



CENTRE FOR QUALITY ASSESSMENT IN HIGHER EDUCATION

EVALUATION REPORT
STUDY FIELD of HERITAGE STUDIES
at Vilnius University

Expert panel:

1. **Prof. dr. Christopher Whitehead (panel chairperson)**, *academic*;
2. **Ms. Marianne Lehtimäki**, *academic*;
3. **Assoc. Prof. dr. Gudrun Drofn Whitehead**, *academic*;
4. **Mr. Saulius Rimas**, *representative of social partners*;
5. **Mr. Imantas Jonas Šimkus**, *students' representative*.

Evaluation coordinator – dr. Domantas Markevičius

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Study Field Data

Title of the study programme	Heritage Research Studies
State code	6211NX058
Type of studies	University studies
Cycle of studies	Second-cycle studies
Mode of study and duration (in years)	Full-time, two-year
Credit volume	120
Qualification degree and (or) professional qualification	Master's Degree in Humanities; Qualification of Heritage Specialist
Language of instruction	Lithuanian
Minimum education required	Bachelor's Degree
Registration date of the study programme	2003-06-17

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I. INTRODUCTION

1.1. BACKGROUND OF THE EVALUATION PROCESS

The evaluations of study fields in Lithuanian Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) are based on the Procedure for the External Evaluation and Accreditation of Studies, Evaluation Areas and Indicators, approved by the Minister of Education, Science and Sport on 17 July 2019, Order No. V-835, and are carried out according to the procedure outlined in the Methodology of External Evaluation of Study Fields approved by the Director of the Centre for Quality Assessment in Higher Education (hereafter – SKVC) on 31 December 2019, Order [No. V-149](#).

The evaluation is intended to help higher education institutions 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 (SER) prepared by HEI*; 2) *site visit of the expert panel to the HEI*; 3) *production of the external evaluation report (EER) by the expert panel 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 are **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 are **accredited for 3 years** if one of the evaluation areas is evaluated as satisfactory (2 points).

The study field and cycle are **not accredited** if at least one of the evaluation areas is evaluated as unsatisfactory (1 point).

1.2. EXPERT PANEL

The expert panel was assigned according to the Experts Selection Procedure as approved by the Director of SKVC on 31 December 2019, [Order No. V-149](#). The site visit to the HEI was conducted by the expert panel on 23 November 2022.

Prof. dr. Christopher Whitehead (panel chairperson), *academic;*

Ms. Marianne Lehtimäki, *academic;*

Assoc. Prof. dr. Gudrun Drofn Whitehead, *academic;*

Mr. Saulius Rimas, *representative of social partners;*

Mr. Imantas Jonas Šimkus, *students' representative.*

1.3. GENERAL INFORMATION

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

No.	Name of document
1.	Course outlines
2.	Examples of final works

1.4. BACKGROUND OF HERITAGE FIELD STUDIES AT VILNIUS UNIVERSITY

Vilnius University (henceforth VU) is a state public university with a legal framework defined by statute. Fifteen academic units comprise 11 faculties, a research centre, an institute, an academy, and a school. All three study cycles are carried out over the fields of humanities, natural, medical and health, and social and technological sciences. VU's primary governance is through a Senate, Council and Rectorate.

Heritage Research Studies (HRS) is administered by the Faculty of History (FH), itself comprising the Department of Archaeology, the Department of Theory of History and History of Culture, the Department of Modern History, and the Department of Ancient and Medieval History). Research and sectoral partnerships feed integrally into the programme. Cooperation with sectoral organisations as social partners exposes both staff and students to contemporary heritage and tourism practice and enables knowledge exchange.

The programme was last evaluated in 2014, obtaining accreditation for the maximum period under the scoring system then in place. Nevertheless, the SER reports that several recommendations were made, all of which were acted upon.

II. GENERAL ASSESSMENT

The *second cycle* of *Heritage* study field at Vilnius University is given a **positive** evaluation.

Study field and cycle assessment in points by evaluation areas

No.	Evaluation Area	Evaluation of an Area in points*
1.	Intended and achieved learning outcomes and curriculum	4
2.	Links between science (art) and studies	4
3.	Student admission and support	4
4.	Teaching and learning, student performance and graduate employment	4
5.	Teaching staff	4
6.	Learning facilities and resources	4
7.	Study quality management and public information	4
Total:		28

*1 (unsatisfactory) - the area does not meet the minimum requirements, there are fundamental shortcomings that prevent the implementation of the field studies.

2 (satisfactory) - the area meets the minimum requirements, and there are fundamental shortcomings that need to be eliminated.

3 (good) - the area is being developed systematically, without any fundamental shortcomings.

