



CENTRE FOR QUALITY ASSESSMENT IN HIGHER EDUCATION

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**EVALUATION REPORT**  
**STUDY FIELD of HERITAGE STUDIES**  
at Vytautas Magnus University

**Expert panel:**

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## Study Field Data

Title of the study programme	<b><i>Cultural Heritage and Tourism</i></b>
State code	6211NX034
Type of studies	University studies
Cycle of studies	Second cycle
Mode of study and duration (in years)	Full-time (2 years)
Credit volume	120
Qualification degree and (or) professional qualification	Master of Humanities
Language of instruction	Lithuanian
Minimum education required	Bachelor's degree in Humanities, Social Sciences or Arts
Registration date of the study programme	02/08/2001

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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 22 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.	Study subject descriptors (syllabi)
2.	Course descriptions

## 1.4. BACKGROUND OF HERITAGE FIELD STUDIES AT VYTAUTAS MAGNUS UNIVERSITY

Vytautas Magnus University (henceforth VMU) is a state university with fourteen academic divisions: Faculty of Arts, Faculty of Catholic Theology, Faculty of Economics and Management, Faculty of Humanities, Faculty of Informatics, Faculty of Law, Faculty of Natural Sciences, Faculty of Political Science and Diplomacy, Faculty of Social Sciences, Agriculture Academy, Education Academy, Music Academy, Institute of Foreign Languages and Botanical Garden. VMU's highest levels of governance are Senate (for managerial, strategic, financial issues and Vision and Mission), Council (academic affairs) and the Rectorate.

The field study second-cycle programme 'Cultural Heritage and Tourism' (henceforth CHT) is administered by the Department of Art History and Criticism in the Faculty of Arts. Research and sectoral partnerships feed integrally into the programme (e.g., through participation in Joint Programming Initiatives (JPI) and EU COST actions). Cooperation with sectoral organisations as social partners exposes both staff and students to contemporary heritage and tourism practice and enables knowledge exchange. Some social partners are included in the study programme committee.

The programme was last evaluated in 2012, scoring 3 out of 4 in all categories for a total of 18 points, thus obtaining accreditation for the maximum period under the scoring system then in place. Nevertheless, the SER reports that nine recommendations were made, all of which were acted upon, primarily through the introduction of more relevant study courses, updating 30% of the total programme content.

## II. GENERAL ASSESSMENT

The *second cycle* of *Heritage* study field at Vytautas Magnus 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	3
2.	Links between science (art) and studies	3
3.	Student admission and support	3
4.	Teaching and learning, student performance and graduate employment	3
5.	Teaching staff	3
6.	Learning facilities and resources	4
7.	Study quality management and public information	3
<b>Total:</b>		22

\*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*

CHT is heavily oriented towards the national-level sector. It contains many key elements for students to develop the necessary competencies, and the provision of the tourist guide certification on completion of the programme is advantageous to graduates and clearly indicates the market employment orientation. The programme provides training for graduates to work at a relatively operational level, with more limited scope to address developing issues in heritage tourism in critical ways and/or at a policy level, although it is evident that some graduates proceed to advanced sectoral roles in public institutions or operate successfully within the private sector. General foundational courses in heritage theory and in tourism studies beyond the operational level (e.g., sociology of tourism) are absent. Although some attention to theoretical approaches and understandings is integrated into core courses, this is selective and based on relatively old, albeit still relevant, literature.

CHT fulfils the needs of the market locally at least in the short-term (it should be considered whether the local and national employment market for guides eventually becomes saturated). CHT does not respond to the market on an international frame. Developing a more global orientation within the programme - without downplaying the national focus - may better equip students wishing to work in Lithuania by providing a wider comparative understanding. It may also compel students to develop an ambition for international mobility after graduation.

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

VMU emphasises humanistic, liberal arts and educational freedom while seeking to avoid the limitations of narrow, highly specialised studies. It seeks to participate in city life and contribute to the development of culture and science worldwide. A further aim is to actively engage with the development of international research. Faculty principles of internationalisation, interdisciplinarity and impact were set out in the meeting with administrators. The programme is well mapped against institutional strategic objectives (SER p. 10) mostly convincingly, although there is no substantive international focus that has a wider scope than setting Lithuanian cultural heritage in context. Strong reciprocal engagement between the city/region and the programme is evident, responding to the imperative to participate in city life.

