SKVC

CENTRE FOR QUALITY ASSESSMENT IN HIGHER EDUCATION

––––––––––––––––––––––––––––

EVALUATION REPORT

STUDY FIELD

HISTORY

at Vilnius University

Review team:

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

2. **Prof. dr. Jörg Hackmann,** *academic;*

3. **Assoc Prof. Peter D'Sena,** *academic;*

4. **Mrs. Giedrė Švėgždaitė-Randienė,** *representative of social partners*;

5. **Ms. Maria-Giovanna Lotito,** *students' representative.*

Evaluation coordinator – *Mr Domantas Markevičius*

Report language – English

Vilnius
2021

Study Field Data

Title of the study programme	History	History
State code	6121NX030	6211NX027
Type of studies	University studies	University studies
Cycle of studies	First cycle	Second cycle
Mode of study and duration (in years)	Full-time studies (4 years)	Full-time studies (2 years)
Credit volume	240	120
Qualification degree and (or) professional qualification	Bachelor's degree in Humanities	Master's degree in Humanities
Language of instruction	Lithuanian	Lithuanian
Minimum education required	Secondary	
Registration date of the study programme	30/03/2012	19/05/1997

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

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

The study field and cycle **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 assigned according to the Experts Selection Procedure (hereinafter referred to as the Procedure) as approved by the Director of Centre for Quality Assessment in Higher Education on 31 December 2019 Order No. V-149. The Review Visit to the HEI was conducted by the team on 3 December 2020. Due to the coronavirus pandemic, the Review Visit was conducted online using video conferencing tools (MS Teams).

---

1. **Prof. dr. Jolanta Choińska-Mika (team leader),** *Professor at the Institute of History, University of Warsaw, Poland.*
2. **Prof. dr. Jörg Hackmann,** *Professor at the Department of History, University of Szczecin (Poland) and Research Fellow at the Department of History, University of Greifswald (Germany).*
3. **Assoc. Prof. Peter D'Sena,** *Learning & Teaching Specialist, Office of the Vice-Chancellor at the University of Hertfordshire, The United Kingdom.*
4. **Mrs. Giedrė Švėgždaitė-Randienė**, *Director of "Ekspomūza", Lithuania.*
5. **Ms. Maria-Giovanna Lotito,** *student of University of Teramo, 2nd cycle study programme in Public Administration.*

1.3. GENERAL

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

No.	Name of the document
1.	Virtual presentation (slides) of learning facilities and resources (incl. an additional information on computer classrooms) of the Faculty of History of Vilnius University.
2.	Course descriptors (syllabi) of the major history field subjects of the first and second cycles.
3.	Additional information about the teaching staff's professional competences development system at Vilnius University.
4.	Additional information about the student survey system at Vilnius University, and the summary of survey results summary (semester questionnaires 2017-2020; distance learning during the pandemic questionnaire 2020; feedback questionnaires of several history subjects).

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

Vilnius University was established first as a Jesuit College in 1579 and is the oldest and largest higher education institution in Lithuania. Studies of history at Vilnius University date back to 1783 when the first Department of History was formed. Today, the Faculty of History consists of four departments (Archaeology, Ancient and Medieval History, Modern History, and Theory of History and History of Culture) and four research centres (Bioarcheology Research Centre, Research Group of the Lithuanian Statutes and Metrics, Centre for Stateless Cultures, Centre for Studies of the Culture and History of East European Jews). Main historical research areas of the Faculty comprise the Grand Duchy of Lithuania and the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth, regional ethnic and religious communities, Soviet studies, and studies on memory and heritage research as well as on the history of culture. The Faculty closely cooperates with the Lithuanian Institute of History as well as other research institutes nationally (as the Genocide and Resistance Research Centre of Lithuania and the Vilnius Yiddish Institute) and internationally with research institutes in Belarus and Ukraine. The unity of scientific research and studies is a principle objective of teaching history at the University of Vilnius.

