with the Literary Studies program. In addition, a Latvian student was admitted to the program, and that student's Latvian bachelor's degree was recognized.

*(2)    Expert judgement/indicator analysis*

The team is satisfied that the policies in force for the recognition of foreign or non-traditional qualifications are adequate.

The team believes, however, that it is concerning that there is little international intake into the program, and suggests that it would be valuable to the program to attempt more actively to advertise their program opportunities abroad, as this would diversify the student body, bring new perspectives to class discussions, and potentially increase student recruitment numbers.

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

*(1)    Factual situation*

Vilnius University has an extensive network of partner universities and institutions, and participates in the Erasmus + and ARQUS programs, both of which permit student mobility. This information is published in multiple fora, such as the VU website, program-specific announcements, etc. Field-specific partner universities permitting mobility exchanges include institutions in Bulgaria, Croatia, Czech Republic, Estonia, France, Germany, Italy, Poland, Portugal, Romania, Spain, Sweden, and Turkey (SER, p. 31).

Students in the Literary Studies program are permitted to undertake these mobility opportunities, subject to several restrictions (she or he must have completed at least one semester at VU before engaging in mobility, and no more than half of her/his program at VU may be covered by mobility credits—which is consistent with the previously noted restriction on the recognition of no more that 50% of external credits for the program).

Regrettably, these mobility opportunities are under-used. During the period covered by this review, only two Literary Studies students undertook mobility visits (one to the University of Warsaw, the other to the University of Tartu), and apparently no incoming students of other universities chose to undertake mobility into the VU Literary Studies program. Both the SER (p.32) and the program representatives (8.12.2020, multiple discussions) had consistent interpretations of this low mobility utilization: students find it difficult to leave their jobs, or their families (or both), for any extended period. The team accepts this as a realistic if disheartening situation, and strongly encourages the program teaching staff and management to identify and support any VU Literary Studies students who might be able to undertake mobility exchanges. Student mobility is a terrible opportunity to lose, and is considered one of the major benefits of contemporary higher education in Europe.

*(2)    Expert judgement/indicator analysis*

The policies and procedures permitting student mobility are adequate.

The team strongly recommends that the program seeks to promote and encourage student mobility opportunities, as they are lamentably under-utilized in the program.

- *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*

Vilnius University aims to provide full-spectrum student support, including information and resources regarding (but not restricted to) academic information (on both university and program levels), library and information resources, student counselling, health and fitness activities, leisure opportunities, and student representation (via the Student Representative Office). There is additionally a developing "mentorship" program that appears highly promising; the program members noted that they are "still looking for the best ways to get involved more actively in the activities" of this program. (SER, p. 32)

The systems and resources available to students appear laudable and adequate, with perhaps two exceptions. As noted above, student mobility opportunities are available, and are under-utilized; it may be advantageous to investigate ways to promote these opportunities more effectively to students in the program. This would come under the rubric of academic counselling. Secondly, the SER notes a disturbingly high student attrition rate: of the 15 students admitted to the program in 2017, 3 had suspended—and 7 terminated—their studies by the time of their expected thesis submission. The team fully recognizes that there are certainly individual financial, familial, or personal reasons for this attrition (and highly commends the SPC for taking corrective measures in 2018), yet the high rate suggests that intervention services and counselling may help some students to remain in the program.

*(2)    Expert judgement/indicator analysis*

The team assesses that the mechanisms for student counselling, incorporating academic, financial, social, psychological, and personal support, is adequate.

The team recommends—without any adverse comment upon previous efforts—that the program implementers themselves (notably management and teaching staff) give additional attention to promoting student mobility opportunities, and to intervening in cases of potential student withdrawal, when the reasons for study termination or suspension are avoidable. The team commends the SPC for undertaking such efforts beginning in 2018.

- *Evaluation of the sufficiency of study information and student counselling.*

*(1)    Factual situation*

Study information is broadly available and open. The website contains basic information, but more specific information may be obtained either from the Student Services and Career Center, or from the program staff themselves.

Incoming students participate in a "University Integration Week," which involves multiple orientation activities and opportunities. This is intended to familiarize students with the program staff, provide opportunities to meet other students, and generally to situate the new student in terms of available information, resources, and opportunities.

There are multiple resources available for student counselling. The Career Center may provide practical job-seeking assistance. Psychological, time-management, or stress counselling is available through the Counselling and Training Center. The Student Representative Office also provides support and advice to students who may wish to know—and assert—their rights, in cases of disputation.

*(2) Expert judgement/indicator analysis*

The team assesses that the study information and student counselling is adequate. It is impossible to anticipate all of the difficulties and needs students may experience, but the general breadth and availability of counselling resources is appropriate.

### *Recommendations for this evaluation area:*

1) The team recommends the reintroduction of entrance examinations for applicants with undergraduate backgrounds outside of the humanities.
2) The team strongly recommends the promotion and encouragement of mobility exchanges for students, and to investigate the promotion of incoming mobility visits by students of other institutions.
3) The team recommends that the program management and staff attempt to utilize the available counselling services to attempt to intervene in cases when students may indicate a desire to withdraw or terminate studies. The team highly commends the SPC for their efforts, beginning in 2018, to address this attrition.