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



**Table No. 1.** Cultural Heritage and Tourism Study programme 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	90-96
ECTS for studies specified by University or optional studies	No more than 30 ECTS	24-30
ECTS for final thesis (project)	No less than 30 ECTS	30
Contact hours	No less than 10 % of learning	24%
Individual learning	No less than 50 % of learning	76%

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*

The main aim of the programme is to train highly qualified specialists in cultural heritage and tourism, with an understanding of the legal basis and requirements of cultural heritage protection. The aspiration is for students to gain a substantial understanding of the heritage field and be capable of presenting cultural heritage to Lithuanian society, tourists and specialists in cultural heritage. The learning outcomes and assessment methods are in alignment with those overall aims, providing students with comprehensive tools to understand and critically assess cultural heritage work in Lithuania and mediate them to a wider audience. Students are presented with these learning outcomes at the beginning of their study, with a full course description of each study course being presented on the VLE (Moodle) and a summary being made available on the website.

Variable study methods are used, including lectures, seminars, workshops, study tours, consultations, independent work, practice, presentations, interpretations, presentations of theoretical materials, analysis, discussions and presentations of practical case studies. Students work independently and in groups, receive practical training and an introduction to some pertinent cultural heritage theories (although as indicated, these are currently limited and could be expanded and updated). The Panel considers the study methods used to be in alignment with overall programme aims and intended learning outcomes.

### *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 and tourism sector(s). There is a strong focus on knowledge of Lithuanian national-level heritage resources and the practical and operational dimensions of sectoral activity. In some courses, e.g., 'History of Lithuania', there appears to be relatively little focus on heritage as a specific domain, in terms of concepts, process and practice; the integration of such a focus into the historiographical approach could be further considered and emphasised. The engagement with heritage and tourism theory throughout the programme appears to be sporadic rather than comprehensive, and the programme would benefit from the introduction of a bespoke, foundational course to provide students with an overview of theoretical understandings of heritage and tourism, including classic studies such as John Urry, Assmann/s, David Lowenthal (the two latter mentioned by teachers during the site visit interview), but also engaging with recent and contemporary debates from Critical Heritage Studies, Critical Tourism Studies and Memory Studies. Such a theoretical grounding can then inform students' further studies, independent research, and vocational/practical activities. The Panel welcomes the recent introduction of the unit 'Research into the Memory Industries' as a partial means of addressing conceptual and theoretical issues and suggests that this be expanded through more concentrated engagement with such issues early in the programme, such that students develop the necessary critical, political, and intellectual frameworks to understand and best operate within the heritage and tourism sectors.

### *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 Panel considers that the programme ensures individualised studies for students throughout the study period. This is regulated by the 'Description of the Procedure for Providing the Individual Study Schedule'. This schedule determines the distribution of courses taken at certain times, their number, the timings of consultations, the form and order of assessments, and the beginning/end dates of the examination sessions. Students are therefore able to personalise their studies during the second-cycle study programme.

Students are able to choose elective study courses in the first-third semesters, 12-18 ECTS, choosing from 8 courses. Students are also able to choose their own research interests from the beginning of their studies. During the first semester, master's students define their research interests, prepare two research papers in the second and third semesters, and complete a master's thesis in the fourth semester. This ensures a personalised emphasis throughout the study period.

VMU gives students the possibility to select elective courses from the bachelor field to fill empty gaps in the academic writing field. Many students take this up, and this good practice should be continued.

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

These topics presented in the SER are clearly relevant to the field. However, the titles themselves do not permit an understanding of the extent of critical, conceptual and theoretical analysis or the framing of appropriate research questions. Some of the theses appear to have highly practical orientations, e.g., relating to the *ex novo* creation of a guided tour. The theses made available during the evaluation appeared to be relatively short in comparison with national and international norms for second-cycle study and made use of very limited bibliographies. A more theoretically informed approach should be developed within students' independent research, even where theses have a practical emphasis. One possibility could be to offer students different pathways for the thesis, one involving more conventional research into and critical analysis of a key problem, using scholarly argumentation, and the other using theoretical and critical approaches to develop a practical application, project or intervention based around a specific case (e.g., the structuring of a guided tour, the redevelopment of interpretive materials for a site, etc.).

### ***Strengths and weaknesses of this evaluation area:***

#### ***(1) Strengths:***

1. The national focus clearly orients the programme towards the Lithuanian cultural heritage sector and many core components are in place to develop students' competencies.
2. Strong reciprocal engagement between the city/region and the programme is evident, responding to the imperative to participate in city life.
3. The vocational opportunities of the programme help students to develop relevant skills for work in the sector.

#### ***(2) Weaknesses:***

1. There is a relative lack of engagement with international and global heritage issues in favour of national-level ones. There is a lack of comprehensive foundational engagement with contemporary critical and theoretical fields in heritage, tourism and memory studies.
2. A number of the theses seen by the panel appeared to be insufficiently critical and grounded in contemporary literature and debates.

