



STUDIJŲ KOKYBĖS VERTINIMO CENTRAS

Vytauto Didžiojo universiteto
**STUDIJŲ PROGRAMOS SKANDINAVIJOS IR BALTIJOS ŠALIŲ
STUDIJOS** (*valstybinis kodas – 621L20006*)
VERTINIMO IŠVADOS

**EVALUATION REPORT
OF SCANDINAVIAN AND BALTIC STUDIES** (*state code –
621L20006*)
STUDY PROGRAMME
at Vytautas Magnus University

Experts' team:

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Išvados parengtos anglų kalba
Report language – English

DUOMENYS APIE ĮVERTINTĄ PROGRAMĄ

| | |
|--|---|
| Studijų programos pavadinimas | <i>Skandinavijos ir Baltijos šalių studijos</i> |
| Valstybinis kodas | 621L20006 |
| Studijų sritis | Socialiniai mokslai |
| Studijų kryptis | Politikos mokslai |
| Studijų programos rūšis | Universitetinės studijos |
| Studijų pakopa | Antroji |
| Studijų forma (trukmė metais) | Nuolatinė (1.5) |
| Studijų programos apimtis kreditais | 90 |
| Suteikiamas laipsnis ir (ar) profesinė kvalifikacija | Politikos mokslų magistras |
| Studijų programos įregistravimo data | 2004 08 01, 2006 04 04 |

INFORMATION ON EVALUATED STUDY PROGRAMME

| | |
|---|--|
| Title of the study programme | <i>Scandinavian and Baltic Studies</i> |
| State code | 621L20006 |
| Study area | Social Sciences |
| Study field | Political Science |
| Type of the study programme | University studies |
| Study cycle | Second |
| Study mode (length in years) | Full-time (1.5) |
| Volume of the study programme in credits | 90 |
| Degree and (or) professional qualifications awarded | Master of Political Science |
| Date of registration of the study programme | 2004 08 01, 2006 04 04 |

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The Centre for Quality Assessment in Higher Education

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I. INTRODUCTION

1.1. Background of the evaluation process

The evaluation of on-going study programmes is based on the **Methodology for evaluation of Higher Education study programmes**, approved by Order No 1-01-162 of 20 December 2010 of the Director of the Centre for Quality Assessment in Higher Education (hereafter – SKVC).

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

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

On the basis of external evaluation report of the study programme SKVC takes a decision to accredit study programme either for 6 years or for 3 years. If the programme evaluation is negative such a programme is not accredited.

The programme is **accredited for 6 years** if all evaluation areas are evaluated as “very good” (4 points) or “good” (3 points).

The programme is **accredited for 3 years** if none of the areas was evaluated as “unsatisfactory” (1 point) and at least one evaluation area was evaluated as “satisfactory” (2 points).

The programme is **not accredited** if at least one of evaluation areas was evaluated as "unsatisfactory" (1 point).

1.2. General

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

| No. | Name of the document |
|-----|--|
| 1 | The number of students admitted to year 1 in autumn 2016 |

1.3. Background of the HEI/Faculty/Study field/ Additional information

Vytautas Magnus University (hereinafter VMU) was re-established in 1989 and is a classical university of Liberal Arts based on the common beliefs and values of freedom, openness and dialogue, and orientated towards humanistic culture. The Faculty of Political Science and Diplomacy is one of the largest faculties of VMU. It consists of 5 departments and 2 research

centres. The faculty offers 6 bachelor degrees, 10 master degrees and a doctoral programme in the areas of political science, public administration and communication. The *Scandinavian and Baltic Region Studies MA Programme* is taught at VMU at the Department of Regional Studies of the Faculty of Political Science and Diplomacy. It was introduced as *Baltic Region Studies* taught in English in 2004. In the beginning, it was conceived as a part of Baltic Studies Programmes offered by a consortium of universities in Tartu, Riga and Turku with a common MA degree. Cooperation also existed with universities in Gdansk, Copenhagen and Humboldt University. Since then, the programme has been modified several times. The evaluation in 2013 recommended clarifications as to the spatial framework and to the student groups addressed (whether national or international) and recommended an accreditation for three years.

Currently, *Scandinavian and Baltic Region Studies* are taught as a three-semester-program, which has been opened every second year (2011, 2013, 2015). The number of enrolled students (9 in 2013, 6 in 2015) largely depends on the number of state funded scholarships.

The review team was very much impressed by the hospitality and the friendly atmosphere at VMU and in particular by the responsiveness and cooperation of the staff.

1.4. The Review Team

The review team was completed according *Description of experts' recruitment*, approved by order No. 1-01-151 of Acting Director of the Centre for Quality Assessment in Higher Education. The Review Visit to HEI was conducted by the team on 16-17/11/2016.