II. GENERAL ASSESSMENT

History study field and *first 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	4
2.	Links between science (art) and study activities	4
3.	Student admission and support	3
4.	Studying, student performance and graduate employment	4
5.	Teaching staff	4
6.	Learning facilities and resources	5
7.	Study quality management and publicity	5
	Total:	**29**

*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.

History 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	4
2.	Links between science (art) and study activities	4
3.	Student admission and support	4
4.	Studying, student performance and graduate employment	4
5.	Teaching staff	4
6.	Learning facilities and resources	5
7.	Study quality management and publicity	5
	Total:	**30**

*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 aims, outcomes and content shall be assessed in accordance with the following indicators:

3.1.1. Evaluation of the conformity of the aims and outcomes of the field and cycle study programmes to the needs of the society and/or the labour market.

The SER states that both the first and second cycles programmes are based on needs of the society as well as on requests from the labour market for specialists with competencies on different levels in the field, from research institutions to others in the public and private sector. Students are given opportunities to develop in-depth knowledge through a variety of teaching and learning experiences that would make them appropriate for and attractive to a range of potential employers.

The aims and outcomes of the study programmes run by the Department of History are developed first comparing them to the aims and outcome benchmarks of study programmes that are operated by other national and foreign higher education institutions in the field and second by actively and consistently involving social partners, employers, and graduates of the field.

The intended competences and learning outcomes are oriented not only towards acquiring knowledge and skills connected to the specific study subjects, but also towards the development of general skills determined by the needs of the labour market. The evidence from interviews with the Faculty's social partners also strongly suggests that they are satisfied with the knowledge and skills of students from both cycles.

3.1.2. Evaluation of the conformity of the field and cycle study programme aims and outcomes with the mission, objectives of activities and strategy of the HEI.

Research and study programmes in History are in conformity with the mission and strategy of VU. The Faculty of History consists of 4 departments and 4 research centres and offers study programmes apart from history also in archaeology, anthropology and heritage conservation. The first cycle history programme attempts to comprise aspects of global history, whereas the second cycle programme concentrates on East Central Europe. The expert panel noticed that there is a strong and ambitious leadership with a coherent vision of building an academic community; both staff and students have a good sense of identity and community.

The Faculty offers an interesting, varied and engaging curriculum to the students and excellent opportunities to utilise interdisciplinary perspectives for investigating the past. Students benefit from the research and scholarly activity of their tutors through the Faculty's ability to use research-informed teaching. This research-informed approach can be seen both in the overall curriculum design, and in the research-oriented tasks set in individual modules. Departmental specialties such as the history of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania and the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth as well as history and culture of East European Jewry feature in the programme and encourage students to develop their own research skills.

From the interviews, the panel could see that students acknowledged the importance of these curricular opportunities, and also expressed strong levels of satisfaction about the teaching of the subjects as well as of developing other graduate attributes and so-called soft skills.

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

The programmes of both first and second study cycles of the field meet the legal requirements set by the Ministry of Education, Science and Sports of the Republic of Lithuania and comply with the Lithuanian Qualification Framework, corresponding with the criteria of the Framework for Qualifications of the European Higher Education Area.

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

The aims and learning outcomes and objectives as described in the SER are well defined and ambitious, they intend to provide students with high quality training. After the last evaluation the focus of the first cycle programme has been expanded towards "world and Lithuanian history." Some aspects of these aims and learning outcomes, however, appear to be still *in nuce* and need to be further developed. This refers first to global history and second to digital history. In particular, it should be clarified in a more elaborated way what is understood as "world", "global" and "European" history. In the discussion with the teaching staff, "global" occurred to refer primarily, if not exclusively, to Soviet studies and anti-communist resistance (Cuba, South Corea, Latin America). Further aspects are addressed in a special module on transnational history. All in all, however, the connection of global and Lithuanian history in the first cycle seems to be too vague and needs further explanation. (This issue does not appear in the second cycle programme with its focus on East Central Europe.)