## **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***

CHT studies are situated with History and Theory of Art and History and Archaeology. The programme has been assessed on a national basis annually as an integral part of VMU's field of

History and Theory of Art, the scientific research and development of which are rated as excellent. The distinctive feature of VMU is the activities according to the research clusters (research priorities). (SER p. 26).

Most CHT teachers are related to the heritage research cluster of Lithuanian art and cultural heritage. Further clusters of individual professors are art exchange in Eastern and Central Europe, Catholic/religious and military contexts of Lithuanian heritage. Their research results are integrated into the study curriculum. (SER p. 23-25).

The CHT research is orientated to cover the national context. Conventional angles of identifying, interpreting, and disseminating cultural heritage, when linked with national contexts, are often constructed around histories of inherited, privileged or institutionalised power. To challenge this, there is a need for more analytical, open and questioning CHT research, which is borne out both by scholarly activity in museum, gallery, heritage, and tourism critical scholarship, and in the gravity of global issues in which heritage is implicated (from the sustainability of the Venice Lagoon to the toppling of statues). Internationally, for example, new analyses studying (*inter alia*) minority heritages, immigration, gender, otherness, power relations, discontinuity, silences, new approaches to materiality, and post- and de-colonial legacies are strongly developing research directions that question and renew previous interpretations of cultural heritage. This research serves the renewal of the field and strengthens the relevance of the cultural heritage field in societies now and in future. The inclusion of different forms of sustainability perspectives in the identification, interpretations and uses of cultural heritage, as well as in the development of tourism and hospitality activities, are fundamentally renewing the research of both cultural heritage and tourism. The Panel encourages the CHT to review and strengthen the linkage between research and studies specifically in the study field (i.e., not the broader category of history and theory of art) taking into consideration the international research field, not only by focusing on current topics (see above), some of which are longstanding, but also the critical approaches to them taken in new and state-of-the-art international research.

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

One of the five objectives of the VMU Strategic Plan for 2021–2027, is to be an ‘international research university’ (SER, p. 9). The SER lists international organisations, such as UNESCO and ICOMOS, where the teachers of the Programme are members, and their other involvement with working groups, boards and committees of state government institutions, national and municipal agencies and organisations as well as business enterprises (p. 31). These memberships promote social influence and enhance professional networking, but do not directly testify to the university's high-quality academic research.

The objective of an international research university needs to be taken as a key focus, emphasising the transfer of international cultural heritage discourse both to research and studies, and strengthening the analytical and critical dimensions of heritage and tourism studies to complement the vocational aspects. Currently, the programme does not appear to

aim to follow the development of international academic critical heritage discourse and, with a few exceptions such as the research connecting to nuclear heritages, there is relatively little engagement with key debates, literatures and fora in the international field (see 3.21). Theoretical understandings of heritage, as stated before, would need bespoke comprehensive content as the core of academic teaching. Special content and skills arising from the national and/or direct employment needs of students can be added to this theoretical substance. In order to best equip the local and national markets with resilience and innovation, more engagement with wider international debates, studies and practice would be advisable. The panel recognises the different position of Eastern and Central European countries dealing with post-imperial and post-communist legacies (about which a limited but significant anglophone critical literature has emerged in the last ten years through major journals and edited volumes by publishers such as Berghahn and Routledge. For this very reason it is now timely for all Lithuanian and neighbouring country universities engaged in areas related to critical heritage, museum, memory, and tourism studies to build participation in and contribute to global debates, including through conference activity and publication outlets. This is partly achieved at VMU through participation in international projects.

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

All programme students have engaged with research and applied research activities (research or experimental development, publications, conferences, projects, experimental applications, and joint activities) carried out by the teachers of the programme (SER p. 24). However, with a few exceptions, all examples are national, with substantial evidence of applied science research at local levels (such as museums, cities and individual sites). During the Panel discussions, it was pointed out by teachers, stakeholders and students that there are good possibilities for employment in tasks where cultural heritage is utilised for the needs of tourism and branding. However, a strong orientation of students' skills to applied scientific activities, where cultural heritage is utilised in a targeted manner for the needs of tourism and branding, should be based on an analytical academic knowledge base.

Among elective courses are listed “Strategies of Art Management: Processes, Projects, Fund-raising” and “Creative Industries: Production of Imaginary”, which teach skills for project work and thereby increase diverse funding opportunities. (SER p. 28).

The Panel identified a language barrier among teachers and students, which obviously affects participation in the international scientific community and student exchange. The literature used in studies and theses was also limited. Creating a more comprehensive theoretical base using upgraded literature and other scientific sources, and study-related exercises to work on topics in foreign languages would improve students' opportunities to participate in networks and projects as well as to create scientific careers at the international level and understanding of global practices and issues in heritage and tourism.