- 1. Prof. Dr. Jörg Hackmann (team leader)** *Alfred Döblin Professor of East European History at the Institute of History and International Relations, University of Szczecin, Poland.*
- 2. Dr. Martin Hallik**, *Library Director, former Vice Rector for Academic Affairs, former Associate Professor of Contemporary History of Asian Countries at the University of Tartu, Estonia.*
- 3. Prof. Dr. Petra Schleiter**, *Professor of Comparative Politics at the Department of Politics and International Relations, St Hilda's College, University of Oxford, Great Britain.*
- 4. Ms Rūta Avulytė Jelagė**, *Executive Director, National Non-governmental Development Cooperation Organizations' Platform (NGDO PLATFORM), Lithuania.*
- 5. Ms Vitalija Viluckytė**, *student of Vilnius University Centre of Oriental Studies study programme Asian Studies.*

II. PROGRAMME ANALYSIS

2.1. Programme aims and learning outcomes

The review team noticed a significant change in the revised programme. Its new regional denomination *Scandinavian and Baltic Region Studies* essentially refers to the same spatial framework as the previous programme evaluated in 2013, but it avoids the inherent ambiguity of the term “Baltic”, which the review team criticised during the last evaluation.

The programme aims and learning outcomes of the Scandinavian and Baltic Region Studies programme are clearly defined, specifically broken down and appropriate for a Masters Level programme. The programme outline is publicly accessible through the AIKOS system – open information, consulting and guidance system, established by the Ministry of Education. Detailed information is also available on the VMU website.

The programme aims are based on academic requirements and public needs, first of all, but also include the labour market beyond academia and public service assuming that there is a constant need of regional experts with knowledge of the Nordic states and societies in particular. Given the fact that students increasingly look for job opportunities in the private sector, this should receive more attention within the programme.

The studies programme has a strong background in the VMU’s mission of supporting studies in liberal arts and the university’s internationalization strategy. Apart from that, it may be stated that there is also an interest in area studies of the Baltic Sea Region by the broader public.

The programme aims and learning outcomes are consistent with the type and level of the studies offered. The 1,5 year MA programme builds up on BA programmes in Political Science or studies of Scandinavian or Baltic Sea region Cultures, all taught at VMU. The Scandinavian and Baltic Region Studies programme shall provide competences in regional theories and languages, identity studies, historical context, modes of conflict and cooperation in Northern Europe. As such the programme takes a unique position within Lithuania with an area studies approach towards the Baltic Sea region.

In distinction to the previous concept the programme now addresses students from Lithuania first of all, which is consistent with the programme aims. The programme is no longer taught in English, but in Lithuanian, although the staff members responsible for the programme explained that courses may also be taught in English, if foreign students without Lithuanian language knowledge enrol into the programme.

2.2. Curriculum design

The curriculum design meets the legal requirements for a MA programme (90 ECTS points, 30 of them dedicated to the MA thesis), and the content of the subjects and modules is consistent with type and level of the studies programme. The existence of a VMU Code of Academic Ethics is especially remarkable, as it shows the intention of VMU to make the study process honest and transparent in all programmes. The course programme has been significantly revised since 2013, it now consists of eight compulsory courses and two elective ones. Mandatory courses comprise general topics of International Relations and politics in the Baltic Sea region. Besides two courses of a North European language are compulsory. Elective courses can be chosen out of eight offers, including topics from political science, history and economy. An internship and academic writing are also offered as elective. The heavy emphasis on compulsory courses seems to be due to the small number of students, implying that the options are rather limited by the fact that most of the students have to make the same choice. Course subjects are spread evenly and are not repetitive. Alumni and students, however, expressed the wish to learn more on economy, as already addressed in the previous evaluations. Together with the repeated request for more practical skills, a stronger emphasis on economy might also meet career strategies of the students of finding jobs in the private sector.

The scope of the programme is sufficient to ensure the learning outcomes. The range of courses offered provides a solid basis for the writing of a master thesis as an independent scientific project. However, due to the reduction to a 1,5 year programme there is no research course offered, where students could develop on projects for a master thesis. As neither a term paper is to be written, it might be considered in future to introduce either a compulsory research course or a term paper.

The contents of the programme widely reflect the latest scholarly achievements and are also capable of discussing recent changes in the Baltic Sea region (increasing relevance of security and geopolitics). Offered language courses comprise – only, one might say – Finnish, Norwegian, Swedish. The limited range of choices was explained by the limitations within the Institute of Foreign Languages, although other Languages from the Baltic Sea region as Danish or Estonian are taught there as well. One may also discuss, how much language knowledge may be achieved within two semesters, but as the studies programme is not a philological one, its place within the curriculum is fully acceptable. However, the review team would suggest that the online programme description could mention that language courses offer only basic knowledge without previous or continued learning.