The aims and learning outcomes of both programmes are constructed in a way which intends to provide students with high quality training. Student knowledge and understanding is assessed in a variety of ways and the panel were pleased to find evidence of formative and innovative assessment forms. The expert panel has the impression, however, that aims, learning outcomes and assessment partly need to be matched across the curriculum and to be more clearly specified in order to be properly assessed. Although the expert panel found that a variety of assessment methods is applied and staff engage in innovative pedagogy, partly on their own initiative, the SER critically states that pedagogic development currently needs more systematic coordination and acceptance among the staff. In particular, methods of assessment with a view to facilitating student progression or tracking longitudinal and holistic engagement with graduate attributes need more attention. We therefore suggest that a more coordinated approach, deploying, for example, a centralised mapping of assessments over the course of the student experience could be used to create a strategic approach using assessment *for* learning to plan for progression and spread innovative and, where relevant, 'authentic' assessments across modules.

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

The expert panel got the strong impression that the study subjects and modules ensure consistent development. In terms of subject content, the expert panel was satisfied that, given the numbers of staff in the department, students in both programmes are offered the opportunity to engage with a good chronological, geographical and methodological range of issues. Moreover, the subject matter bears a strong relationship to tutor expertise.

When appointing new staff in the future, the Faculty should take into consideration the ways in which they would give students a broader range of competences referring to methods of enquiry such as the digital humanities.

3.1.6. Evaluation of opportunities for students to personalise the structure of field study programmes according to their personal learning objectives and intended learning outcomes.

Staff and students reported that there are individual study plans - based on academic as well as or personal / domestic reasons. Students appreciate the possibility of personalizing their curriculum. With regard to subject matter, students underline that there is much space for optional courses. Some students, however, said that there is too little flexibility in adjusting study plans to individual study interests.

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

Standard of student work is good. Students reported that they can access appropriate support and guidance during the process of researching and writing their thesis.

The panel were pleased with the ways in which students had to also give a public defence of their thesis. Some of the theses (according to their titles and grades awarded) are really good examples of research work, which follow international research trends. In general, however, topics from modern history dominate as elsewhere, despite the staff's outstanding expertise on pre-modern history.

Recommendations:

- *The non-Lithuanian programme elements in the first cycle programme should be strengthened and systematically developed.*
- *Develop a coordinated approach towards pedagogic development and its acceptance among the staff.*
- *New staff appointment should also cover the field of digital history.*

3.2. LINKS BETWEEN SCIENCE (ART) AND STUDY ACTIVITIES

Links between science (art) and study activities shall be assessed in accordance with the following indicators:

3.2.1. Evaluation of the sufficiency of the science (applied science, art) activities implemented by the HEI for the field of research (art) related to the field of study.

See point 3.2.2. below.

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

The Faculty consists of an impressive number of research active practitioners who are recognised, respected and published with distinction in their fields of historical enquiry. The Faculty is acknowledging the importance of the scholarship of teaching and learning (SoTL) and its relevance for their own practice in higher education.

The claim by the SER and the Faculty members to balance research and teaching seems to be fully justified. The regional research focus on the Grand Duchy of Lithuania and the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth as well as East Central Europe is appropriate and matches the main elements of the study programmes. Latest research developments are taken into curriculum design, and this leads to research-informed teaching (including latest developments in pedagogics). In addition, there are close good contacts to external Lithuanian and European research institutes.

The expert panel underline, however, that global perspectives could be more reflected in the research activities and – in close connection to this - that the link between global and Lithuanian history in the content of studies could be more diversified. Following the recommendations of the last evaluation, "knowledge of world history" had been implemented (ANNEX 1), but the connection between global and Lithuanian history seems to be rather artificial. In particular, it could be clarified better what is understood as "global" (so far, Soviet studies and anti-communist resistance - Cuba, South Korea, Latin America - were elaborated in this direction).

In addition, the "ability to make use of the possibilities provided by information technology for collecting and processing empirical bulk data necessary for conducting a specialized historical research" mentioned in the SER for the MA programme should be better embedded into the study plan.

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

There is a very good ratio between the number of students and teaching staff (11:1) warranting close connection to scientific activities. The SER states that the majority of second cycle students are involved in various research-related activities. Furthermore, there are several project opportunities offered by VU, students are encouraged to be involved. There is also support for the learning of relevant languages other than English - e.g. Polish for the study of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania and the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth, and Yiddish / Hebrew for Jewish studies. Among students, an interest in modern history prevails (as elsewhere). The expert panel thus suggests to think carefully how to promote medieval and early modern history as relevant, interesting and engaging to students.

Recommendations:
- *Clarify and develop the research on global history in order to strengthen it in the contents of the study programmes.*

- *Develop research in digital humanities.*
- *Encourage more pre-modern and transnational studies.*

3.3. STUDENT ADMISSION AND SUPPORT

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

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

The procedures for admissions to the 1st and 2nd cycle programmes have been approved by the University and meet all rules of transparency and equity, according to the national procedures. Information about entrance requirements, application procedures, programme contents and forms of assessment is all publicly available to prospective applicants and also in English. Information is accompanied by details of the programme's aims, intended learning outcomes and modes of study and - once students are enrolled - other information such as living and studying in Lithuania. The website gives a clear overview of and support in meeting academic and procedural requirements.

Although information about the programme including learning outcomes and forms of assessment is clearly formulated, the expert panel found that there is a very high drop-out rate amounting to about 25% among first cycle students (which is higher than during the last evaluation period). This problem was rather incidentally addressed in the SER (p. 29), but the staff explained that this was a temporary problem, which has diminished since 2017. Nevertheless, the expert panel take the view that this problem, even if counter-measurements to prevent drop-out have been initiated, needs more attention and a strategic approach by the Faculty based on granular information.

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

The academic recognition of prior and foreign qualifications follows national and international regulations and recommendations. VU has a specific procedure for enrolling students with recognizing their previous formal or informal studies.

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

The University's International Relations Department coordinates all the procedures related to academic mobility. In particular, the students have the possibility to spend a period of studies outside of Lithuania according to agreement and international mobility programmes (Erasmus+, ISEP, Nordplus, ARQUS, COIMBRA and others). VU and the Faculty of History have a clearly defined and fully implemented system of credit point acknowledgement for studies at international universities. The procedures are published on the website (available in Lithuanian language) and also during the first semester of the first year by the Faculty Erasmus coordinator.

Student mobility, although it is enhanced by VU, is low, seemingly for different reasons related to personal problems, family or financial situation. Students told that they had not properly thought about mobility. Hence the University should develop a strategy for studying abroad and convince students to at least consider this. Against the background of experiences during the pandemic, forms of virtual / remote mobility could be created. As VU is now part of a European University Network, this might offer the possibility to rethink activities.

3.3.4. Assessment of the suitability, adequacy and effectiveness of the academic, financial, social, psychological and personal support provided to the students of the field.

According to the SER, all students can receive support of various kinds, and most of these services are provided anonymously. The Student Service and Career Department is responsible for tackling with administrative problems. There is a volunteer mentorship programme, which allows tutors, alumni or teaching staff to give formative as well as summative feedback to the students. In addition to the national provisions, VU has a good network for financial support. The website gives a clear overview of scholarship and financial support, also in English. In addition, student representatives also offer support and help to all the students in case of problems. During the online visit these aspects were all confirmed by students. The help given by student representatives is also remarkable; there is a good link among them and as well as between students and lecturers/professors.

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

VU has an integration week during which new students receive information about their study programmes and other information related to VU. In addition, this information can be accessed by the students through email, phone, website, social media, meetings, forums and VU Study Information System (VUSIS). VU has a good data monitoring system.

Nevertheless, drop-out rates are high (see part 3.3.1. above), and there seems to be lacking awareness to identify the reasons for drop-out and to develop a prevention strategy. The expert panel underline that the first six weeks of "introduction to the study" are crucial and recommend to collect more granular information for an additional survey and to develop a familiarity programme for new students. In addition, exit questionnaires should be introduced, which should inform the strategic approach.