### ***Strengths and weaknesses of this evaluation area:***

#### ***(1) Strengths:***

1. The university engages closely with national and regional (project) activities based on the utilisation of cultural heritage.
2. Local and regional heritage is valorised and interpreted for museum and tourism uses.

#### ***(2) Weaknesses:***

1. There appears to be limited analytical attention to the linkage (and the potential for tensions) between heritage and tourism.
2. There is a limited connection between the university's research and international research in the field of cultural heritage.

## **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***

Students are admitted to the study programme via a public competition on condition that they have graduated from the first-cycle (BA) studies, have a diploma qualification in Humanities, Social Sciences, or Arts, and meet the general requirements of admission to the second-cycle university programme. The programme is conducted in Lithuanian. Foreign students can be admitted if they speak Lithuanian and meet the admission requirements. As indicated in previous sections, the CHT programme has a national focus that could be widened by adding more international dimensions. In the context of this evaluation subsection, a greater international dimension could be achieved in part by encouraging international applications.

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

Recognition of foreign qualifications at VMU is undertaken centrally via the International Cooperation Department in accordance with resolutions and regulations of the Republic of Lithuania, following information provided by the Centre for Quality Assessment in Higher Education, as well as general or individual (in the absence of general) recommendations and in consultation with the responsible staff from the Centre for Quality Assessment in Higher Education. Every year, by the order of the VMU Rector, the Rules for Admission of Foreign Citizens to VMU are updated and approved, and they outline the assessment of foreign qualifications, including application processes and documentation requirements. However, it is not possible to find this information in English on the Faculty website. A weakness of this programme is that it appears to be aimed exclusively at Lithuanian and not at international students. There is no possibility of applicants gaining admission to the programme without Lithuanian language competency. As stated above, an international student cohort would be



one step towards making CHT a more international and globally relevant programme in the Heritage Field.

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

Analysis of the data on outgoing students in the SER indicates that the number of those students from the study field of Heritage is not high. It can be argued that this was due to the circumstances of the pandemic. However, before the pandemic period, students from the study field of Heritage used the possibilities of exchange programmes only slightly more. As the programme is conducted in Lithuanian, foreign students do not apply for full-time field studies. It is necessary to have more international students, as was recognised by current students during the Panel meeting with them. Students specifically discussed the value of being able to mix in an international cohort to share ideas, experiences and perspectives from different localities. The students also saw benefits in opportunities for international practical projects. It is important for the Faculty to identify and implement mechanisms to ensure an international experience for students.

### *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*

Students were clear that teachers listen carefully and provide significant personal academic and psychological support and that the study programme is responsive to the students' needs. Students are highly motivated because the programme is so closely related to their personal ambitions. The Panel witnessed a high level of enthusiasm for the programme on the part of the students.

During the meeting, programme students mentioned that it is important to have more flexibility in the structure of the study programme. It is also important to facilitate a balance between work and studies as most CHT students to whom the Panel spoke currently have jobs outside of their studies, mostly outside of the CHT field. Social support could therefore be enhanced, as could financial support, which was noted by students in the site meeting.

Students mentioned that it would be beneficial to have extra credits for extra needs related to personal research.

The internship/placement is organised by the students themselves, but there appears to be a lack of University participation in helping students to find host organisations. Some formal partnership agreements are in place with social partners, but this does not appear to extend to internship arrangements. Some CHT graduates now work where they undertook their own internships, which offers suggestions for how a more formal organisation of internships might be facilitated through graduates who know both the programme and the requirements of current students.

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

Students can receive information about the study programme at VMU and have an opportunity to get acquainted with full descriptions of study courses of the study programme or elective study courses via Moodle. Study course descriptions include the aims and expected learning outcomes of the study course as well as their coherence with topics, study and assessment methods. The system of evaluation, as well as essential and recommended literature, is also presented in the course descriptions. However, it is not possible to find all of the information in English.

### ***Strengths and weaknesses of this evaluation area:***

#### ***(1) Strengths:***

1. Teachers provide a high level of personal support for the students.
2. Students are highly motivated, which is related to the quality of support and tutoring.

#### ***(2) Weaknesses:***

1. There is a lack of international students in the programme, which is partly a function of obstacles to international student interest and applications.
2. Student mobility, both incoming and outgoing, is low.
3. Students are required to seek and organise their own internships.

## **3.4. TEACHING AND LEARNING, STUDENT PERFORMANCE AND GRADUATE EMPLOYMENT**

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

The programme is organised as full-time and (mostly) on-site. During the field visit it became evident that nearly all students are working alongside their studies. The Panel would suggest taking this into account and offering more flexibility, for example by offering more in terms of distance learning and possibly considering more afternoon/evening classes. The school offers some distance learning for students in special circumstances, but it may be advisable to re-evaluate the terms for which students can apply for such measures.