According to the SER (p. 11), “the program objectives and learning outcomes are regularly updated taking into consideration recent research on cooperation, identity and integration in the

North European region”. From the materials provided, almost all courses refer to recent literature, and show thus a clear improvement compared to the last evaluation report. The internship is offered as an elective subject. Although students often refer to a lack of practice, it seems that they agree with his situation, as they are usually working besides their studies, so that compulsory internships potentially conflict with their jobs during their study programme. If an internship is chosen by the student, it includes supervision by the teaching staff and a report and presentation by the student.

2.3. Teaching staff

The staff teaching on the Scandinavian and Baltic Region Studies programme meets the legal requirements, and their qualifications are adequate to ensure the learning outcomes. The degrees held by the teaching staff are well above the required threshold. Some of the faculty members also have experiences of working as national policy advisers, which is obviously useful for maintaining ties with social partners and for developing job opportunities for the graduates.

Currently the teaching staff at the Department of Regional Studies consist of 3 full-time and 5 part-time members. All in all, 6 professors, 3 associated professors, and 4 assistant professors with PhD degrees, partly from other departments of the Faculty of Political Science and Diplomacy, partly from other Faculties, are assigned to the programme. Such a cross-use of teaching staff between different faculties is well advanced at VMU and ensures that teaching responsibilities match with research focuses. With an average teaching experience of 10 years, there is a good balance of senior and junior staff members. Thus, the staff is adequate to run the programme and this marks a significant improvement compared to 2013. Besides, language courses are held by the Institute of Foreign Languages of VMU. The teaching staff is involved in research directly related to the study programme. After the programme changes made three years ago, there has been no major staff turnover, which is a good thing regarding the stabilization of the programme. Three staff members have advanced in their academic career since 2013, according to the materials provided.

Furthermore, about 50 per cent of teaching staff in the Scandinavian and Baltic Studies programme has participated in teaching exchanges since 2013, most of them several times. Incoming international teaching staff, however, was seemingly limited. In that respect, the recommendation from the previous evaluation to “develop more research cooperation with the BSR study programmes abroad and with the relevant think tanks world-wide” could be repeated. But given that the cooperation structures developed since the 1990 have significantly changed in recent years, this situation may be understood a temporary phenomenon within the Baltic Sea region, which the programme committee is aware of.

Most researchers have a good level of productivity, some are outstandingly productive, which is an admirable achievement given the heavy teaching loads. At the same time, only a smaller part of the research outputs produced by the team is placed in journals and book publications published outside of Lithuania. However, there seems to be an improvement compared to the previous evaluation.

VMU is interested in providing good conditions for the professional development of the teaching staff, although the observation from the last evaluation report that the general teaching workload seems to be relatively high (12-18 hours/week) has not changed. This situation definitely limits the staff's research ambitions and opportunities and should be altered by the VMU in future. As supporting researchers to produce high quality research that can be placed in internationally recognized journals is essential to their professional progression and to the reputation of the programme, it should be an important goal for the department.

The university recognizes the problem to a degree and has recently created research clusters, which receive a modest amount of funding. Besides, a "Northern European and Baltic Study Hive" has been launched. These are steps in the right direction, but efforts to support research should be strengthened. To deliver research-driven teaching, staff could be enabled to attend the most important international conferences in their field regularly (i.e., annually). At present major international conferences are only attended by some of academics in the department and the university could consider introducing a personal research allowance for each researcher. Similarly, only a minority of researchers hold personal research grants, and as a leading University in Lithuania, VMU should aspire to greater success in this area. The university could consider introducing a fund for pump-priming research funding (i.e., seed funding), which should be made available to VMU researchers on a competitive basis, possibly via the research clusters or some other mechanism. Small pump-priming grants should be used to fund proof-of-concept and pilot research projects that will serve to launch much larger bids for national or international research grants. If it is well managed, pump-priming funding will repay the initial investment in terms of research overheads many times over.

2.4. Facilities and learning resources

The department is located in a brand new, purpose-built building of excellent quality. According to the self-evaluation report there are 75 classrooms, several large lecture halls with the latest projection equipment, and large seminar rooms. Wi-Fi is available in the main public areas. The buildings also offer spaces for group work. There are IT laboratory spaces, silent and non-silent work areas, a recreational space for table tennis and some vending machines. The lecture halls and their technical equipment are of high standard.

Some activities also take place in several other buildings. They and the facilities for language learning were not inspected by the evaluation team, as language courses in this programme are provided by other branches of VMU.