4 (very good) - the area is evaluated very well in the national context and internationally, without any shortcomings;

5 (excellent) - the area is evaluated exceptionally well in the national context and internationally.

III. STUDY FIELD ANALYSIS

3.1. INTENDED AND ACHIEVED LEARNING OUTCOMES AND CURRICULUM

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 aims and outcomes of the field and cycle study programme contain the predominant components required for the development of students' key competencies, responding well to the needs of society and the labour market. There is a considered balance of theory and practice and a range of courses that provide near-comprehensive coverage of the field, particularly within the Lithuanian national context. The Expert Panel recognises the strong emphasis on built and tangible heritage but encourages further diversification of the typologies of heritage covered during the programme, including intangible heritage and community memory/heritage (and/or 'heritage from below'). Further adjustments could be made to increase the global scope of the programme, such that students have a more comprehensive engagement with heritage paradigms and problems relating to the wider world, including in non-western contexts. Communication and interpretation, audience-facing activity and community engagement were further areas for development signalled during the meeting with social partners (in all such areas it was indicated that students and graduates could have greater skill sets). However, the programme is commendable in providing a solid foundation in several important areas of heritage theory and practice. The unique (among Lithuanian HEIs) award of the 'Heritage Specialist' title is a positive feature of the programme. It should be noted that this has symbolic rather than legal or statutory value but is no less significant because of this.

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

There is good, albeit implicit, congruence between the broad VU mission with closer correspondence to key objectives, e.g., 'educating active and responsible specialists', to contribute national-level economic value, and to promote both foundational and applied research. The VU mission is very general in its terms, so the translation of this into concrete objectives for the programme is indirect. Nevertheless, principles relating to the balance of tradition and innovation, and academic freedom, can be seen in the programme.

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

Table No. 1. Study programme's Heritage Research Studies compliance to general

requirements for *second cycle study programmes*

Criteria	General legal requirements	In the programme
Scope of the programme in ECTS	90 or 120 ECTS	120
ECTS for the study field Information Services	No less than 60 ECTS	120
ECTS for studies specified by University or optional studies	No more than 30 ECTS	+ (compliant)
ECTS for final thesis (project)	No less than 30 ECTS	30
Contact hours	No less than 10 % of learning	c. 22%
Individual learning	No less than 50 % of learning	c. 78%

Table 1 indicates the conformity of the study programme to the requirements, in all cases meeting or exceeding the minimum threshold.

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

Aims and learning outcomes are well defined, clear and provide a comprehensive outline of skills needed in the heritage field. Teaching methodologies and learning assessments are designed to help students achieve these goals and develop critical and analytical tools needed to work in the heritage field in Lithuania. This is achieved through lecturer feedback on assessments and by discussing progress with students on an individual basis. Students engage with recent development in heritage studies and work in the field in collaboration with social partners to provide a practical application to a theoretical foundation. This is an effective way for students to achieve learning outcomes. Compulsory and optional modules aim to provide students with consistency within their study, further enabling them to meet the goals of the programme.

As indicated in part 3.4, the study programme could benefit from additional academic staff with appropriate expertise to respond to the curricular deficit in exhibition methodologies, education and communication theories and/or intangible and movable heritage.

During the field visit, social partners mentioned that they were happy with the level of understanding with which students graduate, suggesting that learning outcomes are well

thought out and students are given the tools needed to meet those goals, through the teaching methodologies and learning assessments.

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

The study programme contains several key components required for the development of competencies relevant to the cultural heritage sector. There is a strong focus on knowledge of Lithuanian national-level heritage resources and the practical and operational dimensions of sectoral activity. The engagement with heritage theory throughout the programme appears to be adequate but would benefit from engagement with contemporary debates, e.g., from Critical Heritage Studies, Critical Tourism Studies and Memory Studies. Such a heightened theoretical grounding can then inform students' further studies, independent research, and vocational/practical activities. A more extensive grounding in global heritage paradigms and issues would both contextualise and expand upon the Lithuanian focus. This would equip graduates with greater readiness for international mobility while also ensuring that those graduates who wish to work in Lithuania and the region are able to embed international dimensions and innovation into their practice, ultimately benefiting Lithuanian heritage and tourism. There is an excellent relay between the cultural heritage practice undertaken at high levels by key staff members and the curriculum (e.g., the Kaunas World Heritage Site application dossier), meaning that students are exposed to sector practice from close at hand.

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

The SER indicates that students have several opportunities to personalise their studies. They can choose optional course units, study according to an individual study plan, participate in academic exchange (partial study periods, internship) and choose open course units.