Studies are arranged through lectures, seminars, consultations and the organisation of study internships. Lectures present theoretical material, discussions, analysis of practical examples, audio-visual content, case studies and general discussions. Students participate in group and individual assignments and practical project developments and implementations. The learning outcomes, methodologies and study methods are made clear to students from the outset. The Panel views these study methodologies as aligned with international academic standards and considers them appropriate to enable students to meet intended learning outcomes.

The library is a high-quality study environment, which provides a variety of different spaces that enable students to study individually and in groups



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

The VMU Disability Policy ensures increased accessibility for students with disabilities. During the field visit, the Panel noted that the faculty building is wheelchair-accessible. The top floor, i.e., the 'balcony' of the library is not wheelchair accessible, but other areas are. Learning facilities therefore largely ensure access to study for students with disabilities. Furthermore, they are provided with an individualised study schedule, which takes their needs into account. These schedules are regulated by the VMU 'Description of the Procedure for Providing Individual Study Schedule'. There is also a disability coordinator.

Socially vulnerable groups receive discounts for tuition or dormitory fees and are provided with scholarships.

The Panel considers the needs of vulnerable groups and students with special needs to be well-secured in the programme.

### *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 learning progress is regulated by VMU Study Regulations and the 'Description of the Procedure of Monitoring of Student Learning Achievements and Providing Assistance to Students'. Following the first assessment, students with the lowest grades receive individualised assistance. Those with sufficient and justifiable reasons, i.e., personal extenuating circumstances, may have their exams postponed.

Students are provided with constant feedback from teachers and are able to communicate with them during office hours and via email communication. The methods of assessment are in line with the study material and methods. Students are provided with ample support to meet learning outcomes and conclude their studies successfully.

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

The programme is graduating students with a variety of skills needed to work in the heritage field in Lithuania (Kaunas in particular). More than half of the students who finish the programme are employed in the heritage field and social partners interviewed confirmed the employability of students who graduate from the field.

The Panel suggests that the programme's staff consider the possibility of adding more international context, which would provide students with better opportunities to work outside Lithuania, as well as inform the work of the graduates working in Lithuania with the understanding of global issues and practices, which will ultimately benefit the national heritage and tourism sector(s).

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

Academic integrity, tolerance and non-discrimination are ensured through the Code of Ethics of VMU, The Plagiarism Prevention Procedures of VMU and VMU Study Regulations. The Code of Ethics of VMU regulates non-discrimination measures. There is also a VMU Gender Equality plan to ensure gender equality and balance. The Code of Ethics is valid for both staff and students, ensuring equal rights and opportunities. VMU Provisions on Prevention of Plagiarism identifies types of plagiarism and outlines methods of determining plagiarism and consideration procedures. The University's Academic Ethics Commission makes final decisions on academic integrity.

The ethics, academic integrity and tolerance codes are presented to students at the beginning of their studies and they are reminded of the principles and rules before each assessment or examination. The programme also uses plagiarism checkers to ensure that no plagiarism has taken place.

These procedures are adequately implemented and made clear to students and staff.

### *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 appeals procedures for complaints and appeals are monitored by the VMU Regulations for Submission of Appeals Regarding Evaluation of Learning Outcomes and/or Assessment Procedure, Provisions on Prevention of Plagiarism of VMU and VMU Study Regulations. Students are able to make appeals to the commission five working days after the evaluation is published. The commission consists of at least four members, three of whom are teachers and one of whom is a student representative. The commission has five working days to come to a conclusion. The procedure is clearly laid out in the relevant documentation and follows international academic standards.

### ***Strengths and weaknesses of this evaluation area:***

#### ***(1) Strengths:***

1. Study methods combine theory and practice in an effective way, enabling students to meet learning outcomes (although as mentioned, the theory requires updating and expansion).
2. The programme prepares students well to work in the heritage field (and tourism) in Lithuania and, in particular, Kaunas. The employability of students graduating from the programme was verified by social partners during the interview with the Panel. A high number of students work in the CHT fields.

## **(2) Weaknesses:**

1. Considering the number of students who work along with their studies, it is a disadvantage that students are not being offered more distance learning or evening classes. More flexible schedules and study methods could be considered.
2. The programme could consider providing a more international dimension to the study programme, increasing employability outside Lithuania and informing the work of graduates working at local and national levels with global understanding.

### **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 number of teaching staff is adequate for appropriate delivery of the programme and their levels of professional engagement with, and achievement within, the cultural heritage and tourism sector(s) are impressive and help inform the curriculum in terms of vocational relevance. With few exceptions, it is evident that teaching staff are not engaged with key contemporary debates in, and fora and outlets for, cultural heritage and tourism studies at the international level. It is important to cultivate the aspiration to present at key conferences, e.g., Association of Critical Heritage Studies, Memory Studies Association, Critical Tourism Studies, and to publish monographs with international publishers, and papers in key journals, e.g., *International Journal of Heritage Studies*, *Heritage & Society*, *Tourism Geographies* etc.

It is also necessary to have more guest lectures/seminars/workshops, especially in the heritage field for exposure to international ideas, debates and practice and to bridge between national interests and international practices of heritage science.

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

Structured arrangements for staff academic mobility are in place through Erasmus+ and encouragement to take advantage of national-level opportunities for international mobility. This should be fostered, ideally through targeting key hosts with centres of international excellence in areas of relevance to the programme, in order to develop staff engagement with the international field and subsequently to inform pedagogy and the curriculum. The Panel notes the limited number of incoming staff from other countries acknowledged both in the SER and the site visit and encourages administrators to identify ways to rectify this in order to enrich the research environment at VMU and foster collaboration and knowledge exchange. The opportunities for staff and students to engage with high-level figures like William Kentridge, Nicolas Bourriaud, Marina Abramović etc. are correctly identified, but clearly, these opportunities are tied to Kaunas Capital of Culture and therefore will not be easy to repeat.

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

Staff are encouraged to take up training opportunities at national and international levels, e.g., in connection with education, cultural heritage practice and EU Funding. This is a strength. However, it is not evident that there are sufficient provisions for staff to undertake paid research leave in order to build academic profiles and expertise. This should be implemented in order to raise the level of scholarship, contribute to the research environment, and inform the curriculum.

#### ***Strengths and weaknesses of this evaluation area:***

##### ***(1) Strengths:***

1. The number of teaching staff is sufficient and their credentials within the field of heritage practice are impressive.
2. Staff are encouraged to take up training opportunities at national and international levels, e.g., in connection with education, cultural heritage practice and EU Funding.
3. Staff mobility opportunities are structured and encouraged.

##### ***(2) Weaknesses:***

1. Teachers do not typically engage with and participate in current critical debates at the international level, including through publications in key international outlets and contributions at key conferences in the field(s).
2. There is limited provision for staff to take time away from teaching in order to build their research projects, expertise and profiles.
3. There are few opportunities for visiting academics to enrich the curriculum.

## **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 study premises for the courses of the programme are in the Faculty of Arts building in Kaunas Old City. The building is newly renovated and accessibility upgraded to align with current standards. The rooms have an internet connection and the necessary equipment for virtual learning environments and communication systems. Informal meetings can take place in lobbies, the lunchroom, and the inner yard. There are also additional premises at VMU: an art gallery, theatre, Grand Hall, Small Hall and Botanical Garden. The faculty building has a sufficient number of lecture rooms and provides computer access and other specialised equipment as needed.

The recently-built VMU Library offers additional high-quality study premises, with individual and group work rooms, workplaces for visitors with disabilities, discussion spaces and recreation areas. Information about the available collections is available through the library website, electronic catalogues, in the virtual library, and in the institutional Research Management System VMU CRIS. The University has access to notable e-resources, even in the field of heritage, and uses 62 databases, including heritage-related ones. In this regard, the situation seems sufficient, especially if the supply of key works of cultural heritage research, new research and paper publications are increased.

The programme uses up-to-date hardware and software equipment. Virtual collaboration systems are used for distant studies. The operating systems of the server and data storage are kept updated. VMU IT infrastructure operates in Lithuanian and English.

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

The selection of physical programme literature mainly includes course textbooks. The supply of other key works, newly-published books, or paper publications in the field of heritage research was modest.

The opportunities to use in teaching the studio's filming equipment and other technology are good. Referring to the plainly text-based theses on display for the Panel, it remained unclear how they are utilised in practice.

#### ***Strengths and weaknesses of this evaluation area:***

##### ***(1) Strengths:***

1. There are high-quality study premises with modern facilities, computer rooms, and a library.

##### ***(2) Weaknesses:***

1. There is a need to expand the printed resources available at the library within the CHT field.

## **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*

The internal quality assurance system of the studies is well-established. The whole mechanism is well-articulated and clear.

A Committee is in place with responsibility for 'preparing and implementing the programme quality improvement plans and assuring correspondence of the programme learning outcomes to the labour market and society needs'. While VMU states that the Committee 'consists of the representatives of all stakeholders and top-level specialists and practitioners of the field', the Panel ascertained that the Committee almost entirely consists of VMU staff and alumni. Bearing in mind the significance of the Committee's role in shaping the strategy of the studies, while the panel recognises the benefits this brings in terms of detailed understanding of the programme and the relevant sectoral positions held by alumni, it is nevertheless recommended as a point for improvement that VMU recruit independent professionals from the heritage and tourism sectors to contribute to the Committee.