In general, library facilities are sufficient for the successful implementation of the study programme. The review team had the impression that space for group work could be enlarged and loud zones set up. The library offers a good range of electronic resources including e-journals and e-books. The SER, however, states that reference materials at the Department of Regional Studies are “occasionally updated with new textbooks and journals”, which implies that there still is a lack of copies of relevant textbooks. The amount of available research literature in different languages of the Baltic Sea Region is limited as well and should be improved. As with many other universities, VMU seemingly tries to compensate this deficit with a broad access to online databases, which allow the students to read research literature (in English, first of all) and to get access to relevant sources. Nevertheless, the general question remains, how competent students are to efficiently use the academic databases. Therefore, the review team would note the necessity of making students familiar with reading books and not only compiling materials from online databases.

2.5. Study process and students' performance assessment

The Scandinavian and Baltic Studies MA programme has been facing a challenge of declining student numbers due to demographic trends in Lithuania, combined with increased competition for state funding both country-wide for social sciences and among MA programmes in the faculty. Effectively, in years 2012, 2014 and 2016 there was no student intake (in year 2014 the 3 admitted students were transferred to other study programmes). Numbers of students' application have even increased from 2013 to 2015, but the numbers of state funded students dropped from 8 to 5.

The department is considering programme rotation (for instance, admitting students every second year). Information about the planned admissions should be given in as predictable manner as possible, to provide a clear message to programme stakeholders and particularly to students who are planning their further study options.

The admissions requirements are reasonable as a bachelor degree in social sciences or humanities (alternatively, bachelor and 30 ECTS credits in social sciences and humanities) and a good command of English is required. The review team noted, however, that there is a mismatch with the information on the university webpage, as there it is indicated that 20 credits in social sciences and humanities are required, it should be revised [<http://www.vdu.lt/lt/study/program/detailed/248/>].

The quality of the students admitted to the programme seems high on average (7.9 competition points in 2015), though individual students are significantly weaker (lowest level of a student admitted was just 5.1 competition points). Funding is a major concern for students, and for the department it represents a central constraint in efforts to expand the programme. The majority of the students on this programme report that they work at the same time as studying for a full time degree. The university could make efforts to fundraise for graduate studentships from its alumni network, social partners, and other donors.

The organisation of the study process ensures an adequate provision of the programme and the achievement of the learning outcomes. Courses are usually offered in the afternoon, since MA students usually work during the day to secure their living costs. Students felt well supported and were very keen to impress on the review team that they valued the openness of staff and the fact they were regularly accessible. Students indicated that studies also involve such study methods as presentations, group work, and simulation games which they found especially useful. According to the Student Opinion Survey 2016, students agree that professors present them with practical tasks that demand creativity and independent thinking. The department might wish to consider putting even greater emphasis on practice-oriented assignments as a method to assess students' progress and performance. The students had 2-3 courses that changed to English as language of instruction, due to the participation of exchange students. Although students accepted such changes, programme changes should be communicated by the Department clearly and in due time.

Student-teacher ratios are excellent, and students, the social partners and the programme representatives during the visit were evidently committed to the program. The students and the alumni took interest in the programme due to the economic and political cooperation connections as well as increasing security concerns of the region; the social partners noted the factor of Lithuanian emigrant flows to Scandinavian region and emphasised that this is the only programme in the country with an area studies approach towards the Baltic Sea region; it appears that there is a clear demand for such a programme.

Currently the internship is included in the programme as optional (6 ECTS credits, along with other elective courses). The department indicated that students were surveyed, and it turned out that they differed in their views regarding the internship scheme. Thus, one may argue that the current optional internship appears appropriate. Internships increase job placement success, and the option of making the internship scheme mandatory should be kept under review. Students should be helped by the department to find appropriate internships. This should not be difficult to achieve since the department can draw on its impressive range of contacts to the world of public administration and politics and on its social partners to support student

placements on such a scheme. In any case, students should be provided with better information and more flexibility to take advantage of the internship option. Erasmus+ internships are available and a student from the latest students' intake has used it.

Student mobility programmes (Erasmus and bilateral agreements) are available; there are partner universities in the programme target region of Nordic countries and Baltic countries, as well as some neighbouring countries of this region. Students have used mobility opportunities during the evaluation period quite well, but the mobility of the most recent student intake was low, one of the reasons being that many students are working. The students mentioned that there was a case when from the exchange opportunities in the Scandinavian region, only Norway was available with appropriate study credits transfer – this region requires better coverage, especially considering that a selection of Scandinavian languages is one of the focuses of the programme. All in all only 3 students have taken part in exchange programmes since 2013, whereas numbers were much higher in the years before.