It is beneficial that more than half the credits of the first-year programme are optional. However, given the important subjects covered in the optional study modules provided by the programme, the Expert Panel encourages the use of additional free units to explore study modules outside the programme. This would allow for more personalised study possibilities and would ultimately be of benefit to students and the study programme. Programme staff should also distinguish subjects more clearly in the study plan according to their status as mandatory and within the study field or optional.

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

The final theses listed in the SER and available for inspection during the site visit comprise a broad range of approaches, indicating the individualised and flexible orientations that students can take. The theses have more or less applied purposes according to topic and inclination but generally appear to be underpinned by core critical and theoretical awareness. In some cases,

the critical aim and overarching issues that theses address - beyond the case in question - could be better articulated in titles and abstracts. This could be encouraged by supervisors.

Strengths and weaknesses of this evaluation area:

(1) Strengths:

1. There is a considered balance of theory and practice and a range of courses that provide near-comprehensive coverage of the field, particularly within the Lithuanian national context.
2. Aims and learning outcomes are well defined, clear and provide a comprehensive outline of skills needed in the heritage field; this is corroborated by social partners who report good competence from interns and graduates.
3. Students engage with recent development in heritage studies and work in the field, in collaboration with social partners and, crucially, with academic staff who are important actors within contemporary heritage practice at the national level. This provides a practical application to a theoretical foundation.

(2) Weaknesses:

1. Although there is a good balance of theory and practice in the programme, there is a predominant emphasis on built and tangible heritages and national heritage, leading to relatively less attention to further dimensions of heritage, both typologically and geographically.
2. Audience-facing and community-engaged heritage practice, as well as the interpretation and public communication techniques and skills, are areas that require further development for student readiness to enter the sector.
3. A minor shortcoming is that although many theses were exemplary in their approach, the critical and theoretical aspects of some of them require further attention, and the overall generalisable issues (beyond the case of any given thesis) need to be signalled in the title.

3.2. LINKS BETWEEN SCIENCE (ART) AND STUDIES

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.

According to the annual evaluations of scientific works and contracts, the Faculty of History (henceforth FH) is a leading research unit in Lithuania. The number of contracts of archaeological, bioarchaeological, historical, cultural heritage conservation and complex research with different entities has nearly doubled during 2018-2020. In addition, FH activities

on research and experimental development activities have been assessed as “excellent” and the unit described as leading at the international level for a five-year period by international experts (in 2013-2017). Employees are regarded as experts in the public and private sectors. They take part in the activities of key Lithuanian cultural heritage conservation expert institutions and are invited to take part in the activities of related Lithuanian councils, commissions or working groups. In addition to quality research, the Unit popularises research results in various forms. (SER p. 16).

The recommendations of the 2013-2017 external evaluation regarding participation in scientific internationally-funded projects and organising cutting-edge international conferences have been implemented. However, due to the Covid-19 pandemic, the number of organised events diminished. The unit has recruited teachers and researchers from abroad, although this is challenging due to Lithuania's relatively modest salary level. According to the Panel discussions and the SER, the problem of attracting doctoral students from foreign countries still obtains. A special Vilnius University Fund has been established to resolve it. (SER p. 15). In order to attract and engage competent foreign teachers, researchers and doctoral students, the research environment of the unit specifically in relation to heritage should be curated and built to be recognised internationally.

The SER and the Panel discussions offer with one accord a convincing description of the research conducted and experimental development activities. An understanding of the academic requirement to continually upgrade research to meet international and global challenges was clearly to be noticed.

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

The unit combines traditional subjects related to the history of Lithuania with topics concerning regional and European research in a comparative context (Jewish studies; Soviet and Communist studies; the history of international relations). The unit is considered an important partner in R&D outside the academic community even internationally. Joint research activities are carried out with several academic institutions in other countries.

Academic staff include both teaching and high-level researchers with exclusively scientific competence. During the field visit, some of the academic staff demonstrated a high level of understanding of recent developments in heritage research and practical knowledge of the field internationally. It was confirmed that most study modules were updated annually to reflect recent developments in heritage research and work. The SER and the Panel interviews suggested that the integration of research and studies is well managed. Lecturers are required to engage in scientific research activities and to publish accordingly. Scientific activities are interrelated with the studies: students are engaged in different research projects, field studies, and activities of research dissemination during their practice placements or as volunteers.

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

All students of the Heritage Research Studies Master's programme must carry out two practical work placements: professional (applied); and scientific (Master's research seminar). The diversity of heritage is acknowledged in studies, for example in terms of uncomfortable heritage (Soviet Lithuania/Soviet heritage, Nuclear Cultural Heritage), and an expanded concept of cultural heritage (e.g., the Middle-Class Mass Housing project). Engaging with the latest trends in the overlapping fields centred on heritage studies (e.g., connected to, *inter alia*, politics, geopolitics, materiality, new approaches to conservation and decay, heritage and emotion, sustainability, and communities) requires regular updating of the Programme curriculum, and, accordingly, providing updated resources. The academic staff are seeking necessary academic and financial resources for this.