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

The university involves stakeholders (students, alumni, and social partners) in internal quality assurance. VMU emphasises stakeholders' role in providing expertise on study subjects which is crucial for the improvement of the studies. Their feedback is mainly collected via different online surveys and later analysed by the Committee, teachers and other members of the administration. Most social partner organisations contribute by accepting students for internships and often hire them afterwards. The Faculty of Arts claims it has signed 30 cooperation agreements with different social partners. Nevertheless, it was learned that only 5 of them are acting in the study field - other organisations are not directly associated with heritage safeguarding or the tourism industry. It must be noted that the Faculty has no formal partnership agreements with key actors in the Lithuanian heritage safeguarding and tourism system, namely Cultural Heritage Department, National Cultural Heritage Commission, Ministry of Culture, Lithuanian National Commission for UNESCO, PI Travel in Lithuania, Lithuanian Tourism Association etc. This could be seen as a shortcoming and an area for possible improvement.

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

VMU states that it applies various formal and informal methods of collecting information about the studies (surveys, stakeholder discussions, statistical data etc). Collected data is regularly analysed, published and used to improve the quality of studies. However, it seems this mechanism is mainly reliant on two regular student feedback surveys: *The survey of the graduates of studies (EXIT) about the studies, final theses, and the preparation for the labour market* conducted by the VMU at the end of the studies and *The teaching and learning evaluation surveys* conducted at the end of each semester (SER, p. 74-75). Yet, as the SER suggests, these two surveys are not representative because of low participant numbers. Nevertheless, an improvement within this mechanism is expected as the Faculty has highlighted this issue to VMU (SER p. 79).

Judging by some cases which were presented to the Panel, the management of studies is flexible and adjustable, for example, in relation to rescheduling times of the lectures.

#### *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 field students as well as alumni held positive opinions about the quality of the studies. During the meetings, current and former students expressed their general satisfaction with the skills and knowledge provided by the VMU. Many of them emphasised that their qualifications acquired in this study programme met the requirements of the local labour market. These outcomes match with the statements in the SER based on *The survey of the graduates of studies (EXIT) about the studies, final theses, and the preparation for the labour market* conducted by the VMU at the end of the studies and *The teaching and learning evaluation surveys* conducted at the end of each semester. However, during the meetings, some respondents indicated study areas that could be improved, notably, limited access to financial support and lack of international cooperation.

#### ***Strengths and weaknesses of this evaluation area:***

##### ***(1) Strengths:***

1. The engagement of the alumni as social partners is effective.
2. Graduates are - overall - highly satisfied with the studies.
3. There is a flexible adaptation to students' needs.

##### ***(2) Weaknesses:***

1. There is no involvement of external experts in the study of quality management and improvement mechanisms.
2. No signed partnership agreements exist with key actors in the Lithuanian heritage safeguarding and tourism system.



## IV. RECOMMENDATIONS

Evaluation Area	Recommendations for the Evaluation Area (study cycle)
Intended and achieved learning outcomes and curriculum	<p>The global coverage of the programme should be extended to comprehend further international dimensions of heritage and tourism, beyond the basic contextualisation of the national level. This should be allied to wider engagement with contemporary international debates in critical heritage studies, critical tourism studies, museology, and memory studies.</p> <p>The thesis component of the programme should be reviewed to ensure that projects are coherent, scholarly and sufficiently extensive, with appropriate critical underpinnings even where the research is applied.</p>
Links between science (art) and studies	<p>CHT should review and strengthen the linkage between research and studies taking into consideration the international research field. Within the chosen research cluster of the Programme, strong analytical attention to the linkage between heritage and tourism should be included in studies. Particularly, the impacts of touristic dominance of heritage identification, assessment, use and interpretations as well as the potential for tensions should be analysed. Creating a more comprehensive theoretical base using upgraded literature and other scientific sources, and study-related exercises to work on topics in foreign languages would improve students' opportunities to participate in networks and projects as well as to create scientific careers at the international level.</p>
Student admission and support	<p>The Faculty should identify means to make the programme more international, e.g., inviting international guest lecturers, enabling teachers to gain international experience, and providing more opportunities for student mobility.</p>
Teaching and learning, student performance and graduate employment	<p>More flexible schedules and study methods should be put in place to accommodate the working patterns of students, for example with more distance learning and/or evening classes. The incorporation of an international dimension into the study programme should be allied to a greater emphasis on employability prospects outside of Lithuania, as well as to increase the employability of graduates working at local and national levels through providing wider global contextual understandings.</p>
Teaching staff	<p>Measures should be taken to raise international visibility and engagement of academic staff, e.g., through structured opportunities for mobility, academic leave to undertake sustained research, and encouragement to contribute to key international outlets (through conference and journal publications and book publications).</p>