### 3.4. STUDYING, STUDENT PERFORMANCE AND GRADUATE EMPLOYMENT

*Studying, student performance and graduate employment shall be evaluated according to the following indicators:*

- *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*

According to the SER (p. 33), in the second-cycle study program, independent and classroom work, seminars at the museums, archives, and other cultural institutions or participation in research and cultural events are the major forms of studying. Seminar is the dominant form of classroom work. During the seminars, in collaboration with each other and the lecturer, students analyze and interpret theoretical, scholarly, critical, historiographic, documentary, literary and other artistic texts, raise and explore problematic questions, discuss, conduct analyses of literary, artistic, and cultural phenomena and present them to their peers, write reviews or short term papers, thus building the necessary skills of practical analysis and spoken and written discourse. If needed, the lectures and seminars take place on the MS Teams platform, where the students can collaborate in groups or interpersonally. The lecturers provide students with the study material and assignments on the VLE Moodle.

Students' learning outcomes are assessed throughout the semester and during the exam session. The main form of work, seminar, enables a lecturer to observe each student's performance and give feedback, assess his or her individual abilities and progress and, depending on student's needs, adjust the methods applied in the seminars and lectures and their content within the framework of the course unit (module) description. The assessment for many subjects (modules) is cumulative, which facilitates constant monitoring of a student's progress.

The University provides necessary support to students (including academic counseling, vocational counseling, career orientation, and so on) and lecturers (training, counseling, discussions, sand haring good practice), promotes initiatives for the internationalization of studies (teaching visits, training, visiting lecturers, student Erasmus exchange program), and ensures the necessary learning conditions (suitable rooms, equipment, information resources, and so on).

The graduates can continue their studies in a third-cycle (doctoral) program in the area of humanities (4 (four) graduates out of twenty-three (23) of the academic year 2018-2020 in the field of SPs, pursue a doctoral degree in literary studies at the University or in a joint program run by the University and the Institute of Lithuanian Literature and Folklore).

*(2)    Expert judgement/indicator analysis*

The teaching and learning process that enables to take into account the needs of the students and empower them to achieve the intended learning outcomes is flexible, orientated towards active learning methods and students competences, especially their academic interests, is adequate (very good).

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

   *(1)    Factual situation*

The University has an effective procedure to personalize the study process in order to suit the special needs of the students with disabilities. Such students can contact the coordinator of disability affairs, who, having clarified their special needs, prepares a plan for individual studies (listing specific ways of personalized studies in relation to the area of the study process, such as study environment, lectures and other contact learning, assessment of learning outcomes, and so on), and ensures its implementation. The coordinator also advises the students with special needs on their other issues (the students with special needs can also use all consulting services available to all University students). The approved plan is sent to all directly concerned staff (lecturers, administrators, and others). To assess the learning outcomes of the students with special needs (who have vision, hearing, mobility impairment or other disability), lecturers use flexible forms of assessment, adjusting to the abilities of such students (for example, enlarging the font in the examination papers, expanding the time given for the exam assignment, adjusting the setting of the assessment exercise: ensuring sufficient lighting in the exam room, its accessibility, and so on). Information about support for the students with disabilities is available on the University's website.

During the period under the evaluation, there were no students with disabilities or special needs in the literary studies programs.

The students coming from socially vulnerable groups receive state scholarships from the State Study Foundation in accordance with the procedures adopted by the Government of the Republic of Lithuania.

In the three-year period under the evaluation, eight (8) students received state social scholarship (out of which three (3) received it for two semesters); one (1) student received a University single-payment social scholarship; two (2) students received financial aid for disabled persons, and twenty-five (25) students received incentive scholarships, of which twelve (12) students received it for more than one semester. Students who are not funded by the state have the opportunity to reduce their study fees in the three-year period under the evaluation. All students in the LLCW SP were state-funded, thus there was no need for exemption.

*(2)    Expert judgement/indicator analysis*

The University has an effective procedure for personalized study process to suit the special needs of the students with disabilities; information about the support for students with disabilities is available on University's website. The students who come from socially vulnerable groups receive state scholarships from the State Study Foundation in accordance with the procedures adopted by the Government of the Republic of Lithuania. The conditions ensuring access to study for socially vulnerable groups and students with special needs in VU are adequate.