Researchers share their experiences of expert activities undertaken in and with heritage institutions from international to municipal levels, in order to draw students into practical and applied activities. Students are able to participate in events (summer schools etc.). The recommendation of the previous evaluation to increase the number of students' publications has been implemented by the FH initiative *Journal of Research Papers of FH Students*. The first issue of the Journal is in preparation.

Strengths and weaknesses of this evaluation area:

(1) Strengths:

1. The Unit conducts high-level research and has an ambitious approach to sharing outcomes with students and popularising research to wider audiences in society.
2. The unit utilises its own geographical and historical specificity and expertise, integrating it into international cultural heritage discourse.

(2) Weaknesses:

1. The integration into the research environment of competent foreign teachers, researchers, and doctoral students within the heritage field has, with few exceptions, had a *predominant*, although not exclusive, focus on built heritage, at the cost of other areas of heritage and heritage studies that could enrich the programme.

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

Admission is conducted following the *Vilnius University Admissions Procedure for Study programmes* approved by VU Senate. All other information important for admission is publicised on VU website in Lithuanian but not all of it is available in English.

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

VU conducts academic recognition of education and qualifications obtained under the education programmes of foreign states and international organisations in accordance with the right granted by the Minister of Education and Science of the Republic of Lithuania. Foreign qualification is considered equivalent to secondary or equivalent-level higher education obtained in the Republic of Lithuania if no essential differences between the general requirements of the country where the qualification was obtained and those of the Republic of Lithuania can be identified. Each foreign qualification is evaluated and a decision about its academic recognition is taken individually, based on available information and the practice of evaluating and recognising similar or equivalent foreign qualifications, thereby ensuring the consistency of qualification recognition practice. It is important for the detail of this recognition process to be described in English on the Faculty website.

An applicant who has studied in another country or higher education institution and wishes to continue their studies at VU may be accepted to study in field study programmes. In such cases, learning outcomes are recognised by evaluating their correspondence to formal (study field group, study field, type of study programme, form of studies, etc.) and a course unit (module) (the aims, outcomes, contents, scope, etc.) requirements. However, no more than 75% of the scope of first-cycle, second-cycle, integrated and joint study programmes may be recognised.

3.3.3. Evaluation of conditions for ensuring academic mobility of students

Almost all of the master's programme students work, often gaining employment in the first year of their bachelor studies. This is a function of the increased cost of living in Vilnius and low scholarships, which reduces students' possibilities to move and leads to a tendency to pursue studies in Lithuania. Nevertheless, it is important to increase outgoing and incoming student mobility, because international student communities add significantly to the academic environment, to the student experience, to the quality of learning, and to the international visibility of the programme. This is especially true in the heritage field, where international debates, practices and institutions are key. VU gives the opportunity for students to choose universities from the list of partners in the Erasmus programme. However, further support is needed to encourage and equip students to apply for these.

University scholarships are few in number and could be increased, also potentially increasing student mobility. It is also important to provide more courses in English (in the heritage studies programme), in which case the programme would more flexibly respond to international students' integration.

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

Gifted and high-achieving students are awarded nominal scholarships. Their details and the procedure of awarding scholarships are available on the VU website. Students of the programme are also granted a targeted award for the best Master's final project. It is granted from the outset of the study programme, every year and is given during the graduation celebration together with the diploma.

Students gave very positive feedback about teachers' support. However, support for students during the independent research process could be improved, e.g., in relation to the structure of assignments, supervision, and use of norms and standards for student work.

3.3.5 Evaluation of the sufficiency of study information and student counselling

Students admitted to the programme are initially acquainted with the study process at FH. Support is provided to students at the beginning of their studies during the introductory lectures. Information about studies is provided to students at several levels: general information is provided in a centralised means at the Department of Student Services and Careers; information specific to a Division and study programme is provided in the Study departments and in individual meetings with academic counsellors and lecturers. Joint or individual meetings and consultations with representatives of the Study Programme Committee (henceforth SPC), Vice-Dean for Academic Affairs and International Relations are held. The Students' Representative also provides information to students. General information is constantly published and relevant news is provided on VU and FH websites. It is, however, not possible to find all relevant information in English.

Strengths and weaknesses of this evaluation area:

(1) Strengths:

1. Admission processes are clear and well communicated in Lithuanian.
2. Teachers provide a high level of support for students.
3. Given the national-level social and economic constraints on student mobility, VU endeavours to maximise opportunity for students.