<p>Learning facilities and resources</p>	<p>The supply of key works, newly-published books, and paper publications in the field of heritage research should be ensured. The available IT equipment at VMU may offer more opportunities for elaborating and summarising information graphically and visually, provided that the teaching of these skills is included in the studies.</p>
<p>Study quality management and public information</p>	<p>Measures should be taken to engage the key actors of the Lithuanian heritage safeguarding and tourism system in study quality management, improvement and other activities, e.g., through making social partnership agreements.</p>

## V. SUMMARY

The expert panel extends thanks to the VMU staff for the organisation of the site visit and engagement in discussions.

The second-cycle Cultural Heritage and Tourism programme is an efficient vehicle for preparing students for operational-level activity within the national context of Lithuania. It contains many key elements for students to develop the necessary competencies. The provision of the tourist guide certification on completion of the programme is advantageous to graduates and fits well with the sector employment orientation. CHT is well positioned in Lithuania (vis-à-vis other programmes) to equip students with skills and knowledge that can be deployed in both public and private sectors within the heritage and tourism fields.

Students and graduates appreciate the learning and support they receive throughout the programme, and their professional readiness is verified by social partners (themselves often alumni), who play an important role in the development of the programme. CHT students benefit from appropriate levels of support and some high-quality facilities, including the library. It is evident that many students work, and the Panel found that flexibility in accommodating students' work-life needs has been given due consideration, but that this good practice could be further enhanced. It is clear that many of the teachers are committed to providing a high-quality student experience, and the students with whom the Panel spoke were enthusiastic champions of the programme.

The national and operational focus of the programme is at once a strength (in providing a relatively tightly defined scope and a thorough preparation for the local job market) and its weakness. Engagement with global and theoretical/conceptual issues are linked, for a greater engagement with global debates and heritage/tourism issues in other locations around the world would lead to an increase in exposure to critical and theoretical debates (two obvious examples are the longstanding global debates about the nature of 'authenticity', and global disparities in representation on heritage lists). Furthermore, as a result of an expanded global focus, graduates may develop an ambition for international mobility. Those students who remain in Lithuania to pursue their careers will be able to deploy more international insights and contextual understandings in-country, ultimately enriching the national heritage and tourism sector. In short, there is a clear need to develop further engagement with theoretical, conceptual, critical and political heritage and tourism issues, with wider global exposure. This need not detract from the national focus, and will in fact enhance it. Notwithstanding the dominant national focus of the programme, the Panel found that some key actors/institutions within the heritage sector - both locally in Kaunas and nationally - are not engaged as social partners.

The independent research undertaken by students for their theses did not appear to be commensurate with national and international standards: the theses seen by the Panel were markedly short, did not seem to be characterised by critical research questions and approaches, and largely did not refer to sufficient literature. This too could be remedied by greater

engagement with conceptual, theoretical and political dimensions of heritage and tourism and by closely binding this into structured supervision and assessment processes for the thesis.

Broadening the global scope of the programme and deepening the theoretical, critical and political understandings of heritage and tourism should be allied to the development of the research environment within the field at VMU. As part of this, mechanisms should be identified to allow teaching staff to undertake sustained pieces of research that increase their international standing. Where possible, staff mobility should be enabled, in order to engage with and participate in key international fora for critical heritage, tourism and memory studies which have become 'where the action is' within the field, e.g., the Association of Critical Heritage Studies biennial conference, the Memory Studies Association conference, etc. Such increased scholarly extroversion will positively inform teaching and contribute to the development of research culture in the field at VMU. This could be further enhanced by enabling incoming staff mobility, for example through more structured mechanisms for inviting visiting scholars and incorporating their perspectives in ways that benefit the pedagogy and student experience. Such activity would help to develop the international reputation of VMU in heritage and tourism, potentially building the attractiveness of the programme to international students. Current students noted that, in their view, an international cohort would enliven the learning experience by providing cross-cultural perspectives and promoting intercultural engagement. At present, this opportunity is disabled by obstacles such as a lack of information in English on the website and the limited international reputation and focus of the programme and staff research portfolio.

The Panel appreciates the depth of change implicated in the above suggestions. However, the high-quality features of the programme and facilities, the commitment of teachers, and the positive experiences of students constitute a solid basis for development with the potential to significantly increase the quality of teaching and learning, research and the research environment, and international standing and reputation in the CHT fields.

Expert panel chairperson signature:

A handwritten signature in blue ink on a white background, enclosed in a white rectangular box. The signature appears to be 'C. W.' followed by a flourish.