Recommendations:
- *Regarding the drop-out rates among first cycle students, a more effective strategic approach for students' retention needs to be implemented, including the collection of data and preventive tools that will enable students to be well prepared for the next steps of their studies.*
- *In addition, exit questionnaires should be included, which can be analysed to inform the strategic approach.*
- *Regarding the students' mobility, VU needs to create a general strategy and a culture of students' mobility with the specific aim to invite students to consider studying abroad as a particular aspect for their academic career and an opportunity to build their own*

future. Developing forms of virtual mobility could be one option to enhance students' mobility.

3.4. STUDYING, STUDENT PERFORMANCE AND GRADUATE EMPLOYMENT

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

3.4.1. Evaluation of the teaching and learning process that enables to take into account the needs of the students and enable them to achieve the intended learning outcomes.

The programmes enable the intended outcomes. The expert panel support the idea brought forward by the students and also (indirectly) expressed in the SER (p. 32) to offer courses in foreign languages. Furthermore, the expert panel noticed some space for improvement for programme aims and learning outcomes in annex 1 that are not sufficiently clearly formulated.

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

The University has a procedure for adapting studies to individual needs with a focus on physical disabilities, and the Faculty takes care of students with special needs for instance with individualized study plans and flexible forms of assessment. The expert panel found that conditions ensure access.

3.4.3. Evaluation of the systematic nature of the monitoring of student study progress and feedback to students to promote self-assessment and subsequent planning of study progress.

Information provided by VU states that forms of formative assessment can be applied. The panel observed, however, that assessment still tends to be "exam heavy" and summative. During the interviews with students they shared their impression that formative assessments were infrequent and often informal. Importantly, what also emerged is the feeling that tutors were routinely very supportive to them during modules. Students explained that they are satisfied and mentioned a good sense of identity and community.

Given the fact that cohorts in any programme will generally comprise students with diverse learning needs and styles, the relevance of formative assessment (which can, if desired, contribute to the final, summative grade) has been highlighted in pedagogical research, as it can motivate, engage and inform this array of students about their progress. We therefore recommend that the Faculty looks to develop opportunities to adjust the imbalance between summative and formative assessment with a view to increasing the systematic flow of information to students about their progress during, rather than at the end of modules; and, at the same time, consider the ways in which formative assessment can partially contribute to the final grade and motivate increased engagement.

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

See point 3.4.3. above.

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

Representatives of social partners participate in the activities of the Council of the Faculty and the Study Programme Committee, host professional practice placements, are invited to take part in lectures or seminars. Graduates in the history study field cooperate with the Faculty through the Alumni Association or through specific initiatives. These close relationships help the Faculty to collect data about employment of graduates and to know better the needs of the social partners and the labour market.

The social partners as potential employers are in general very satisfied with the knowledge and skills of the students and the graduates.

The expert panel found that there is an impressive breadth of excellent alumni and social partners (not only from museums and archives, but also web design companies, political organizations etc.). Some of them expressed that they would also prefer more general competencies (modern foreign languages, more knowledge of social sciences).

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

Students reported about an academic integrity initiative initiated by one of the student organizations. The SER states that such exam monitoring takes place in cooperation with the lecturers. It was furthermore explained that this academic integrity initiative is fully supported by the Student Representatives' Organization and the University. The expert panel supports such cooperation.

3.4.7. Evaluation of the effectiveness of the application of procedures for the submission and examination of appeals and complaints regarding the study process within the field studies.

There is an ethical code and a strategy on diversity and equal opportunities as well as an appeal procedure. The expert panel detected no problem.

Recommendations:
- *To develop opportunities to adjust the imbalance between summative and formative assessment with a view to increasing the systematic flow of information to students about their progress during, rather than at the end of modules; consider the ways in which formative assessment can partially contribute to the final grade and motivate increased engagement.*

3.5. TEACHING STAFF

Teaching staff shall be evaluated in accordance with the following indicators:

3.5.1. Evaluation of the adequacy of the number, qualification and competence (scientific, didactic, professional) of teaching staff within a field study programme(s) at the HEI in order to achieve the learning outcomes.

The scholarly depth of the teaching staff comprising 45 members (including part-time and external lecturers) is impressive. The diverse age and experiential profile creates a very good balance. This opens the possibility to introduce a two-way-developmental mentorship as a means to cascade good practices of innovative assessment methods to both younger and more experienced colleagues.

3.5.2. Evaluation of conditions for ensuring teaching staffs' academic mobility.

The Faculty is preparing an internationalisation strategy, but the results are not fully convincing as stated in the SER and confirmed by the online visit. There is quite a huge number of incoming foreign lecturers, but as it seems only for single events. In addition, it seems that, based on the provided information, staff members only to a limited degree are publishing in other languages than Lithuanian. However, international networks that VU takes part in are very promising and must be benefited from. More international projects involving the teaching staff is recommended.

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

All staff are evaluated every five years. Staff members reported a balanced workload and possibilities of a flexible schedule allowing to combine teaching and research activities. The SER, however, states that "lecturers/professors are too passively involved in the pedagogical qualification improvement programmes offered by VU". Similar statements were repeated during the online visit. Some staff mentioned that the acquisition of pedagogic competencies is partly based on individual international stays.

There is a need for a strategic approach to address the self-proclaimed problem of engaging staff more actively in pedagogic training.

Recommendations:
- *Increase internationalization among the teaching staff.*
- *Introduce a staff mentorship initiative.*
- *Develop a strategic approach to engage staff more actively in pedagogic training.*

3.6. LEARNING FACILITIES AND RESOURCES

Learning facilities and resources shall be evaluated according to the following criteria:

3.6.1. Evaluation of the suitability and adequacy of the physical, informational and financial resources of the field studies to ensure an effective learning process.

16

The faculty location - in the center of Vilnius - is privileged. There are good and improving facilities. Auditoriums have been equipped with modern technology, also for distant learning. The faculty has its own on-site library with an expert librarian. There is a computer classroom, which is used for GIS related projects (although seemingly for other study programmes than history). Furthermore, there are special study rooms relevant for history study programmes. Offered access to online research databases seems to be above standard. Although constrained by historical building limits, premises are accessible for disabled people (with a newly installed elevator).

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

The expert panel did not identify a need for immediate upgrading, except for the need (as in almost every university) to upgrade resources for digital humanities, as it was stated by VU. The university has identified this issue and explained that it will present a concept for the integration of digital humanities shortly.

Recommendations:
- Resources for digital humanities should be increased.

3.7. STUDY QUALITY MANAGEMENT AND PUBLICITY

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

3.7.1. Evaluation of the effectiveness of the internal quality assurance system of the studies.

VU has specific procedures to implement QA on various levels from study programme committees to central university bodies. Responsibilities for programme management are clearly defined, according to national and international procedures of QA. The History Field Study Committee consists of lecturers/professors, a social partner and two students and is responsible for data analysis and monitoring.

During the online visit the stakeholders and the students have emphasized their inclusion in the review process of both history programmes.

3.7.2. Evaluation of the effectiveness of the involvement of stakeholders (students and other stakeholders) in internal quality assurance.

At the end of each semester VU conducts a centralised survey which gives students the possibility to leave anonymous feedback. Each lecturer/professor can also conduct student surveys independently, in oral or written form. In consideration of the pandemic situation, VU has adopted a specific survey related to the new didactic methods.

According to 1st cycle survey results, the number of the students filling in the questionnaire is increasing. Students confirm that the university is reacting to criticism expressed in the

surveys. In general, students underlined their general satisfaction and the possibility to express their opinions. During the online visit students mentioned a good sense of identity and community, a flexible schedule and the solution for some problems with clarifying examples.

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

The expert team was pleased to learn that VU has a closed Deming cycle (Plan–Do–Check–Act) connected to the student surveys and carries out training related to Quality Assurance also for students. During the online visit this aspect was particularly stressed by all the parties involved. The expert team have no further suggestions for improvement.

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

See point 3.7.2. above.

Recommendations:

- *There are no recommendations for this evaluation area.*

IV. RECOMMENDATIONS

1. **Curriculum**

- The non-Lithuanian programme elements in the first cycle programme should be strengthened and systematically developed.
- Clarify and develop the research on global history in order to strengthen it in the contents of the study programmes.
- Encourage more pre-modern and transnational studies and try to stimulate students' interests in them.

2. **Study process, assessments and surveys**

- Regarding the drop-out rates, a more effective strategic approach for students' retention needs to be implemented, including the collection of data and preventive tools that will enable students to be well prepared for the next steps of their studies.
- Exit questionnaires should be included, which can be analysed to inform the strategic approach.

3. **Mobility**

- Regarding the students' mobility, VU needs to create a general strategy and a culture of students' mobility with the specific aim to invite students to consider studying abroad as a particular aspect for their academic career and an opportunity to build their own future. Developing forms of virtual mobility could be an option to enhance students' mobility.
- The mobility among the teaching should also be increased. It is highly recommended to invite international scholars for longer teaching stays at VU.

4. **Teaching staff**

- Develop a coordinated approach towards pedagogic development and its acceptance among the staff.
- Introduce a staff mentorship initiative.
- New staff appointment should also cover the field of digital history and develop research on this field.
- Increase internationalization among the teaching staff.

5. **Facilities**

- Resources for digital humanities should be increased.

V. SUMMARY

The Faculty of History at Vilnius University is the leading national institution in providing studies in History. Academic staff makes major contributions to historical studies in Lithuania and beyond on various fields, most prominently the history of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania and the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth, but also on the history of East European Jewry, Soviet Studies as well as memory studies. Whereas the field of expertise is the regions of East Central Europe, attempts have been made (in the first cycle history studies), based on the previous evaluation, to expand towards global history. The expert panel acknowledge this development, but suggest developing and deepening this field, also in research activities.

The expert team noted, from the interview with the students, that they are proud of being part of the university (in the traditional understanding), that they appreciate the close contact to their teachers in small groups, as well as the many possibilities to get in contact with future work fields (in and outside of academia), and they support the maintaining of academic values by own initiatives. They also appreciate the many forms of support offered to them, including the individualizing of study plans according to personal needs. The expert panel had a very positive impression of the connections and relationships that the Faculty has developed with social partners, academic institutions, and employers, who expressed their satisfaction with the qualifications that graduates obtained during their studies. The expert team were also impressed by the facilities of the Faculty in a historic building as well as the resources provided by the University's central units.

The suggestions for improvement made in this report partly refer to general changes in academia: first, the quest for deepened internationalization and second, to develop methods and resources in the field of digital humanities. A third aspect relates to the improvement of pedagogic competencies of the staff. All three points are already addressed in the self-evaluation report and accompanying documents, the expert team supports thus the development already described by the Faculty.

The only major point of concern the expert team identified is the high drop-out rate among first cycle students and believe that measurements should be taken to identify the reasons and develop a preventive strategy that will enable students to be well prepared for the next steps of their studies.

Finally, the expert panel noticed the strong leadership in designing the self-evaluation documents and the preparation of the virtual visit, which gave a clear image of the Faculty's academic and pedagogic potential. We thus would like to thank all at the Faculty of History who were involved into the preparation and writing of the self-evaluation documents for the hard work that inevitably went into these texts (and could have been invested in scientific work instead). We would also like to take this opportunity to thank all of the staff, students, social partners and administrators involved in the interviews. We want to assure everyone concerned that we have endeavoured to be scrupulous in our scrutiny of the evidence

presented to us, and we have discussed and deliberated over our recommendations in great depth. They are presented with the sole intention of supporting the Faculty specifically, and the University, more generally, to work towards taking the student experience forward.

Expert panel signatures:

1. **Prof. dr. Jolanta Choińska-Mika (panel chairperson),** *academic*
2. **Prof. dr. Jörg Hackmann,** *academic*
3. **Assoc. Prof. Peter D'Sena,** *academic*
4. **Mrs. Giedrė Švėgždaitė-Randienė,** *representative of social partners*
5. **Ms. Maria-Giovanna Lotito,** *students' representative*