(2) Weaknesses:

1. Incoming student mobility opportunities are limited.
2. Not all information is available in English, hindering the take-up of the programme by international students.
3. Further support and structure are required for the independent research component.

3.4. TEACHING AND LEARNING, 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.

According to the SER, the main aim of the programme is for students to gain a critical understanding of culture and heritage, both in terms of current standards and in terms of possible improvements to be made, as well as to foster tolerance and diversity. In Annex 1, it is further clarified that the aim of the programme is to train qualified specialists who understand the heritage field, traditional theories and the latest developments pertaining to the field, protection methods, administration, research and presentation. The main learning outcomes relate to this overall theme, detailing well thought out skills relating to cultural heritage work in Lithuania, fostering a broad understanding of international heritage debates.

The Expert Panel can confirm that the main aims of the programme are embedded in the study programme. Learning outcomes are well defined, based on relevant professional and academic standards, public and labour-based needs. It is also worth noting that during the field visit, students expressed satisfaction with the support they receive to meet the learning outcomes of the programme and to graduate with qualifications to work in the heritage field in Lithuania.

The study enables students to be responsible for their own performance, fostered through collaboration with lecturers. Students participate in lectures and seminars, are able to get various types of student support (academic, professional, and career counselling and support), have access to an appropriate learning environment and adequate access to the teaching staff. These allow students to meet the demands of the learning outcomes. Furthermore, the VLE is used effectively to provide students with a variety of lecture and support materials, providing general information, and conducting tutorials and lectures.

One area to improve is to consider expanding the learning outcomes pertaining to communication skills. Social partners mentioned this as particularly important. They explained that students graduate with a broad set of skills, but that there was a need to provide students with a deeper understanding of exhibition methodologies, educational skills and communication skills, i.e., to learn how to present cultural heritage to a wide range of audiences, including engaging with local communities. There is also a need to consider more intangible and movable heritage within the programme.

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

The faculty building is mostly wheelchair-accessible, although there are some historic spaces on the upper levels that are not currently accessible. The library has been made mostly wheelchair accessible. Currently, discussions are being held on how to make further improvements to wheelchair accessibility in the library. The faculty attempts to take individual needs into account when working with students. Students can apply to the VU Disability Affairs Coordinator, who submits recommendations to help study processes to student needs. Based on those recommendations, individual study plans are drawn up and teachers are informed about the adapted plans and assessment methods.

There are various grants, scholarships and other financial incentives available for students from disadvantaged backgrounds.

There is an anonymous hotline students can call in case of discrimination. Specialists investigate each case, ensuring confidentiality.

The Panel considers access to study to be assured for socially vulnerable groups and students with special needs. The individual study plans drawn up ensure that each need is met on an individualised level.

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

Student progress is monitored on their course modules by the lecturer(s), who also provides feedback on specific assignments, assessing strong and weak points and providing solutions and advice.

Students provide anonymous feedback (centralised by VU) on the assessment methods of a course module, the result of which then impacts improvements in the assessment methods or criteria.

The Studies Administration Division monitors all students of a given year. Students receive additional help if they fail an exam and need to retake it. The student's progress in the field study programme is further monitored by the SPC.

During the field visit, it was evident that students were provided with practical and theoretical training and given feedback from teachers that helped develop their critical understanding of heritage.

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

The students seem well equipped to work in the sector in Lithuania, with both practical and theoretical understanding of the national heritage field. During the field day, social partners expressed that they were content with the graduates of the programme and their capacity to

work in the field. As discussed in 3.4.1., there is a need to pay more attention to student communication skills (in terms of communicating heritage to a wider audience).

Alumni indicated that there was also a need to teach students about various business processes, including financial management. This would improve student employability in the public and private sector.

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

The Expert panel considers the implementation of policies regarding academic integrity, tolerance and non-discrimination to be effective, adhering to academic standards. All staff and students must adhere to the *Academic Ethics Code of Vilnius University*, which defines general academic, teaching, study and scientific research ethical norms. It also defines cases of cheating, plagiarism, fabrication, bribery and assisting one another in dishonest academic activities. Breaching ethical standards can result in expulsion or being censured. They are introduced to students at the start of their studies, securing their effectiveness.

The Student Representation delegates invigilators during exam periods, who monitor exams and help lecturers ensure exams are taken in good faith. Final thesis and research papers are electronically checked to ensure they do not plagiarise other papers stored in the database.