- *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*

Students' progress is monitored on the level of course unit (module), cohort, and study program. On the level of course unit (module), the lecturer looks into the progress of students and their feedback throughout the semester, assesses students' achievements at the end of the semester, and, if necessary, improves the methods of study and (or) assessment. On the level of cohort, students' progress is monitored by the Study Department. Student Services and Career Department monitor students' drop-out levels and implements an action plan for drop-out prevention, which includes monitoring students' achievements when necessary. At the level of the study program, students' progress monitoring is conducted by the SPC. Student representatives are also involved in the work of SPC. In case of a need for direct feedback from all students, the SPC representatives organize meetings with the students to discuss the process of studies. At the end of the semester and the exam session, students are asked to provide their feedback on course units (modules) and the SP in anonymous surveys. In 2018, the newly appointed SPC for literary studies at FPhil identified a large drop-out (60%), as many students failed to complete their master's thesis on time. To improve the situation, the SPC decided to create more conducive and motivating conditions for master's thesis writing at the level of the program. It also included the seminar on scholarly research into the SPs plans, where the students are required to define a preliminary topic of their thesis and find a supervisor in the second semester. To create more suitable conditions for employed students, from 2018 onwards, the FPhil adheres to the general rule to adjust the schedule of second-cycle studies to the needs of employed students. Therefore the lectures and seminars of the course units (modules) of the field SPs are taught in the afternoon.

*(2)    Expert judgement/indicator analysis*

The systematic nature of the monitoring of student study progress and feedback to students to promote self-assessment and subsequent planning of study progress orientated to individual students needs is adequate.

- *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*

The lecturer of a course unit (module) provides the feedback to students. The lecturer introduces students to the forms, methods, and criteria of evaluation at the beginning of each semester and, in the course of the semester, offers group and individual consultations to discuss students' progress and give recommendations on improving the results. The teaching

staff of the SPs provide feedback on final evaluations by discussing the exam results with the students individually or in a group.

When writing their final master's thesis, the students work individually, are consulted by the supervisor of their project, other consultants, also the lecturer of the seminar on scholarly research. Each student who has submitted a final thesis is appointed a reviewer, who reviews the work, comments on the strengths and weaknesses of the work, and gives questions to the author, presenting the review to the student and the thesis defense committee in writing.
The SPC discuss students' views, expressed formally and informally, on the study process during the regular meetings. The decisions and questions are communicated to the students in writing and (or) orally.

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

The feedback provided to the students in the course of the studies to promote self-assessment and subsequent planning of study progress is clear, personalized, and adequate.

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

### *(1) Factual situation*

The University uses the tools of the Career Tracking Information System (CTIS) karjera.lt, which enables the organization of survey questionnaires for employers about their demand for the general competences of graduates, collect data on graduates' employability, and conduct surveys of both employers' and graduates' opinions. As a member of the FPhil, SPC has included a few social partners, from a publishing house to a museum.

The graduates of the SPs work in the fields of education, culture, culture communication, public relations, advertising, and marketing. According to the CTIS data, in 2017, two (2) male and 80% (twelve (12) graduates out of fifteen (15)) of female graduates were employed and (or) studied one year after graduation. On the day of graduation, 52% (nine (9) out of seventeen (17)) of all graduates were employed; two thirds of graduates (eight (8) out of twelve (12)) were employed one year after graduation. The graduates were employed in the following roles: as primary, lower secondary, and upper secondary education teachers (4); as teachers of the students with special needs (1), as policy and administration specialists (2), as secretaries (2), as public relations specialists (1), and as private service providers (3).

All graduates of 2018 were working one year after graduation. On the day of graduation, almost half (3 out of 7) of the graduates were employed. In 2019, the graduates were employed in the following roles: as librarians and other information specialists (1), as creative employees and performers (1), as teaching specialists (4), as civil servants (1), as advertisement and marketing specialists (2), as public relations specialists (1), and as heads of companies, institutions, and organizations (1).

A high number of graduates are successfully employed in the areas where there is need for the competences acquired in the field studies.

*(2)    Expert judgement/indicator analysis*

The employability of the graduates and graduate career tracking in the study field are good; more social partners should be invited to the FPhil SPC.

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

*(1)    Factual situation*

The main principles of academic integrity, tolerance, and non-discrimination are defined in the University Statute, the University's Code of Academic Ethics, its Diversity and Equal Opportunities Strategy, and other documents. Cases of breach of academic integrity, tolerance and non-discrimination are handled under the Regulations of the Central Academic Ethics Committee of Vilnius University and the Regulations of the Academic Ethics Committee of the Core Academic Units of Vilnius University.

In the last three years, neither FPhil's nor KNF's AEC have received information about breaches of the principles of academic integrity, tolerance, and non-discrimination related to Master's programs in literary studies.

*(2)    Expert judgement/indicator analysis*

The implementation of policies to ensure academic integrity, tolerance, and non-discrimination is adequate.

- *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 students who disagree with the exam procedure and (or) the evaluation of an exam or pass/fail evaluation have the right to file an appeal to the Exam Appeal Commission of their CAU, the Dispute Resolution Commission. FPhil DRC received two (2) student appeals regarding the evaluation methods and the evaluation for a course unit (module). Both decisions sided with the lecturers' evaluations.

*(2)    Expert judgement/indicator analysis*

The effectiveness of the application of procedures for the submission and examination of appeals and complaints regarding the study process within the field studies meets all the necessary legal requirements, is adequate.