Students have opportunities to participate in related academic and extracurricular activities. The current students have participated in such events as conferences on security, Russia Forum organised by NATO, and have joined Nordic club to organise cultural events. Representatives from Nordic embassies come to the university to give guest lectures. This practise could be extended to other social partners.

The assessment system of students' performance is clear, adequate and publicly available. Students were very clear about what they needed to do to succeed and about their assessment schedule. Thesis writing experience is generally positive; students are mostly happy with thesis consultations (Student Opinion Survey 2016), alumni enjoyed the flexibility in selecting the topic. However, the students felt insecure about the thesis expectations, and some would prefer more research papers writing experience to be better prepared for thesis; while alumni mentioned that methodological preparation could be further strengthened. It is suggested that the department ensures more timely information during the study process, including clear and timely information about thesis requirements and thesis methodology (it would be advisable before the 3rd semester).

According to the SER, Graduates Survey 2013 shows that most of the respondents were employed, the majority working in public (incl. Ministries) and private institutions, media, NGOs; one has become a PhD student. Alumni spoke highly of the benefit and skills the programme had imparted and the impact this had on their employment. The professional activities of the majority of graduates meet the programme providers' expectations.

2.6. Programme management

The programme was introduced in 2004 and was already evaluated by international experts in 2007 and 2013. Introduced changes, although partly differing from the recommendations of 2013, show a clear improvement to the programme based on the demographic and financial situation in Lithuania.

Responsibilities for programme decisions, monitoring and implementation are clearly allocated. Regular internal and external procedures are in place for the programme's review, monitoring, quality assurance and implementation. These assessments are effective and efficient and ensure that data is regularly compiled on the implementation of the MA. The self-evaluation document, staff and student feedback made clear that the department uses the conclusions of such reviews to improve the programme.

Social partners are expected to regularly contribute to this programme with examining theses, providing internships, contributing to joint conferences and public lectures, and serving on the programme committee. The Lithuanian Ministry of Foreign Affairs as well as the Norwegian Embassy are as prominent social partner currently actively participating in these processes. Representatives of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs regularly give lectures for the students. Furthermore, meetings of graduates from different classes are organized annually.

Students could additionally benefit if more social partners would be used as lecturers and advisers to final thesis or/and course papers. Social partners could also be more close involved in the curriculum design and through surveys into the programme assessment. Furthermore, fundraising to establish specific scholarships would be a boost to the programme.

The SER describes the formal procedures of quality ensuring, but the review team had the impression that besides standardized measurements direct communication between the Programme Committee, students, academic staff and social partners plays an important role, which is understandable due to the small number of the students and close personal ties between all persons involved in the programme.

The programme's alumni are generally very employable. Although there are meetings organised by the Faculty Alumni association, alumni do not tend to be very involved with the programme after graduation. The department should consider supporting the alumni network more closely and involving them in mentorship programmes for the current students. This would have a range of benefits for current students, alumni, and for the department. It would help alumni to develop their professional networks. It would also enable the alumni to remain engaged with the department. This may lead to opportunities to develop new internships; it would allow the alumni to become a source of advice and guidance to current students. Ultimately, the alumni should also become part of the donor base of the University.

2.7. Examples of excellence

The new faculty premises are exceptional. The building is modern and equipped with the latest IT and lecturing facilities. It offers a good number of work spaces for students and academics, seminar rooms and lecture theatres.

The relationship between students and teachers is outstanding. Students generally commented that the academic staff are very approachable and responsive.

The programme has strong and very productive relationships with high-profile social partners.

Existence of a Code of Academic Ethics at VMU is especially remarkable.

III. RECOMMENDATIONS

1. **Programme Aims:** Given the ambition of the programme and the expectations of the students, the placement of graduates, who don't aim at an academic career, in the private sector could receive more attention in shaping programme aims and could be also supported by practical assistance of VMU.
2. **Curriculum:** (i) More flexibility could be introduced in the choice of the language courses and their respective levels. (ii) The review team would recommend to introduce one research course or a term paper to better prepare students for the master thesis.
3. **Teaching staff:** (i) The department should attempt to revive previous cooperation with universities and research institutions in the Baltic Sea region and also put emphasis on internationalizing its staff, for instance with incoming exchange academics. (ii) The department is recommended to further strengthen its support for research driven teaching. The research clusters are welcome developments but more needs to be done and the department should consider the introduction of personal research allowance to which academics are contractually entitled. (iii) The department, jointly with the university, could also consider the introduction of seed funding for research projects. If it is well managed, such an investment in a fund for small pump-priming research grants will be repaid many times by the overheads from research grants that are won as a result of proof-of-concept and pilot studies which the research seed grants have enabled.
4. **Facilities and learning resources:** (i) The department is recommended to introduce a mechanism to ensure that reading lists are regularly updated and that reading lists make use of up to date journal articles and monographs. (ii) The faculty should continue in its efforts to increase library holdings of relevant textbooks.
5. **Study process:** (i) Decisions on the opening of the programme should be made on a predictable basis. This includes predictable decisions about state-funded places to the programme. (ii) Given the challenging funding situation facing students, the department could make fund-raising for graduate scholarships from its alumni, social partners, and donors one of its strategic priorities. (iii) Faculty and teaching staff might encourage more student mobility. Exchange opportunities with the Scandinavian should be re-introduced, also considering that a selection of Scandinavian languages is one of the focuses of the program. (iv) There is an unmet but slightly obscure request for more practice oriented work on the part of students. The review team recommends that the department could draft more specific student questionnaires and/or form student focus groups to explore what types of assignments/assessments the students have in mind.