The academic community can use a hotline to report violations of academic ethics or principles of tolerance and non-discrimination. The reports are anonymous and each case is evaluated; the reporter is also given assistance from a team of psychologists and lawyers. The Panel considers this hotline to be an effective measure to deal with possible breaches in ethical standards.

3.4.6. 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

The appeal procedure is conducted by the commission of FH, which consists of six members, including 3 student representatives. Complaints must be lodged no later than one month from when the violation occurred. Those who disagree with the results of a final exam or evaluation of a final project or course unit can file a complaint in writing within five days after the examination report is published.

The Expert Panel concludes that the appeals and complaints procedure follows academic standards; that student representation is secured; and that students have adequate time to submit their complaints to the Commission.

Strengths and weaknesses of this evaluation area:

(1) Strengths:

1. The main aims and learning outcomes of the programme are effectively embedded into the study programme, learning methods and study assessments. Students verified this during the field visit interviews, stating that they felt ready to work in the local/national heritage field. This was verified by the social partners.
2. Individualisation of the study is made possible for students with disabilities and vulnerable students.
3. Academic integrity, tolerance and non-discrimination are safeguarded through effective policies and policy implementations.

(2) Weaknesses:

1. There is an identified need, expressed also by social partners who host students, for the programme to expand the students' learning in relation to communication, i.e., how to effectively communicate the heritage they are studying to a broader audience.
2. There is a need to consider more intangible and movable heritage within the programme.
3. There is a need to include further teaching on heritage management and entrepreneurship to further improve student employability.

3.5. TEACHING STAFF

Study field 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 current staff are adequate in number and have excellent sectoral engagement and competence that feeds into pedagogy. Nevertheless, it would be highly beneficial to diversify expertise among staff to enhance those areas lacking within the programme. Alongside this, academic staff should have more comprehensive engagement with, and participation in, the international heritage studies field, including publication in key international outlets that function as international fora for the latest ideas - e.g., *International Journal of Heritage Studies*, *Heritage and Society*, *Memory Studies*, *Museum and Society* etc.

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

The panel notes the intensification of international collaborations that open up opportunities for staff mobility, alongside organisation and participation in training programmes and conferences. Opportunities for staff to participate in the key general international conferences specifically focused on the study field (Association of Critical Heritage Studies, Memory Studies Organisation) should be fostered, as should inter-institutional mobility, particularly for junior

staff. The panel notes eight cases of outgoing mobility in 2021, all but one undertaken by full professors (SER, p. 52).

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

The panel noted that *to date* staff members have not benefited from a structured approach to research leave, freeing them (usually for a semester) from teaching. This would enable staff to undertake a sustained piece of research - either in Vilnius or potentially in other countries or host universities, enhancing their own profile, the research profile of the faculty and university, and the quality of teaching. One application is understood to be in progress and the panel encourages further progress in this area. The panel also notes the recent approval of a research leave procedure and encourages take-up of this to optimise research achievements in future; however, during the meeting with teaching staff it was evident that not all teachers knew about this opportunity. A structured institutional approach to skills development in teaching and research, e.g., through the provision of centralised (in-house) and external opportunities for training, has contributed positively to staff competency and career development.

Strengths and weaknesses of this evaluation area:

(1) Strengths:

1. Some academic staff members contribute at a high level to heritage and museum sector practice, which is positive for the visibility of VU, its research environment for heritage and student experience and learning.
2. Staff expertise and engagement in pedagogy are considerable, contributing positively to the student experience. The approach to teaching is thoughtful and energetic.

(2) Weaknesses:

1. There is relatively little engagement with, and participation in, the international heritage studies field, including publication in key international outlets that function as international fora for the latest ideas - e.g., *International Journal of Heritage Studies*, *Heritage and Society*, *Memory Studies*, *Museum and Society* etc.
2. It would be highly beneficial to diversify expertise among staff to enhance those areas lacking within the programme.
3. Structured opportunities for undertaking research leave have been in development but have not yet fed into the enhancement of research quality and culture in the study field at VU. This means that staff have had less opportunity for advancing their personal research careers than colleagues in some other institutions of similar scope worldwide. Some staff were unaware of the new opportunity.

3.6. LEARNING FACILITIES AND RESOURCES

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

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

The FH administration, student organisations, the majority of lecture-rooms, a specialised library of the university is located in the heart of historic Vilnius with the limitations given by the culturally and historically valuable building the historical urban structure. These premises were restored and repaired in 2006-2010. Equipment of lecture rooms is adequate, having multimedia, whiteboards and, since the pandemic, video and audio equipment necessary for online and blended teaching. The students can use a local geographic information system when working with maps or performing other practical assignments, for example, GIS and information technology cultural heritage conservation classes. VU Virtual Learning Environment Moodle and MS Teams are used for studies. (SER p. 54-55).