### Recommendations for this evaluation area:

The team recommends that more social partners should be invited to the FPhil SPC.

## 3.5. TEACHING STAFF

### Study field teaching shall be evaluated in accordance with the following indicators:

- *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*

According to the SER, in the period under evaluation a total of 37 members of teaching staff taught in the SPs, of which 22 are permanently employed at the University (5 professors, 14 associate professors and 3 assistants); they account for more than two thirds of all the staff teaching the course units of the study field. In addition to the teaching staff permanently employed at the University, 8 other literary scholars (5 associate professors, 1 assistant, 1 junior assistant and 1 lecturer), employed at the University for less than half of position, teach in the SPs. Certain specific matters, related to cultural, anthropological, and intermedial studies included in the programs are taught by 7 specialists in other fields: lecturers in philosophy, anthropology, and philology by language working at the University, and employees of other institutions (specialists in art research). Since the spring 2020 (after the renewal of the LLCW SP), 6 practitioners (poets, writers, translators, literary critics) teach course units of practical creative writing. (SER 40-41). The student-teaching staff ratio is highly beneficial to students: statistically, there are about 2 students per member of the teaching staff; it allows an understanding of the needs of each individual student and can be seen as satisfactory from this point of view.

The Appendix 5 (Permanent teaching staff (at least part time and at least 3 years in the University) of the field of literary studies) lists permanent teaching staff and teaching the course units (modules) of the study field, indicating their pedagogical and/or research degree, pedagogical experience, areas of research interest (listing the 3 most significant works accomplished in the last 5 years), practical work experience in the field of the course unit taught, the list course units taught and their workload in the field SPs.

As the SER states, some of the teaching staff have a research degree and/or teaching experience acquired in foreign universities (Lund University, University of York, St. Andrews University, University of Warsaw, etc.).

Teaching staff of the SPs is employed at the University in accordance with the *Regulations for Organising Open Competitions for Teaching and Research (Artistic) Staff of Vilnius University and Their Certification* (Vilnius University Senate Resolution of 20 November 2018 No. S-2018-12-4). Their research and pedagogical qualifications are subjected to certification carried out every five years. According to the Regulations, teachers are assessed and re/appointed on the ground of various criteria. These include scientific achievements and their visibility (number of research articles published, participation in conferences, conducted research etc.). Other criteria are the lecturing, preparation of methodological material, participation in the process of doctoral studies, supervision of students' research, and organizational and other scholarly work. Student feedback on the teaching is also considered.

As explained in the response to pre-visit questions, the ratio between teaching and research is defined by the *VU Teachers workload accounting regulation* : all teaching staff employed on a full-time contract with a research constituent in their workload have to do the same number of teaching hours – 288 (+/-32) per year. Lecturers have 416 (+/-32) hours per year, but they are not expected to do research. The purpose of such rules is to ensure the achievement of strategic objectives by giving all staff equal opportunities for research and teaching.

*The research qualifications of the teaching staff is presented supra, in the part : 3.2. LINKS BETWEEN SCIENCE (ART) AND STUDY ACTIVITIES.*

*(2)    Expert judgement/indicator analysis*

The data given in the SER, the Appendix and answers to pre-visit questions allows the team to conclude that the number, the research qualifications and pedagogical experience of the teaching staff of the SPs meet the requirements set in legislation and internal documents of the University. Also their workload corresponds to the rules and policy adopted at the University, which was confirmed during the meetings with Senior administration and the teaching staff. This allows the program to ensure high-quality teaching and achieve the learning outcomes.

Certain natural turnover of the teaching staff (retirement; promotion; arrival of young teachers) has been observable in recent years. The distribution of the average number of years of professional experience (21-30 years for 9 people; 6 in the tranche of 10-20 years and 6 over 30 years) implies a certain stability of the staff which ensure teaching quality.

The matters included in the SPs are taught by professors and associate professors with 10 and more years of pedagogical experience, and all assistants and lecturers and some practitioners teaching creative writing have a research degree. Young specialists involved in the SPs bring international experience of research and pedagogical work which certainly contribute to general level of the quality of lectures delivered in the SPs, as does the diversity of the overall teaching staff in terms of their professional qualifications and the diverse experience in various areas of professional and pedagogical work.

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

*(1)   Factual situation*

According to the SER (p. 45-46), the VU academics improve their research and pedagogical competences by participating in exchange and various seminars and trainings organized by the University and CAU. These include in-service training courses, monitoring visits, international cooperation visits, teaching visits and staff study visits to foreign universities and non-university institutions within the programs such as ERASMUS+, NORDPLIUS, ISEP. The staff teaching in SPs mostly use the opportunities of the Mobility for Learning program of the Erasmus+ exchange, going to partner universities for short training stays, usually of 7 days. The data given in the Table 13. MOBILITY SUMMARY OF THE TEACHING STAFF IN THE FIELD OF LITERARY STUDIES (SER. p. 45) show seven visits in 2017 –2018, nine in 2018–2019 and ten in 2019–2020; every year only one assistant took advantage of this opportunity to deepen his teaching competences, used primarily by associate professors.

The SER (p. 45) mentions also project-based activities financed from the EU funds distributed by the Research Council of Lithuania or other external institutions financing research and other activities, which also provide opportunities for exchange visits. However there is not information about the way they are really used by the teaching staff of the SPs. According to the SER, the administration of the CAUs running the field SPs encourage such exchange, provide the organizational assistance, allow for adjusting the schedule of work with students, assign business trips, and provide a system for the payment of salaries during internship, but finally, the mobility of academics through exchange programs and projects depends on personal initiative.

*(2)   Expert judgement/indicator analysis*

Although the SER presents in several places the advantages and benefits of academic mobility, internal and international, although it also shows different forms of help or support offered by VU administration, the evidence of the real use of existing opportunities is lacking. The only data (number of members of the teaching staff using ERASMUS+ program for a visit in a foreign university; that of foreign academics visiting the SPs) and

information given during the meetings with the Senior administration lead to the conclusion that the existing possibilities are not fully used.

This observation is consistent with the remark given in the point 5.3. Strengths, weaknesses and aspects for improvement of the evaluated area, concluding this part of the SER. It's authors indicate, as one of *Aspects for improvement of the evaluated area,* that "The international mobility of the teaching staff should be stepped up, making better use of the wide range of exchanges available, such as Erasmus+ programs."

● *Evaluation of the conditions to improve the competences of the teaching staff.*

*(1)    Factual situation*

The University's academics can improve their competences by participating in various seminars and trainings organized by the University and CAU. According to the SER (p. 46-47), in 2017-2019, they could improve their pedagogical competences in 16 different training programs lasting from 3 to 40 hours each, such as "Active Learning Methods", "Student Work in Groups", "Supervision of Research Papers", "Communication Skills", "Integration of Information Communication Technologies in the Teaching Process", "Application of Blended Learning in University Studies". Five training workshops on innovative teaching-and-learning methods were led by guest lecturers from foreign universities. In 2019–2020, the lecturers of the SPs attended 40 hours of pedagogical and professional qualification improvement seminars and trainings organised by the University, their CAU or other institutions; in 2018, it amounted to a total of 6 hours, in 2017 to a total of 75 hours. The teaching staff could also improve their language skills (English and Italian, 180 hours per year). They could also participate in training and consultations intended to deepen the skills of using the VLE Moodle and MS Teams more actively. Especially in spring 2020, when due to the Covid-19 pandemic using distance learning became the main form of teaching, lecturers of SPs participated in online trainings on these tools and shared experiences in the designated MS Teams environments. In preparation for the autumn semester of 2020, in view of running the studies under the conditions of a pandemic, sessions of mutual assistance were arranged by the teaching staff in September.

As for the research competences: SPs' lecturers deepen them mainly by participating in national and international conferences. All 22 permanent members of the teaching staff give at least one presentation per year. The university has different programs and funds (University's fund, CAU's fund, strategic fund for internationalization of studies etc.) allocated to the financial support of participation in the conferences or other scientific events (as a speaker or participant). There is also the possibility of taking a sabbatical, once in five years, according to legal regulations and on the approval of the CAU Board. The FPhil are currently working on improving the procedure to facilitate better use of this opportunity, important for individual research.

The reform of the University that has been under way through the period under evaluation intensified internal exchange between researchers. In 2018–2019, FPhil organized internal and special seminars and lectures; due to them, lecturers in SPs acquired a more thorough knowledge of the research of their colleagues working in their field and related subject areas, as well as their work and teaching methods.

*(2)    Expert judgement/indicator analysis*

The data given in the SER show that the HEI institution develops various forms of helping teaching staff to develop or improve pedagogical and research competences. As can be seen in point 5.3., *Strengths, weaknesses and aspects for improvement of the evaluated area*, concluding this part of the SER, seminars of the CAU Institutes, departments, and centers are held at least once a month, and informal cooperation of the teaching staff has become more active. It seems to be a response to the recommendations of previous evaluation: " To organize more internal seminars where teaching staff share research knowledge."

Targeted trainings and seminars on technological and information resources of the University and the CAUs, especially in view of their constant update and expansion, are also offered. As stated during the meeting devoted to study facilities (by IT administrator at FPhil), after some reluctance, the trainings were very popular and attended by many participants.

Conditions to improve the competences of the teaching staff can be seen as a strong element of the SPs.

## Recommendations for this evaluation area:

The team would strongly recommend reinforcing mobility for teachers. The potential of the different Erasmus programs is not fully exploited and more free time should be given for teachers to go abroad.

### 3.6. LEARNING FACILITIES AND RESOURCES

*Study field learning facilities and resources should be evaluated according to the following criteria:*

- *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 SPs in the study field take place in historical buildings (both FPhil and KNF). According to the SER, the five buildings of FPhil have 79 lecture rooms, 8 of them are computer classrooms providing 8-24 workstations each. The majority equipped with the

necessary presentation equipment; the 5 buildings of KNF have 30 lecture rooms, 5 of them– computer classrooms providing workstations for 15-30 students each. The premises of the SPs are equipped with widescreen TV-computers, projectors, and therefore enable lecturers to use various media and online resources.

Regarding people with special needs, the KNF is equipped with a mobile stair climber for transporting wheelchairs, a set of adjustable furniture; the library is provides a Braille printer, special software for conveying information using voice function; for visually impaired users the KNF library has magnifying software. FPhil is equipped with the lift for wheelchair transportation, a mobile copier and a sanitary unit, also height and angle adjustable tables. The University Central Library premises are also equipped with 4 height-adjustable desks and 3 ergonomic chairs, a wheelchair lift in order to access reading rooms. According to the SER, in the period under evaluation, there were no students with special needs.

Each core academic unit has access to units of the University Library. The students and lecturers of the SPs are able to access the collections of resources needed for the studies of the field; if the required literature is not available in the library, the library orders necessary items for purchase. In 2013, a new Scientific Communication and Information Centre (SCIC) was built and since has proved to be convenient for the students studying in Vilnius. SCIC provides access to 34 individual study rooms, and the spaces of the SCIC are open 24/7. In 2015, KNF library was opened and currently there is a total of 18 workspaces (12 of which are computerized). Since 2019, the virtual learning environment was updated and connected to VUSIS and proved to be a useful step towards unifying and improving the quality of the study process. As it is mentioned in the SER, students and staff of the SPs have access to the unified study system VUSIS which is used for the purpose of study administration (including monitoring the study progress by the SP administrators, SPC chairs and the Study Department), as well as *Moodle* and *MS Teams* software which create all the necessary conditions for individual, virtual and distance learning.

It is difficult to separate the direct financial support of the program from the broader investments in infrastructure, library resources, online databases, etc.; yet it is the team's opinion that adequate logistical, informational, and resource support is being provided for the effective delivery of the program.

*(2) Expert judgement/indicator analysis*

The team agrees that the physical, informational and financial resources are suitable and very good.

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

*(1) Factual situation*

According to the SER, since the previous evaluation of the SPs, the University started organising more trainings (both live and distance) for the teaching staff on using the virtual learning environments and other ITC systems. This proves to be useful during the times of quarantine when the number of VLE users has significantly increased.

Although the team was unfortunately unable to visit the physical premises of the institution—because of the COVID-19 pandemic—it was a repeated comment in the various discussions (senior management; teaching staff; students; infrastructure and facilities staff: all 8.12.2020) that appropriate and modern teaching and learning conditions exist for this program. The team believes this to be accurate, on the principle of multiple attestation from the variety of perspective solicited.

*(2)   Expert judgement/indicator analysis*

The team assesses this category to be very good.

The team notes that during the discussion with the learning facilities' representatives, it was mentioned that the need of digital resources has increased even more, even though it was the dominant way to access information. All of the necessary documents are currently in process of being digitalised.

### *Recommendations for this evaluation area:*

1)  The team recommends that the library and digital resource specialists maintain close collaboration with the teaching staff of the program for suggestions about acquisitions and database subscriptions, as Literary Studies rely heavily upon original texts and critical articles, many of which are difficult to obtain outside of research databases. The team notes that this cooperation already exists; the team merely wishes to reinforce the value of that collaboration between librarians, information specialists, teaching staff, and students.
2)  The team commends the university's commitment to investing in specific technologies as resources needed by those with restricted mobility, visual impairments, or hearing impairments.

## 3.7. STUDY QUALITY MANAGEMENT AND PUBLICITY

### *Study quality management and publicity shall be evaluated according to the following indicators:*

●  *Evaluation of the effectiveness of the internal quality assurance system of the studies.*

*(1)   Factual situation*

The internal quality assurance systems of Vilnius University are governed by, among other documents, the Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area, and the Regulations of the Study Programme Committee of Vilnius

University. There is broad, university-wide quality assurance oversight, incorporating matters such as program quality, student achievement and assessment monitoring, staff recognition and promotion, program and course delivery, examination policy, etc.

By university authorization, much of the program-specific quality assurance is devolved down to the SPCs (whose membership includes teaching staff representatives, social partners, and student representation). This body reports to the Faculty Board, and is required by VU regulation to meet at least once per term; in practise, the SPC meets more frequently. It has a wide quality assurance portfolio, including: student admissions; congruence of the program with comparable international programs; assessing proposed changes or modifications of the program; approval of mentors for proposed thesis work and the relevance of the proposed topic; teaching staff competences; student survey results; and other similar indicia. (SER, p. 54)

It may be noted with commendation that the quality assurance mechanisms involved in the Literary Studies program appear practical and effective. Notably—as previously mentioned in this report—the SPC observed an excessively high student attrition rate, and began taking steps to ameliorate this problem. This is only one incident, yet it demonstrates the quality assurance policies in the program are active, and are focused upon addressing genuine problems.

In discussion with the various university representatives (8.12.2020), the team heard repeatedly that the basic quality assurance mechanisms are implemented, understood by staff and students, and are effective in practise. The team believes this to be accurate.

*(2)   Expert judgement/indicator analysis*

The team assesses that the quality assurance and quality maintenance mechanisms of the program are adequate.

- *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*

Students and stakeholders (social partners) are involved in the SPC. The student representative is empowered and required to raise any student complaints, comments, or other concerns that are properly the responsibility of the SPC. The social partners, in turn, also take an active role in internal quality assurance through their participation in thesis defense commissions.

The students are surveyed twice per year (at the end of each semester) anonymously for their opinions, suggestions, comments, and complaints about their courses, assessment

methods, and course delivery. The surveys cover each course offered in the term being assessed. The results of these surveys are provided to the relevant instructor, and to the chair of the SPC. This enables the individual instructor to implement changes and to address weaknesses in her or his delivery or assessment; it additionally permits the SPC to draw more general conclusions about program-wide student satisfaction or dissatisfaction.

In conversation with the team (8.12.2020), both teachers and students verified that these surveys are indeed implemented; that they are valued by both students and teachers; and that both groups are convinced of the anonymous character of the information and data provided to the instructors.

The team was, however, somewhat concerned by the inability to detect or identify clear student participation in the creation and formulation of the SER. It is the opinion of the team that student participation in the SER was not as extensive as it could usefully have been, and the team recommends a clearer, formally identified, element of student contribution to future versions of the program SER.

(2)  *Expert judgement/indicator analysis*

The team assesses that the student and stakeholder involvement in quality assurance is adequate.

The team commends the implementation and ubiquity of the policy of anonymous student surveys.

The team recommends that a more transparent, formally-identified role be established for student contributions to future program SERs.

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

*(1)  Factual situation*

As noted above, one of the main quality assurance mechanisms of the program lies in the student surveys. The results of these surveys are distributed to the teacher herself or himself, and to the Chair of the SPC, but are not formally published (quite rightly).

The general quality assurance mechanisms, however, appear regularized, widely-implemented, institutionally effective, and commonly understood. It was the opinion of both students and teaching staff that the basic survey system is useful and simple to implement. The team also understands that these results are partially included in staff evaluation and promotional consideration. The SER also reports high general student satisfaction with the Literary Studies program elements, such as being encouraged to express opinions, developing critical thinking, and improving individual research and problem-solving skills.

The team notes that the SER also reports a series of student complaints elicited through these surveys. Among the complaints received were: concerns about excessive reading loads; discontent with being told to study more; inflexible time scheduling (particularly in relation to those with full-time employment); and a desire to see more modern teaching methodologies. (SER, p. 57) The team believes that this openness indicates not a weak program, but a healthy one. Many of the complaints listed are common in other institutions around the world, but it is heartening to see the program SER report them accurately. (It should be noted, however, that what are identified as "modern teaching methods" are slide presentations, which are already widely required throughout higher education; it would be well to train instructors in the utilization of slide presentations, as students themselves have identified this as a weakness).

It should also be noted, with commendation, that the teaching staff noted that surveys are indeed helpful, and have provided valuable insight into the student experience in the classes taught by those staff members.

*(2)    Expert judgement/indicator analysis*

The team assesses that the collection, use, and publication of information on the studies, their evaluation, and improvement outcomes are adequate.

- *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*

As multiply noted above, the students are surveyed anonymously twice per year, to provide their comments, suggestions, and criticisms about the courses they have just taken. By both teacher and student testimony, this process is taken seriously, and has produced valuable advice and insight to the academic staff.

One apparent difficulty that seems to remain unresolved is scheduling adaptability. It is the understanding of the team that schedule conflicts represent a significant source of student stress and difficulty, given their obligations to family or employers. This may be ultimately unresolvable in each individual case, yet the general student profile for this program is of a person who likely has professional or familial obligations (or both).

It is unclear to the team what regular mechanisms are in place to elicit alumni comment and contribution. Alumni are an extremely valuable resource, given their experience of the program, and their (usually recent) experience in utilizing this program to obtain employment. Alumni may usefully serve as guest lecturers; curriculum advisors; external advisors; and potentially internship hosts. It was the impression of the team, however, that most program contact with alumni is informal and based upon interpersonal relations. It

might be advisable to formalize—perhaps as rarely as once per year, an alumni survey, to gather impressions from graduates about job skills development; program effectiveness; potential program changes or developments; and other related areas regarding program delivery.

*(2)    Expert judgement/indicator analysis*

The team assesses that the evaluation of field student opinions regarding quality assurance is adequate.

As noted, the team believes alumni might be more usefully included, on a formal basis.

### *Recommendations for this evaluation area:*

1) The team recommends a clearer, more formally structured role for students in creating future program SERs.
2) The team recommends that more effective engagement with program alumni be pursued, particularly in an advisory capacity, regarding program development, labor market conditions, internship opportunities, and changes to the curriculum.

# IV. EXAMPLES OF EXCELLENCE

Core definition: Excellence means exhibiting characteristics that are very good and, implicitly, not achievable by all.

Explanatory context Excellence enshrines one meaning of quality: a traditional view that associates quality with the exceptional.

- The team highly commends the resources, resource management, and library services, which seem to provide substantial assistance to the staff and students of the program. Additionally, the team wishes to commend these specialists for their evident commitment to accommodating students with disabilities (limited mobility, visual impairments, hearing impairments, etc.).

- The team notes that the M.A. thesis process seems highly effective, with strong guidance for the student, a reasonable public defence opportunity, and a mixture of internal and external examiners on the evaluation/defence committee. The team believes that a student who successfully defends her or his thesis has demonstrated a research ability and autonomy appropriate to the expectations of the second-cycle of studies.

  - The team observes and commends the apparent emphasis on encouraging students to explore scholarly opportunities outside of the classroom; it is the team's understanding that students are actively encouraged and supported to publish their work in peer-reviewed journals; participate in workshops and seminars; present papers in academic conferences; and similar other associated opportunities. This is laudable, and should continue.

# V. RECOMMENDATIONS*

1. Improve and Increase Multilingualism and Foreign Language Utilization in the Programs

The team would strongly recommend reconsidering a more systematic and planned use of foreign languages in the delivered teaching, using existing abilities and competences of the teaching staff.

2. Objectively Assess the Effectiveness of the Tripartite Structure of the Program

The team believes that the three available SPs are academically and intellectually valuable; yet the team also suggests that, in a small program, three SPs may be too many, for practical and logistical reasons. Maintaining three foci places burdens on teaching staff; diffuses student enrolments; and may require potential students to wait an academic year before enrolling in the SP of her or his choice. The team suggests that one program, carefully uniting all three SPs, may be more sustainable in the long-term, and would usefully congregate courses of excellence from all three SPs. This is by no means a requirement, yet it is the recommendation of the team that the possibility be considered by program managers and instructors.

3. Clarify Professional Competencies Gained During the Studies

The team is persuaded that strong, market-ready skills are built by the program, yet it is the opinion of the team that more effective harmonization between learning outcomes, assessment methods, and practical skills could, and should, be achieved.

4. Increase both Outgoing and Incoming Student Mobility

The team understands that students of the Literary Studies program may lack the ability to participate in mobility exchanges, given their employment responsibilities or obligations to their families. Nonetheless, the team strongly urges the program management and academic staff to promote both incoming and outgoing mobility, as internationalization (including study abroad) is one of the main pillars of European higher education.

5. Increase Practical Engagement with Alumni and Other Social Partners

The team believes that alumni and other stakeholders (employers, internship hosts, etc.) could be used more extensively and effectively in the delivery of these SPs.

*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

Main positive and negative quality aspects of each study field evaluation area at Vilnius University higher education institution.

The Literary Studies program of Vilnius University has a unique structure, split among three SPs: "Intermedial Studies of Literature"; "Literary Anthropology and Culture"; and "Lithuanian Literature and Culture." Despite their different emphases, they all aim to produce students capable of independent research and professional competence in fields related to literature, multimedia, criticism and reviewing, and general Lithuanian culture. Although the program sizes are relatively small, the intended employment positions for graduates are those with high potential to influence the public, among which would be: writing, reviewing, teaching, researching, and cultural criticism (either in traditional print formats, or through developing technological media).

The program recently restructured and refocused itself, after a year of abeyance (2018); the program seems to have recovered from this perilous moment, and genuinely reestablished itself as a vital and sustainable program. As noted internally in this report, the team urges an ongoing consideration of whether the tripartite structure of the program truly maximizes student opportunity, yet the team commends the management and staff of the SPs for their ongoing commitment to the program, and their reconsideration of the program after the disappointment of 2018.

The team assesses that the three SPs represent responsible and reasonable learning opportunities, and that students of capability and motivation would prosper and develop through participation in the program. The education thus obtained, the team believes, would be comparable with that expected at any similar program in a top-tier European university.

The team would like to recognize and thank the various VU representatives—from program managers, the SER team, academics, facilities representatives, students, and stakeholders—for their contributions to our understanding of their program. The team was unfortunately unable to visit the institution personally (given pandemic conditions), yet the assistance, clarity, and forthrightness of the institutional collocutors greatly assisted our comprehension of the program, its delivery, and its intentions.

**Expert panel signatures:**

1. **Prof. dr. Andrew Goodspeed (team leader)** *academic,*

2. **Prof. dr. Elżbieta Anna Skibińska-Cieńska,** *academic,*

3. **Prof. dr. Kai Mikkonen,** *academic,*

4. **Ms. Aušra Martišiūtė-Linartienė,** *representative of social partners'*

5. **Ms. Sonata Bortelytė,** *students' representative.*