These options could then be discussed with the teaching staff to determine how more practice oriented assignments/assessments can be introduced into the teaching.

6. **Programme management:** (i) The review team recommends that changes in the programme are communicated to the students on a clear basis. (ii) It could be explained more in detail which language learning outcome student may expect after two courses. (iii) The department could consider launching an alumni network and regular alumni reunions as well as a mentorship programme to engage the alumni more with the programme and with the department generally. This would benefit the department, current students and the alumni. (iv) A closer involvement of social partners in the curriculum design would help to keep the competence development of the students up-to-date.

IV. SUMMARY

The programme has seen a significant revision since the last evaluation, programme aims and learning outcomes are now coherent and clearly defined and fully appropriate for a Master Level programme. The curriculum's balance of core and options papers is well designed.

The review team understands that the reduction to 1.5 years programme has to be seen against the background of declining student numbers and the general financial situation of the university as well as the students.

The review team, however, has got the strong impression that the university / faculty leaders could give more emphasis and support to the MA programme reviewed. Currently the programme has been opened only in 2013 and 2015 with a number of admissions significantly below the number of applications.

Given that this programme is a core component of the university's internationalization strategy as well as of the focus on regional and area studies, the review team strongly recommends that the university guarantees the opening of the programme on a predictable and clearly communicated basis, if it cannot be offered annually.

The teaching staff are highly motivated experts in their areas. The student-staff ratios are excellent, and students generally see their teachers as very accessible. The relationship between students and teachers is outstanding. These are major strengths of the programme. The department and university value research-driven teaching. The review team, however, thinks that career development for the teaching staff should receive more attention. Research activities should be supported also beyond the research cluster structures recently introduced by VMU, grant seed money or personal research allowance could be considered.

The new faculty premises are exceptional. The brand-new building is equipped to the highest standards, which is a major asset for the programme. The department can further complement its competitive advantage in this area by improving library holdings.

The programme builds upon the international links of the department, but it seems that former strong ties to other higher education and research institutes have to be revived, so that students can benefit from them.

The programme has excellent links with a range of high-profile social partners who contribute to the programme by examining theses, providing internships, contributing to joint conferences and lectures and serving on the programme committee. This is a very considerable strength of the programme. The department can further strengthen its links with stakeholders by involving social partners more closely and launching an alumni network that actively engages alumni with the department in a manner that is similar to its excellent links with social partners.

The review team finally underlines that it was very much impressed by the hospitality and the friendly atmosphere at VMU and in particular by the responsiveness and cooperation of the staff. There seem to be no barriers between teachers and students, both are seemingly strongly committed to the studies programmes.

V. GENERAL ASSESSMENT

The study programme *Scandinavian and Baltic Studies* (state code – 621L20006) at Vytautas Magnus University is given **positive** evaluation.

Study programme assessment in points by evaluation areas.

| No. | Evaluation Area | Evaluation of an area in points* |
|-----|--|----------------------------------|
| 1. | Programme aims and learning outcomes | 3 |
| 2. | Curriculum design | 3 |
| 3. | Teaching staff | 3 |
| 4. | Facilities and learning resources | 3 |
| 5. | Study process and students' performance assessment | 3 |
| 6. | Programme management | 3 |
| | Total: | 18 |

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

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

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

4 (very good) - the field is exceptionally good.

| | |
|---------------------------------|---------------------------|
| Grupės vadovas: Team leader: | Prof. Dr. Jörg Hackmann |
| Grupės nariai: Team members: | Dr. Martin Hallik |
| | Prof. Dr. Petra Schleiter |
| | Ms Rūta Avulytė Jelagė |
| | Ms Vitalija Viluckytė |

**VYTAUTO DIDŽIOJO UNIVERSITETO ANTROSIOS PAKOPOS STUDIJŲ
PROGRAMOS *SKANDINAVIJOS IR BALTIJOS ŠALIŲ STUDIJOS* (VALSTYBINIS
KODAS – 621L20006) 2017-01-05 EKSPERTINIO VERTINIMO IŠVADŲ NR. SV4-6
IŠRAŠAS**

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V. APIBENDRINAMASIS ĮVERTINIMAS

Vytauto Didžiojo universiteto studijų programa *Skandinavijos ir Baltijos šalių studijos* (valstybinis kodas – 621L20006) vertinama **teigiamai**.

| Eil. Nr. | Vertinimo sritis | Srities įvertinimas, balais* |
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* 1 – Nepatenkinamai (yra esminių trūkumų, kuriuos būtina pašalinti)

2 – Patenkinamai (tenkina minimalius reikalavimus, reikia tobulinti)

3 – Gerai (sistemiškai plėtojama sritis, turi savitų bruožų)

4 – Labai gerai (sritis yra išskirtinė)

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IV. SANTRAUKA

Programa buvo reikšmingai peržiūrėta po paskutinio vertinimo; dabar programos tikslai ir studijų rezultatai nuoseklūs bei aiškiai apibrėžti ir visiškai atitinka magistrantūros studijų programą. Programos sandaroje pasiekta puiki pagrindinių ir pasirenkamųjų dalykų pusiausvyra.

Ekspertų grupė supranta, kad programos trukmės trumpinimą iki 1,5 metų reikėtų vertinti atsižvelgiant į mažėjantį studentų skaičių ir bendrą finansinę universiteto bei studentų situaciją.

Tačiau ekspertų grupė susidarė įspūdį, kad universiteto / fakulteto vadovybė galėtų labiau akcentuoti ir palaikyti šią magistrantūros studijų programą. Priėmimas į studijų programą buvo paskelbtas tik 2013 m. ir 2015 m., tačiau priimta ženkliai mažiau, nei pateikta paraiškų.

Atsižvelgiant į tai, kad ši studijų programa yra pagrindinis universiteto tarptautiškumo strategijos bei regioninių ir srities studijų aspekto elementas, ekspertų grupė labai rekomenduoja

universitetui užtikrinti, kad priėmimas į programą būtų skelbiamas nuspėjamais intervalais ir aiškiai komunikuojamas, jei jis nevyksta kasmet.

Personalą sudaro ypač motyvuoti savo sričių ekspertai. Studentų ir dėstytojų santykis labai geras; studentai paprastai atsiliepia apie dėstytojus kaip apie lengvai pasiekiamus. Studentų ir dėstytojų tarpusavio santykiai puikūs. Tai yra pagrindinės studijų programos stiprybės. Katedra ir universitetas vertina moksliniais tyrimais grindžiamą mokymą. Vis dėlto ekspertų grupei atrodo, kad reikėtų skirti daugiau dėmesio personalo profesiniam tobulėjimui. Mokslinė tiriamoji veikla turėtų būti remiama, neapsiribojant vien tik neseniai VDU įsteigtų tyrimų klasterių struktūromis; galima apsvarstyti stipendijų pradinio fondo ar asmeninės mokslinės stipendijos steigimą.

Naujosios fakulteto patalpos išskirtinės. Visiškai naujas pastatas įrengtas pagal aukščiausius standartus ir tai yra didelė studijų programos vertybė. Katedra gali toliau didinti savo konkurencinį pranašumą šioje srityje, pildydama bibliotekos fondą.

Programa remiasi tarptautiniais katedros ryšiais, tačiau reikėtų atgaivinti ankstesnius tvirtus ryšius su kitomis aukštosiomis mokyklomis ir tyrimų institutais, kad studentai iš to gautų naudos.

Studijų programa palaiko puikius ryšius su įvairiais aukšto lygio socialiniais partneriais, kurie prisideda prie programos vertindami baigiamuosius darbus, siūlydami praktikos vietas, prisidėdami prie bendrų konferencijų bei paskaitų ir dalyvaudami studijų programos komiteto veikloje. Tai labai didelė programos stiprybė. Katedra gali toliau stiprinti ryšius su socialiniais dalininkais, labiau įtraukdama socialinius partnerius ir įkurdama alumnų tinklą, kad galėtų aktyviai bendrauti su absolventais panašiai, kaip bendrauja su socialiniais partneriais.

Ekspertų grupė galiausiai pabrėžė, kad jai labai didelį įspūdį padarė svetingumas ir draugiška atmosfera VDU, ypač reaguojantis ir bendradarbiaujantis personalas. Tarp dėstytojų ir studentų nėra jokių barjerų; abi pusės atrodo itin atsidasavusios studijų programai.

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III. REKOMENDACIJOS

1. **Programos tikslai.** Atsižvelgiant į studijų programos siekį ir studentų lūkesčius, formuluojant programos tikslus reikėtų daugiau dėmesio skirti absolventų, kurie nesiekia mokslinės karjeros, įsidarbinimui privačiame sektoriuje; VDU taip pat galėtų teikti praktinę pagalbą šiuo klausimu.

2. **Programos sandara.** (i) Kalbų dalykų ir jų atitinkamų lygių pasirinkimas galėtų būti lankstesnis. (ii) Ekspertų grupė rekomenduoja įtraukti vieną mokslinių tyrimų dalyką ar kursinį darbą, kad studentai geriau pasirengtų baigiamajam magistro darbui.
3. **Personalas.** (i) Katedra turėtų pabandyti atgaivinti ankstesnį bendradarbiavimą su universitetais ir tyrimų institutais Baltijos jūros regione, taip pat akcentuoti personalo tarptautiškumo didinimą, pavyzdžiui, kviečiant dėstytojus pagal mainų programą. (ii) Katedrai rekomenduojama toliau stiprinti moksliniais tyrimais pagrįsto mokymo paramą. Mokslinių tyrimų klasteriai yra sveikintini, tačiau reikia dar padirbėti šiuo klausimu ir katedra turėtų apsvarstyti, ar įsteigti asmeninę mokslinių tyrimų stipendiją, skiriamą akademikams sutartiniu pagrindu. (iii) Katedra kartu su universitetu taip pat galėtų apsvarstyti pradinės finansinės paramos teikimą mokslinių tyrimų projektams. Jei tokia parama bus gerai valdoma, šios pradinės investicijos į koncepcijų pagrindimo ir bandomuosius tyrimus generuos mokslinius tyrimus skatinančių stipendijų fondo pajamas, kurios bus naudojamos tyrimams vystyti.
4. **Materialieji ištekliai.** (i) Katedrai rekomenduojame įdiegti mechanizmą, užtikrinantį, kad literatūros sąrašai būtų reguliariai atnaujinami ir į juos būtų įtraukiami naujausi žurnalų straipsniai ir monografijos. (ii) Fakultetas turėtų toliau stengtis pildyti bibliotekos fondą aktualiais vadovėliais.
5. **Studijų eiga.** (i) Sprendimai dėl priėmimo į studijų programą skelbimo turėtų būti labiau nuspėjami. Tai apima ir prognozuojamus sprendimus dėl valstybės finansuojamų studijų vietų skaičiaus. (ii) Atsižvelgiant į studentų patiriamą studijų finansavimo iššūkį, vienas iš katedros strateginių prioritetų galėtų būti lėšų pritraukimas iš absolventų, socialinių partnerių ir paramos teikėjų absolventų stipendijoms steigti. (iii) Fakultetas ir dėstytojai galėtų labiau skatinti studentų judumą. Reikėtų atnaujinti mainų su Skandinavijos šalimis galimybes, atsižvelgiant į tai, kad skandinavų kalbų pasirinkimui studijų programoje teikiama didelė reikšmė. (iv) Vis dar neįvykdytas ne visiškai aiškus studentų pageidavimas daugiau akcentuoti praktinį studijų aspektą. Ekspertų grupė rekomenduoja katedrai parengti konkretesnius studentų klausimynus ir (arba) suformuoti fokusuotas studentų grupes, siekiant išsiaiškinti, kokias užduotis / atsiskaitymus studentai turi omeny. Vėliau šiuos siūlymus galima aptarti su personalu ir nuspręsti, kokias į praktiką orientuotas užduotis / atsiskaitymus būtų galima įtraukti į mokymo procesą.
6. **Programos vadyba.** (i) Ekspertų grupė rekomenduoja aiškiai informuoti studentus apie studijų programos pokyčius. (ii) Galima išsamiau paaiškinti, kokių kalbos mokymosi rezultatų studentas gali tikėtis po dviejų semestrų. (iii) Katedra galėtų įkurti alumnų tinklą, rengti reguliarius absolventų susitikimus ir vykdyti mentorystės programą, kad

absolventai aktyviau dalyvautų studijų programoje ir apskritai palaikytų ryšį su katedra. Tai būtų naudinga katedrai, dabartiniams studentams ir absolventams. (iv) Labiau įtraukus socialinius partnerius į programos rengimą, būtų geriau ugdomi šiuolaikiški studentų gebėjimai.

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Paslaugos teikėjas patvirtina, jog yra susipažinęs su Lietuvos Respublikos baudžiamojo kodekso 235 straipsnio, numatančio atsakomybę už melagingą ar žinomai neteisingai atliktą vertimą, reikalavimais.

Vertėjos rekvizitai (vardas, pavardė,
parašas)