There are research centres; the Centre for Stateless Cultures, the Lithuanian Statutes and Metrica Research Group, the Centre for Studies of Culture and History of the East European Jews with a thematic library and Laboratories of Archaeobotany and Zooarchaeology of the Bioarchaeology Research Centre have lecture-rooms and spaces intended for student classes. (SER p. 55).

The University is able to provide equal opportunities by different means to people with disabilities. These are reported in the SER (p. 53).

The VU Library stocks and electronic resources of 5.4 million documents include a rich collection of humanities, periodicals, old publications and manuscripts and a collection of sources (old publications, manuscripts, iconography) on archaeology, anthropology, history, history of culture and cultural heritage. The most central books are open-access books, when possible, many books can be borrowed and taken home; the library can order specific books at a lecturer's request and students can order publications from abroad through the mediation of the library (SER p. 56).

The suitability and sufficiency of the informational resources reported in the SER were verified by the Panel during the site visit.

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

Various quality Lithuanian, foreign and international databases are available in the VU Library, among them such as Academic Search Complete, Humanities International Complete, JSTOR, Wiley Online Library, and Web of Science. Programme students also use collections amassed

in other public libraries of Vilnius as well as collections of specialised libraries of cultural heritage conservation and research institutions (SER p. 58).

According to the SER and the Panel interviews, the premises, furniture and facilities are updated regularly according to the needs, the latest scientific or study literature necessary is acquired, research trips of students are organised, and research of international significance and scientific events, research promotion with own resources is supported (p. 59).

Strengths and weaknesses of this evaluation area:

(1) Strengths:

1. There are high-quality institutional research resources that benefit students.
2. The unit takes a professional approach to facilitate and equip the studies.

(2) Weaknesses:

No notable weaknesses were identified.

3.7. STUDY QUALITY MANAGEMENT AND PUBLIC INFORMATION

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 developed a complex internal quality assurance system of the studies, based on the Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area. *Inter alia*, the mechanism includes means for monitoring, analysing and evaluating the course of studies, student performance evaluation, and development of teaching staff competence. The main role within the process of study quality monitoring and management is delegated to the SPC, which consists of four teachers, one student and one social partner – the director of the Cultural Heritage Department under the Ministry of Culture. Having a high-level heritage policy/practice official in the ranks of SPC is a definite advantage.

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

The Heritage Research study programme of VU benefits from having a broad network of social partners including key actors from the Lithuanian heritage sector among them, namely: Cultural Heritage Department, National Cultural Heritage Commission, Lithuanian National Commission for UNESCO etc. Most social partner organisations contribute by sharing experience, implementing joint research projects with VU and accepting students for internships. Many students are hired after their internships as most employers in the heritage

field admit they value the skills of the graduates of this study programme. Regarding the involvement of the stakeholders in the study quality improvement, we note that VU relies on informal means of collecting suggestions from the social partners. Feedback from students is mainly collected via online surveys and later analysed by the SPC, teachers and other members of the administration. According to the findings, of the surveys and suggestions from social partners, the curriculum is adjusted in order to satisfy students' requests and to correspond to the needs of the labour market.

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

The VU Faculty of History lists several means for disseminating information about the studies, including participation in education fairs, conferences, festivals, talk shows and social media (SER, p. 62). However, it must be noted that most of the means are intended to advertise to future students but not to critically assess the study quality as such. The results of students' feedback on studies and resolutions of the SPC are not published on the Faculty's website and are not publicly accessible. Moreover, it seems that the aforementioned information is not accessible for the students through the otherwise efficient electronic Study Information System (VUSIS), as the SER (p. 61) mentions only *Vice-Dean for Studies, SPC, lecturers* that "become acquainted with the data of the surveys and analyse them".

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

The expert panel learned that the majority of the programme students (as well as alumni) hold a positive opinion towards the quality of studies. During the meetings, the majority of current and former students expressed general satisfaction with the skills and knowledge provided by the VU. These findings matched the results of the VU student study quality assessment (SER p. 62). Many of the students emphasised that the qualifications acquired in this study programme met the requirements of the labour market. However, there were some complaints about the curriculum being too focused on built heritage, ignoring the intangible heritage issues. This statement coincides with the assessment of the expert panel.

Strengths and weaknesses of this evaluation area:

(1) Strengths:

1. Key actors from the Lithuanian heritage sector are engaged in the quality management of the studies.
2. Graduates and employers are satisfied with the quality of the studies.
3. There is a flexible adaptation to students' needs.

(2) Weaknesses:

1. Information about the internal study quality assurance processes and outcomes is available to the public (not all of it in English) but the webpages are not easy to explore.

IV. EXAMPLES OF EXCELLENCE

The programme is led by enthusiastic, committed, and supportive teachers, some of whom are engaged in high-level sectoral activity in the heritage field. This informs pedagogy, meaning that students have direct exposure to important initiatives and processes, helping to build their graduate employability.

V. RECOMMENDATIONS

Evaluation Area	Recommendations for the Evaluation Area (study cycle)
Intended and achieved learning outcomes and curriculum	The global coverage of the programme should be extended to comprehend further international dimensions of heritage, beyond the basic contextualisation of the national level. This should be allied to wider engagement with contemporary international debates in critical heritage studies, museology, and memory studies while expanding coverage of conceptual areas currently underrepresented in the programme (e.g., intangible and community heritage), and practical areas such as engaging with audiences, community engagement, interpretation and public communication. The curriculum should be updated to respond accordingly to the teaching, including the latest trends in the overlapping fields centred on heritage studies. Students should be enabled to diversify and individualise their studies as appropriate and encouraged to maintain critical perspectives in their individual research for theses, such that they are able to make arguments of wider relevance beyond individual case studies.
Links between science (art) and studies	The research environment of the unit specifically in relation to heritage should be curated and developed to help to publicise staff research, building reputation and identity mechanisms. This would attract and engage competent foreign teachers, researchers, and doctoral students.
Student admission and support	Potentials for internationalising the student cohort should be explored (including through easily-achievable practical initiatives such as ensuring all information is available in English on the website), as well as increasing opportunity for students' exposure to international contexts, both in teaching and mobility schemes. All relevant institutional and programme information should be made available in English in order to make the programme accessible to international students. Individual research supervision for theses should be structured to ensure that students' criticality and wider contextualisation of issues are encouraged.
Teaching and learning, student performance and graduate employment	The curriculum should be further developed with regard to: heritage communication, working with intangible and movable heritage, and management aspects including the development of financial and project management understandings/skills.
Teaching staff	Measures should be taken to raise international visibility and engagement of academic staff, e.g., through structured opportunities for mobility, facilitating academic leave to undertake sustained research, and encouragement to contribute to key international

	outlets (through conference and journal publications and book publications).
Learning facilities and resources	No additional recommendations.
Study quality management and public information	Information about the internal study quality assurance processes and outcomes should become more accessible to the public.

VI. SUMMARY

The Expert Panel extends thanks to the VU staff for the organisation of the site visit and their open engagement in discussions. Heritage Research Studies is a very good second-cycle study programme that occupies a leading position in the Lithuanian context and a respectable position vis-à-vis international standards in taught postgraduate provision in the study field. The programme benefits from the considerable energy and commitment that teaching staff bring to it. The programme is coherent, equips students with many relevant understandings and skills, and produces capable and employable graduates, the majority of whom work in Lithuania. There is a well-founded and close relationship between the study programme and the social partners who are key stakeholders, both in terms of hosting placements and employing graduates. These are appropriately substantial examples of new research into relevant topics. The programme and its students benefit from a high level of engagement on the part of key staff members in live heritage initiatives and developments at a high level, e.g., close involvement in World Heritage Site nomination. This is opportunely linked to pedagogy as well as serving the reputation of the unit. This is an example of excellence - both at national and international levels - and the Panel hopes that this will continue and be further developed in future. Support and facilities for students are well managed and provision is good.

The leading position of the programme at the national level could be bolstered in various, interlinked ways. The panel identified certain key emphases within staff expertise and the curriculum, particularly relating to built, tangible, (mostly) immovable, and Lithuanian, heritage. This, in turn, informs the main content of the programme and determines the range of heritages to which students are exposed. While these concentrations are clearly strengths, they also imply deficits in some areas, such as intangible heritage, and global heritage issues. From discussions with students and social partners it also became clear that further engagement with heritage communities, heritage communication, and management issues (including the development of financial and project management skills) would be desirable and would aid graduate employability. While the focus of the programme is on Lithuanian heritage, it would be beneficial to transcend this focus strategically, engaging students with the latest international issues and debates. This is not simply to create more global awareness, but also to enrich students' understanding of national heritage and its wider contexts. This, in turn, links to a need for greater engagement on the part of teaching staff with critical debates in the field, including participation in relevant (global) international fora, international research consortia, e.g., in Horizon 2020, and publication in key international outlets. This would have the corollary effect of improving the international reputation of VU. Opportunities for staff mobility and sustained research leave - the latter of which the Panel notes has been recently formalised - will facilitate this, enabling VU to reach its reputational potential and to aim for comprehensive excellence within the HRS programme.

Expert panel chairperson signature:



