



# STUDIJŲ KOKYBĖS VERTINIMO CENTRAS

## VILNIAUS DAILĖS AKADEMIJOS VEIKLOS VERTINIMO IŠVADOS

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### INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW REPORT OF VILNIUS ACADEMY OF ARTS

Grupės vadovas: Team leader:	Prof. John Butler
Grupės nariai: Team members:	Richard Fajnor Dr. Annie Doona Maren Schmohl Saulius Valius Rita Bieliauskaitė
Vertinimo sekretorius: Review secretary:	Dr. Liudvika Leišytė

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## I. INTRODUCTION

This report is the result of the institutional review of the Vilnius Academy of Arts (VAA) in Lithuania. The review took place on 25-29 March 2013. The report is based on the insights gained from the information from the Vilnius Academy of Arts self-evaluation report and a range of meetings and interviews conducted with around 140 representatives of the VAA community. The site visit included visiting the Academy in Vilnius as well as its Faculty in Kaunas. The meetings included a range of stakeholders: university management, academic staff, administrative staff, students, and social partners. We have met representatives of all faculties including Telsiai and Klaipeda.

*The Review Team (referred to as the Team) consisted of:*

The Chair:

- Prof. John Butler, Head of the Birmingham School of Art, Birmingham Institute of Art & Design, Birmingham City University, UK

Team members:

- Dr. Annie Doona, President, Institute of Art Design and Technology, Dun Laoghaire, Dublin, Ireland
- Richard Fajnor, Vice-Rector, Janacek Academy of Music and Performing Arts Brno, Czech Republic
- Maren Schmohl, Member of the Executive Team, Merz Akademie, Stuttgart, Germany
- Dr. Saulius Valius, Independent Curator and Artist, Lithuania
- Student representative: Rita Bieliauskaitė, Student, Vytautas Magnus University Music Academy, Lithuania
- Review secretary: Dr. Liudvika Leišytė. Senior Researcher, CHEPS, University of Twente, the Netherlands

The team received the results of evaluation of VVA by the Research and Studies Monitoring and Analysis Centre (MOSTA) regarding the adequacy and availability of the learning resources. Overall evaluation of the results is positive, although some areas did not meet the required standards. The VVA's comments regarding these areas are listed below:

*Evaluation of the area "prior academic preparedness and motivation of entrants and changes in the number of students"*

*The ratio of the number of third cycle student numbers and second cycle student numbers with integrated studies student numbers .*

VAA stated that the number of Masters students depends on the number of Bachelor students and their achievements in the area of research. The discrepancy is partially caused by the economic crisis. VAA is looking to increase the number of students onto the 3<sup>rd</sup> cycle. In order to improve this measurement VAA will accept students progressing from the Aspiranto programmes on to Doctoral programmes

*Evaluation of the area "Efficiency of the use of funds allocated from the State budget "*

*The proportion of Science (Art) doctors with State funded tuition to third degree entrants with State funded tuition*

VAA stated that they experienced problems in importing data so there may be discrepancies. There is an issue with Masters' students completing on time, for example due to competing demands of the programme and employment. VAA will address this by introducing new study regulations allowing for a break of one year in the study programme.

The panel endorses these actions.

## II. BACKGROUND INFORMATION ABOUT THE INSTITUTION

The Vilnius Academy of Arts has a long history dating back to 1793 when the Department of Architecture was established at the High School. In 1803 the Department of Painting and Drawing was established followed by the Department of Graphics (Engraving), and in 1805 – the Department of Sculpture was created. The Kaunas Faculty was established in 1922 as an Art School.

Today VAA offers three cycle degrees in Arts and a Doctoral level degree in humanities related to Arts studies. This institution has 2,000 students in 2013 and 230 academic staff. The Academy consists of the faculties in Vilnius, Kaunas, Telšiai, and Klaipėda. The main faculties are: Faculty of Humanities, Faculty of Visual and Applied Arts, Faculty of Architecture and Design and they comprise of 29 Departments. VAA has a museum, six galleries in Vilnius and Telšiai, an Art Colony in Nida, student studios in Mizarai (Alytus region), exhibition space in Panemunė Castle, an Audiovisual Arts industry incubator and an Art incubator in Telšiai. The Academy has the Institute of the Art Studies where research carried out in the Academy is concentrated. Research is also produced in five departments in Vilnius, Kaunas and Telšiai. The Academy has its own publishing house.

The mission of the VAA is outlined in its Statute:

“The Academy seeks to create, improve and disseminate knowledge of both artistic creation and artistic research as well as knowledge in social sciences and humanities, educate highly qualified specialists able to make a significant contribution to the Lithuanian and the global society.”

The Academy receives its funding on an annual basis from the government according to the number of students and the volume of its artistic and research outputs. The government also provides funding for real estate and infrastructure development. The central administration of the Academy in Vilnius distributes funding to all the faculties. The faculties in different geographical locations are autonomous in their budgetary matters.

## III. STRATEGIC MANAGEMENT

VAA has set up a management structure according to the national Law on Higher Education and Research 2009, which consists of the Council, the Senate and the Rector. The VAA has drawn up a Strategic Plan: *Vilnius Academy of Arts: Integrated Development Strategy from 2012-2020*. The aims defined in this document are fully commensurate with the institution’s mission, the national policy on research and studies, the principles of the European Higher Education Area (EHEA) and the European Research Area (ERA). Emphasis is given to the national policy of National Identity and Regional Development and Impact, the principles of *comparability and autonomy* to be ensured in the EHEA and principles of *international exchanges, excellence and relevance* as promoted by the ERA.

The Strategic Plan has been introduced and discussed within the institution and is fully supported by all levels of management including the Senate. The plan has been formally approved by the Council.

The Strategic Plan is prefaced by an analysis of the current situation and a list of positive and negative factors. Four goals have been defined for the plan 2012-2020. These are broken down into Tasks and Indicators. A more concrete list of actions can be found in the Activities Quality

Strategy (Quality Strategy Measure Plan), which assigns general responsibilities as well as a list of concrete actions (Measures) to be completed in 2013. The main tool of monitoring is the Annual Rector's Report, which is submitted to the Senate, the Council and the VAA community.

The Team is of the view that the Strategic Plan should be based on a more rigorous SWOT analysis, the findings of which should be directly and clearly linked to the strategic goals, which in turn could be perceived as part of a Plan-Do-Check-Act Cycle. However, the Team appreciates the difficulties faced by VAA to plan its actions over a long period of time due to a volatile political environment and limited autonomy concerning some of its strategic areas (the rigid budgetary structure of state line-item funding which makes up the bulk of its income).

As they are phrased now, the strategic goals are very broad and progress will be difficult to measure in a meaningful way. They are more vision statements than goals in the sense that they probably will never be fully achieved and completed.

The Team thinks that the various components of the Strategic Plan should be better defined and integrated. Currently the documents "Integrated Development Strategy Plan" (Doc 2), the "Quality Strategy Measure Plan" (Doc 5) and "Rector's annual report" are not well integrated. It would be better to compare and correlate if they were to use the same format, structure and headings. Especially the "Quality Strategy Measure Plan" must be written as a more detailed action plan for a specific time period, which allows to track progress on individual tasks. It should include tasks, names or positions responsible, resources, time frames, expected outcomes (e.g. amendment of existing documents/regulations, inception of new ones) and further required actions (i.e. Senate or Council approval of new regulations etc.). Each document should be clearly authored, authorized and dated.

The Academy has used a formal template for breaking down its strategic goals into tasks and indicators, which the Team appreciates, but it should match the format in the monitoring tools and respective documents. (i.e. they should use the same headings and structure in order to link and map the documents more clearly with or onto each other).

The Strategic Plan includes quantitative and qualitative indicators for each of the goals. As part of the process of realizing the Strategic Plan the Academy has set itself the task to draw up quality indicators this year; unfortunately they were not available for the Team during the Evaluation Process.

While the Team appreciates the effort taken to break down the strategic goals into individual tasks and indicators, these may turn out to be too rigid a framework, considering that this covers an eight-year period. The Team points out, that the Rector's Office should be precise in designing quantitative and qualitative indicators that they feel are truly telling and helpful to their questions. It should also be considered whose responsibility it will be to collect and monitor this data on an ongoing basis to insure that monitoring of the Strategic Plan's implementation is accompanied by a well-defined and robust process, which would also be the basis to change the Strategic Plan, should the need occur.

The main monitoring tool is the Rector's Annual Report.

The Team feels that the Rector's Report may be constructed in too broad a format, which has to fulfil other requirements and needs as well. It could be useful to have a separate section included in the report specifically addressing the action plan of a given year. This would allow for more detailed reporting on individual tasks.

The Strategic Plan and Rector's Reports are readily available in print and/or on the Academy's website and have been circulated widely.

Existing Quality Assurance (QA) mechanisms for the enhancement of the quality of study programmes and student performance are in line with national and international requirements and consistent with the European Qualifications Framework (EQF). Measures for student support are in place and students stated they are happy with this service. The Team has seen evidence of data collection on student performance which is used in the regular updates and reviews of study programmes by the Study Programme Committee which reports (via Academic Core Units) to the Senate. Module-descriptions which include course aims and content, study hours, teaching and learning activities, exam formats and assessment criteria are available for students within the course descriptions which are published on the Academy's website (with variations of comprehensiveness) as well as through direct student-staff communication at the beginning of a teaching session. Students were satisfied with the information they received regarding the expectations of their performance. The Team has also found that QA procedures for the enhancement of the quality of study programmes and student performance are harmonized over the different campuses, which is commendable.

Many procedures relating to the update and enhancement of study provision are defined in the "Quality Strategic Measure Plan". The Team was able to confirm most of the key assigned roles and responsibilities, with the exception of the Internal Auditor, who apparently provides mostly legal/judiciary counsel to departments rather than audit the implementation of the Strategic Plan, as is stated in the document.

The newly established Study Quality Division (SQD) has so far mainly worked on process management, for example it has standardised and published routines for the initiation of new study programmes. It has also offered and given valuable guidance to staff on module revision as well as provided general information and counsel on new developments within the EHEA and the Bologna Process.

Student representation in all relevant committees in the faculties is in place and VAA has increased the number of students in the Senate (2 students from each faculty). Student feedback mechanisms are in place and is collected, albeit not yet in a standardised way. Student support for disability and special needs is offered, although some of the measures taken seem to depend on the engagement of individual staff members.

An Alumni survey is carried out, but the Team was informed it is personalised (by phone), not anonymous, and includes anecdotal evidence. A more robust, statistically valid model for alumni monitoring could be found. The envisioned Success and Career Centre of VAA could take the responsibility of developing an integrated alumni monitoring and engagement system.

While students and alumni were satisfied with the offered channels for complaints, most of the complaints were related to their studies (feedback on performance and grades) and depended on personal interaction with the staff in question. It was not evident to the Team how more serious complaints (i.e. sexual harassment) would be dealt with.

All information for services as well as study information about programme schedules, modules and courses offered is available on the Academy's website.

The Team found that some strategic changes have been implemented, most notably the introduction of a new senior position: Vice-Rector for Strategic Planning, as well as the newly founded SQD. Also a work-load based payment scheme for academic staff has been recently

introduced as has been a provision to reimburse staff according to their acquisition of research funds. The Team encourages the use of these valuable steering instruments to further enhance the strategic management of the institution. The Academy has used the opportunities (given by a new law) to take up commercial activities by founding the Open School of Architecture, Arts and Design, the business incubators as well as the Nida Colony. The VAA has proactively influenced external conditions by lobbying with the Lithuanian Research Council to introduce funding for artistic research to compliment the existing scientific research, and this has successfully been achieved.

The decision-making bodies of the institution (the Rector, the Council and the Senate) are working effectively. The Team has witnessed that the distribution of responsibilities and accountability within the institution is delegated to the faculties in different locations as they successfully manage their budgets. There is general satisfaction amongst staff on all levels within the VAA's hierarchy that they are informed about and have been engaged in the Academy's decision-making process. This points to good management of processes. The Team thinks it is important to ensure a strong position for the newly created SQD, especially in relation to Senate, in order to ensure its leading position in the implementation of a new QA system.

The institutional management has recently adopted a new workload calculation model throughout VAA for its academic staff based on the actual taught credits and numbers of students (the practice the Team was informed has started some years ago in Kaunas, but only recently introduced to Vilnius). The Team welcomes this move, but thinks it is a good example to show why creating platforms to share good practice is very important, which should result in the implementation of these models more quickly.

Some academic staff development is available and the Team saw that an important project of staff professional development system was started in 2012 at VAA (SER, p.76). The Team strongly believes that the general high level of Quality Assurance and Enhancement measures should be completed by developing a more comprehensive staff development policy, which must be adequately supported. This is especially important in respect to the enhancement of teaching skills.

The Team has seen little evidence of risk analysis management at VAA and recommends the need to improve this.

Learning resources and infrastructure of the Vilnius campus are seen as excellent. According to the Academy, the enhancement of the Kaunas infrastructure is seen as a key priority. The Team agrees with this and proposes the Academy includes such aims in the Strategic Plan.

VAA has very limited autonomy over the use of its funds, but it has managed to raise considerable extra funds to be added to their own state income, including income from the Open School of Architecture, Art and Design as well as other commercial activities.

The Team perceives the ratio to spend 80% of a "student voucher" on personnel seems unsustainably high, putting the financial viability of the Academy at risk and prohibits a more strategic use of funding, which is needed to fulfil VAA's Strategic Plan.

VAA has implemented a Code of Academic Ethics approved by the Senate. The implementation and constant revision of the Code is supervised by the Ethics Committee of the Senate which also handles disputes or infringements of the Code. The Team was satisfied that the mentioned Code and regulations are in place and ensure good practice by all parties.

*Areas for improvement:*

- The required bodies for management are in place but need to find their roles and carry out their individual responsibilities. The VAA should consider defining the responsibility and authority of the SQD in its Statute, especially in regards to the authority granted to the Senate concerning QA procedures.
- A monitoring tool more precise than the Annual Rector's report could be helpful. Operational action planning is not yet fully developed across VAA.
- The operationalisation of quantitative and qualitative indicators of success underpinning the strategic process still needs to be developed.
- There is no clear identification of risk assessment informing the VAA strategy.
- A system of international benchmarking is not fully in place.
- A staff development strategy embracing the workload based funding allocation model is not yet developed.
- The Academy should consider using the valuable input and broad support given by their large and active group of social partners in the council.

**Recommendations:**

- Student feedback collection should be standardized over the whole institution.
- Staff development policy should be developed, and funds dedicated towards it.
- The use of statistical data and quantitative indicators of study, research and strategic management performance should be enhanced. The development of meaningful indicators of success should be linked to an on-going analysis of threats and risks.
- Remunerate students for the participation in the VAA decision-making structures and processes from all faculties.

***Judgement on the area: Strategic Management is given positive evaluation.***

#### IV. ACADEMIC STUDIES AND LIFE-LONG LEARNING

The evidence presented in the Self-Evaluation Report and the discussions held by the Team with both internal and external stakeholders made it very clear that VAA is a highly regarded institution and deemed appropriate for the needs of the regional and national economies. The programmes are strong and the commitment and enthusiasm of staff is evident.

The Departments have fully embedded the Bologna action lines in terms of student centred learning, three cycles, diploma supplements and ECTS. The programmes are in line with the specific vision and mission of VAA.

The nature of the programmes and the particular regional focus in the campuses is compatible with national and international needs and developments. VAA emphasizes the need to connect with the regional governments and the regional culture in its different campuses. There are major plans to renovate a building in the Kaunas campus, which will greatly enhance the resources available to develop the programmes.

The Team found good evidence of cooperation and involvement between the campuses and of systematic procedures and regulations being applied. Some of the key meetings are held across the different campuses and staff and students from campuses are members of central bodies of VAA. The Team found that staff and students on the different campuses do feel part of the whole VAA and identify strongly with the mission and vision.

There are some specialism on campuses and some competition between them for students e.g. in Sculpture but this does not appear to have any negative impacts. The competition, as the students affirm, extends the offer of potential widening the diversity of the individual profile of graduates.

The Team found evidence of the Programme Committees engagement with stakeholders and social partners, staff and students in programme development and in programme reviews. Students and social partners stated that the quality of the programmes is high.

The development of the new Studies Quality Division is a positive move, and this was reflected in the views of staff and students. This initiative is still at an early stage and would benefit from a clear strategy and action plan for the implementation of quality processes.

The Team identified a need to improve the systematic collection and dissemination of objective trends e.g. recruitment and retention, to inform the quality improvement processes of study programmes. There is a clear need for all departments to fully utilize institutionally endorsed quality indicators to monitor and improve levels and standards of study programmes across VAA.

The present VAA and state investments in resources such as working rooms, wide range of technology and libraries is fundamental to ensure the sustainable quality assurance of the standards in art education for longer time.

Staff development is not fully embedded across VAA in particular with reference to teaching and learning. Staff are encouraged to develop their own professional and artistic practice, which is commendable, but a clear staff development plan around improvements in teaching and learning and the sharing of best practice is needed.

The Team noted the high number of Master's students postponing their final defence beyond the original two years and noted the VAA's plans to rectify this issue. VAA should be stricter and more rigorous in defining and applying the rules for the state examination and develop a system for supporting students to achieve within the time frame or put in place formal additional time scales for completion.

VAA is implementing the basic principles of equality and support of students with disabilities or learning difficulties.

The experts congratulate the VAA on attaining additional grants for 57 students from the Ministry of Education and Science. The national admissions policy restricts the institution's capacity to choose their students. It is our view that if Lithuania wants to be competitive in the European Higher Arts Education area, the student admission system has to allow and support the more creative students to enter the institution regardless of age or qualification level. This also reflected in the VAA's inability to develop processes for the recruitment of mature students who do not have the necessary formal qualifications and to accredit prior work experience.

The Team found that although there are formal and informal communications systems in place feedback mechanisms are not clearly defined, the roles of different representative bodies that students are involved in was also not clear to the students. In particular the relationships and communication channels between student union, class representatives and Senate student representatives is not clearly defined. VAA needs to ensure that student representation is based on full engagement of the student population.

The Team found that assessment feedback to the students is not consistent across VAA, in some cases feedback was verbal, in others it was more formal and written.

A system of more formal feedback to students on their assessment would benefit the staff and students.

There are some good examples of lifelong learning initiatives across VAA. The newly created Open School of Architecture, Art and Design is a positive development and offers opportunities for students of all ages to access programmes and workshops. There did not appear however a clear strategy for life-long learning or a shared understanding of what lifelong learning means to VAA.

The Nida Colony provides an excellent example of integration between VAA programmes and research. There are excellent opportunities for staff and students develop their practice working with other artists and the project is a well-managed with a clear strategy and aims.

A system for optimum use of an on line-learning platform across the VAA was not well developed

VAA has in place good systems for the collection of graduate destinations. There is a system for contact with social partners to engage with them in identifying the needs of industry. Project based work and strong relationships with local cultural institutions benefit the students. Some students go on international placements.

VAA is conscious of the need to further develop employability skills, but they are not fully developed across all programmes.

There are very good examples of international collaboration and partnerships including staff and students. VAA is an active member in a number of intentional organisations to the benefit of the Academy. Students and staff attend exhibitions and conferences abroad, there are a number of undergraduate Erasmus exchanges in place, the VAA has stated its desire to extend these and to include possible Masters level exchanges too. There is a commitment to grow the number of international students but there is not a well-developed approach to the information the students receive pre arrival. There is a need for the development of better and timely pre-arrival communication and on-site mentoring of international students.

VAA needs to work on a broader definition of internationalisation, it appears currently restricted to mobility and participation in exhibitions.

The Team commends the development of partnerships but felt that these were in some cases limited to the Baltic region and could be extended further. To encourage exchanges and partnerships beyond the Baltic States VAA may need to look more closely at teaching in other languages, this currently happens in some programmes but this relies on staff being able to teach via English and is primarily an ad hoc arrangement.

*Areas for improvement:*

- VAA needs to develop a clear strategy for life-long learning.
- A system of formal feedback to students on their assessment should be determined across VAA.

- Improve the systematic collection and dissemination of objective trends data to inform the quality improvement process of the study programmes.
- There is a need for departments to utilise institutionally endorsed quality indicators to monitor and improve levels and standards of study programmes across VAA.
- The relationships and communication channels between student union, class representatives and Senate student representatives is not clearly defined.
- Implementation of a formal system to share good practice across VAA should be achieved.
- There is a need to create a programme of staff development around teaching and learning to enable staff to achieve their professional aspirations and operate effectively in a period of change.
- Although the Team found good examples of the use of the virtual learning environment especially in the theoretical fields, the experts found variable usage, particularly across the artistic programmes.
- VAA should consider the embedding of employability skills across the programmes.
- Timely pre-arrival communication and on-site mentoring of international students should be implemented.

### **Recommendation:**

- VAA should create meaningful, sustainable international agreements with different partner institutions in response to students desire to have wider choice.

***Judgement on the area: Academic Studies and Life-Long Learning is given positive evaluation***

## V. RESEARCH AND ART

The quality of the very large volume of art, cultural and art history research outputs (including 157 international projects and 94 research articles/collections/monographs in foreign publications between 2007-11) and recognition by the Lithuania Research Council as being the 2<sup>nd</sup> highest achiever in the arts sector is a clear indication of the high standard of research practice across VAA.

The Team found that the Academy's research activities and outputs are fully aligned to its mission, which states that it "*seeks to create, improve and disseminate knowledge of both artistic creation and artistic research as well as knowledge in social sciences and humanities, educate highly qualified specialists able to make a significant contribution to the Lithuanian and the global society*". In achieving this it is in compliance with to the requirements of the Law on Higher Education and Research of the Republic of Lithuania, which is formulated in the Statute of the Academy – namely to deliver *programmes dedicated to educate specialists of high qualification and provide for conditions for continuing training of academic personnel* to contribute to the European Research Area (ERA).

Although the Academy is in compliance with its mission and the priorities of the national and regional economic, cultural and social developments, there is no clearly stated research strategy or statement of the VAA research policy to reflect the composition and practice of the Academy. As a consequence there is a need for greater clarity of terminology in describing the research of VAA. The Team found different descriptors of VAA research, both in the presented texts and through discussions with the different groups of teaching/research staff, which were confusing, potentially misleading and damaging to the development of a research community and culture.

The Team fully endorses the description in the VAA Statute, which consistently states that studies at the Academy shall be based on professional artistic activities, ‘artistic and scientific’ research work and that it should go hand in hand with students practical training. Whereas in the Self Evaluation Report (SER) the emphasis is placed on ‘scientific research and artistic practice’, with five (5) Departments + the *Institute of Art Studies, Research and Dissemination* (Institute) carrying out the former and twenty-nine (29) Departments engaged in the latter. The Team found that in meeting the different groups of academic/research staff there was some concern and discontent in their perceived inequality between the research practices. The Team thinks it is important the Academy addresses this issue and recommends it produces a research policy and strategy, as there is a need for improved collaboration between the elements of research practice leading to increased interdisciplinary projects. Similarly we recommend more collaboration outside the Baltic region in research projects if VAA wants to aspire to be a leading international higher arts education research institution.

The Team is fully aware that the Academy is in a period of transition, having only introduced the third cycle Art and Design PhD Doctoral study in 2011 and it is admirable that VAA has taken the initiative to successfully lobby to broaden the national funding scheme of the Lithuania Research Council to include grants for art practice research. This will help facilitate greater interaction across the Academy and increase income generation for national and international collaborative research projects. Even in this short period the Academy has thirty (30) Doctoral students registered in 2013 including nine (9) for Fine Art and seven (7) for Design, which is commendable and comparable to many leading international European higher arts education institutions. Between 2008-12 twenty-three (23) humanities dissertation and twenty-six (26) art project research students graduated.

VAA has identified the following as principle areas of research it is engaged in: Visual culture of the old Lithuania and the modern reflection; Monument protection and management and research in heritage; Formation of modern trends in art – art and culture of new times; Modern visual culture and its theories; Theory and criticism of visual arts; Management and sociology of art and culture. In these largely humanities and social sciences areas it is the leading research institution in Lithuania and the Baltic region. The major focus of ‘fundamental and applied’ research activities of VAA happen in the Institute, but other significant applied research is produced in Departments of UNESCO Culture, History and Theory of Art and Humanities (Kaunas). There is very little duplication of this research carried out in the country, which is strength but also can be considered a threat, as there is little competition to drive it. The Team is concerned that in identifying these areas VAA is also possibly presenting an imbalanced (humanities/social sciences) view of their research with little/no focus on art practice - this could impact on developing international partners?

VAA has is fully committed to developing and expanding its ‘social and business’ partners to guide, develop and enhance its creative research activities. The Team were very impressed with the diversity of VAA partners, from the leading national culture providers to small ‘local’ organisations and companies – all sustainably embedding the Academy within the communities and the professional world. Between 2007-2013 VAA has completed approximately 650 collaborative projects with its partners embracing financial, marketing, curriculum, international dimension, prizes, exchanges etc. These efforts are aimed at creating conditions for students and teachers to gain direct professional experience and strengthen the connections between their studies and the related research. To this end VAA has successfully established business incubators in Telsiai, assisting graduates to establish themselves in the labour market.

Since 2007 VAA has successfully engaged in major international collaborative projects (*Baltu Menas*, Vilnius Capital of European Culture 2009, Design in the City, the Nida *SHARE 12* etc.)

and received substantial external funding from organisations such as the Ministry of Culture, Ministry of Education and Science, Bureau of Nordic Council of Ministers, European Capital of Culture 2009, the European Social Fund and other EU funding.

The Academy has very good high quality exhibition galleries including the excellent Textiles and Titanic spaces, and VAA is active in presenting exhibitions in Vilnius and contributing widely to national and international art events. The venues and their collaboration with local and national galleries and museums are a clear indicator of the strength and importance of the institution to the city and nationally. These galleries are also part of the numerous international level research platforms VAA has developed as learning resources and outlets for the dissemination of research outputs which include: the Nida Colony; the Publishing House including the *Acta Academiae Artium Vilnensis* an international refereed journal and the textile and fine art archives.

VAA has developed a successful Publishing House, which produces a wide range of diverse publications from the internationally acclaimed *Acta Academiae Artium Vilnensis*, with 67 volumes published to-date, to the standard texts *Dictionary of Arts* and *Dictionary of Christian Iconography* for all Lithuanian publishing houses, universities and research institutes. The Publishing House publishes the original textbooks on art, architecture, art studies and monument management for all higher art schools, faculties of art, colleges and art gymnasiums as well as twenty-three (23) monographs over the past five years. The Publishing House has also forged an agreement with EBSCO Publishing enabling VAA research articles to be published in a number of international arts journals.

The Team also found that the research was positively feeding into the curriculum and the learning and teaching strategies, and undergraduate as well as postgraduate students were actively engaged in the research programme.

Although both external and internal funding is scarce and hard to obtain, all staff felt they were supported by the Academy to carry out their research and research was seen to be an acceptable part of their workload. They were not sure to what level and the amount of time allocated for research was expected/given. The Team recommends clearer guidelines on research expectation and time allocated to carry it out be provided by VAA and the terms of engagement be defined in the employment contracts.

The Academy Statute states that academic staff, after five years service, are entitled to up to one year's sabbatical to develop their research or improve their qualifications, which the Team believes is excellent practice - unfortunately due to financial constraints staff report this practice is not implemented. The Team strongly recommends the Academy strives to find ways to make this happen, as it is essential to enable researchers to fully engage at a national and/or international level, and to raise the standard of the research output.

The Team does commend the Academy for introducing a research 'bonus-scheme', whereby researchers can be additionally allocated between 50-100% of their monthly salary from funds generated for their research, which "*led to a considerable enhancement of the artistic creative activity*" (SER). The Team believes it is important for VAA to pump-prime the activity and motivate the staff.

There is a clear process for developing, operating and evaluating research strategies and activities within VAA, with the Faculty Council approving the departmental five year strategic development plans and the annual operational plans, and Senate evaluating the research activities and outputs. Senate also approves training programmes and the qualifications necessary for

research staff and the academic promotion process considers the staff's research activity and outputs.

To address the European Research Area the Academy has prioritised close interaction between the component parts of the *Knowledge Triangle – education, scientific and artistic research and innovation*. This is achieved through the enhancement of human resources, free movement of researchers and artistic knowledge, creative working conditions, the reduction of social and administrative obstacles, the creation of long-term partnerships and sustainable development responsive to societal and market needs. VAA encourages and supports both teaching staff and students to participate in international mobility programmes such as ERASMUS and Nordic exchange programmes as well as research projects. It uses the former to learn best practice and new developments in curricula and learning and teaching in other institutions and compare their level of achievement with international institutions. VAA has successfully removed obstacles for inviting international artists of the highest quality. This has enabled the Academy to bring in international Professors to visit them and deliver short courses, which is supported by a newly initiated fund within the VAA budget.

To support these international developments the Academy established two units, the first the *International Relations Division*, which is responsible for organising, coordinating and promoting the activities in accordance to the institutions strategic objectives. In 2008 VAA established the second unit the *Project Management Division*, which acts as information provider and consultancy service; gathering data on EU calls and training programmes and helps academic staff find appropriate partners, develop project proposals, make funding bids and produce appropriate reports. The Team fully supports these actions but thinks the Academy should ensure the terms of reference for both units have clear distinctive roles and responsibilities with no duplication of activities.

The Team recognise the considerable development of VAA in international research, their considerable success in building a network of international partners and generating external funding in a challenging time of financial constraints. But to achieve the high standards the Academy has set itself will require even higher income generation, which the new developments with the Lithuanian Research Council should help, but the team recommend VAA should be more selective and strategic in choosing its international and social partners. This is necessary to be more focussed with their time and energies to achieve the most rewarding return. The Team also recommends the Academy invests more in developing the foreign language skills of their academic staff to enable them to participate in international research projects and aid them to develop, write and teach international courses.

Areas for Improvement:

- There is no clear VAA research strategy or statement of research policy to reflect the composition of the Academy and there is a need for greater clarity in the use of terminology in describing research and art practice (“Art and scientific research” [VAA Statute], “scientific research and artistic practice” [SER]).
- There is a need for improved collaboration between the elements of research practice leading to increased interdisciplinary projects (making use of the recent announcement for funding artistic research by the LRC).
- More collaboration outside the Baltic region in research projects is desirable.
- The use of sabbatical leave should be increased and supported by the VAA.

***Judgement on the area: Research and Art is given positive evaluation.***

## VI. IMPACT ON REGIONAL AND NATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

One of the explicit objectives of the Strategic Plan 2012-2020 is ‘to enhance the impact of the Academy on regional, national and international levels’ and this is emphasised in VAA’s mission statement and strategy, which express their ambition to make major contributions to regional and national cultural development.

VAA’s creative activity in the region is extensive and diverse, enabling it to fully achieve the objectives expressed in its mission. These objectives are oriented to: promoting the importance of regional culture; initiating and enhancing social and cultural centres of excellence in the region; developing the sense of community, citizenship and social cohesion.

The Team commends VAA for pro-actively seeking to establish links with social partners as set out in the Strategic Plan. At the Team’s meetings with these social partners their dedication and commitment to collaboration with VAA was very evident and the mutual benefits were clearly expressed and acknowledged. Thus the strategic orientation of VAA is very much in line with their priorities for regional development, and the regional faculties work in collaboration with local museums and authorities, including municipalities.

The Academy due to its national and historical profile is clearly committed to the diffusion of modern culture and cultural heritage, and is engaged with the other cities and communities via a plethora of art events, publications and workshops/conferences through its faculties located in the different regions of Lithuania including the opening of a faculty in Klaipeda. The Team commends the VAA approach of engaging with the regions. The Team meeting in Kaunas revealed that different faculties are in dialogue with local municipalities and communities via: educational outreach; life-long learning; public art practice and publishing as well as research activities. For example, Telsiai municipality provided the Telsiai Faculty with gallery premises in the centre of the city and provided the city streets and parks as venues for staff and students work.

Other notable examples of engagement with cities and communities were the Vilnius Art Festival, where students exhibit their work alongside highly esteemed professionals and student internships, which take place in museums, major galleries, media companies and major ceramics production companies.

The VAA has around 650 agreements with different academic, social and business partners nationally *some of which* provide funding to support a range of initiatives. These agreements vary in the type of support provided, some social partners provide additional funding including a number of European Structural Funds and Ministry of Education and Science funded infrastructure development and study programme renewal projects. This financial support in the view of the Team is significant and partnerships are vital for VAA as witnessed from the recent infrastructure renovations, programme renewal, training of academic staff and cultural projects that took place at VAA (e.g. the new building in Vilnius, renovation of the building and establishment of the Nida Colony, renovation of the Panemune Castle, and the establishment of business incubators).

Some institutions provide concrete support for student work e.g. the companies Teo, Swedbank and the Municipality of Vilnius funded the exhibitions and the albums of student final projects ‘*Meno celes.*’ Other examples include the sponsorship of the Young Designer Prize by the Ministry of Economy together with the Teo Company; an international co-operation sponsored by Ekspobalta Company, which includes an annual visit of VAA students and teachers to the winter reviews at *Düsseldorf Academy of Art.*

Other examples of co-operation include an international gallery fair *Art Vilnius* which is sponsored by the Lithuanian Association of Art Galleries. The Municipality of Vilnius and the Ministry of Culture of the Republic of Lithuania has consistently provided a forum for VAA students to present their work and participate in organizing this event. Participation in these various co-operational projects and their achievements is evidence of the institutions contribution to the city of Vilnius, which is of mutual benefit to students, artists, the public, and the city.

The VAA galleries (including the new *Titanikas* gallery in the VAA Design and Innovation Centre) provide outlets for student and staff exhibitions as well as exhibitions of artists from outside the Academy. In 2011 the VAA *Titanikas* gallery organised 24 exhibitions, of which 11 were international and the Museum of VAA organises exhibitions in other Lithuanian cities.

The examples provided by the VAA external stakeholders at our meeting with them demonstrate the effectiveness of the implementation of the Strategic Plan and the Academy's serious progress towards reaching the set of strategic objectives regarding the regional and national impact of VAA.

In terms of the contribution of stakeholders towards the study programmes and the student experience at VAA the Team has witnessed their engagement in various ways. The representatives of galleries, museums and nationally and internationally renowned artists are involved in teaching, assisting with internships, and participate in the discussions on programme development and renewal. Student's practical training takes place through placements in various companies, museums and galleries in the different cities where the faculties are located. The Academy is rightly concerned about the employability of its students, and to enhance this discussions with business partners take place on how to improve the network of partners for internships and create more opportunities for VAA graduates and alumni to find employment. The team regards this breadth of stakeholder engagement as good practice and commends it.

Included in the strategic targets for enhancing the impact of the Academy, a set of quantitative and qualitative indicators are proposed These include the enhancement of the efficiency of cooperation with business and public sector partners and systematic dissemination of the achievements of the Academy to the public The development of cooperation with outstanding international higher education and research institutions would further develop and strengthen this area of VAA's work.

*Area for improvement:*

- The VAA has very limited financial resources for regional development.

***Judgement on the area: Impact on Regional and National Development is given positive evaluation.***

## VII. BEST PRACTICE EXAMPLES AND RECOMMENDATIONS

BEST PRACTICE EXAMPLES:

*Area: Strategic Management*

- There is a Strategic Plan in place, which is endorsed by the institution, the Senate (going beyond the formal requirement), it is shared and fully supported across the institution.
- The VAA has raised considerable funds via EU Structural Funds to develop new leadership, management and quality structures and processes.

- The VAA is aligned to EQF, EHEA and ERA. The Academy aims to develop the programme benchmarks. It plans to develop discipline specific guidelines of competences in the fields of art and design.
- There is a shared sense that the development of a quality culture requires regularized procedures for the whole institution.
- QA tools and measures for enhancing quality of studies and research are in place. At department level quality management of the study programmes is embedded.
- Student feedback mechanisms are in place. Student representation in all relevant committees in the faculties is in place. VAA increased number of students in the Senate (2 students from each faculty).
- Initiatives to engage in commercial activities both to broaden the Academy's activities and to generate additional income have been taken.
- Valuable management steering tools (incentive for staff to engage in research, work allocation scheme) have been introduced.
- Stakeholder involvement with the Strategic Plan has been observed.
- The relationship between the Senate, the Rector and Council are clearly defined but in the renewed structure the defined roles need to be enacted.

*Area: Academic studies and life-long learning*

- The departments have fully embraced the Bologna action lines (student-centred learning, three cycles, Diploma Supplement, ECTS, learning outcomes and related assessment criteria).
- International collaborative partnerships, international staff and student mobility are commendable.
- Programme committees engage with stakeholders (social partners and students) in writing the annual programme reviews.
- Students and social partners stated that the content of the study programmes is of high quality and appropriate to the professional world.
- Departments were very positive about the support offered by the newly formed Studies Quality Division in developing study programmes.
- The experts congratulate the VAA on attaining additional grants for 57 students from the Ministry of Education and Science. The national admissions policy restricts the institution's capacity to choose their students. It is our view that if Lithuania wants to be competitive in the European Higher Arts Education area, the student admission system has to allow and support the more creative students to enter the institution regardless of age or qualification level.
- The VAA is developing an interdisciplinary approach in their study programmes.
- The newly created Open School of Architecture, Art and Design is a positive development.
- The Nida Colony provides an excellent example of integration between VAA programmes and research.

*Area: Research and art*

- Research platforms as learning resources and for the dissemination of research outputs are excellent including: the VAA galleries; the Nida Colony; the Publishing House including *Acta Academiae Artium Vilnensis* refereed journal and the textile and fine art archives.

- A very large volume of art, cultural and art history research outputs and recognition by the Lithuanian Research Council as being the 2<sup>nd</sup> highest achiever in the sector is a clear indicator of the high standard of research practice across VAA.
- The importance of the role of VAA in taking the initiative to lobby to broaden the national funding scheme of the Lithuanian Research Council to include art practice research is commendable.
- VAA is active in presenting exhibitions in Vilnius and contributing widely to national and international art events, and their collaboration with local/national galleries and museums are a clear indicator of the strength and importance of the institution.
- A strong commitment to increasing the number of Doctor of Arts and Doctor of Science PhD students.
- The growing number of high quality visiting international academic artist/teachers.
- The policy of a financial bonus system encourages staff research and development

*Area: Impact on regional and national development*

- The impact of the VAA upon the development of regions and on the national scale is well described in detail and carefully commented in the Self-evaluation Report.
- Most objectives are well formulated and reasoned. Goals are pursued consistently. All activities carried out in accordance to the Strategic Plan.
- Telšiai Municipality provides a grant for one student place on a yearly basis – this is a good example of a successful collaboration between VAA and local authorities.
- The VAA's regional engagement and impact is a real strength of the Academy and in line with its mission.
- The faculties in the regions are important for the regional spread and development. Working with communities is important. VAA have witnessed strong links with local municipalities in various places which is commendable.
- The Nida Colony is an excellent regional project with an international impact. It has a clear management structure, evaluation and output monitoring.
- VAA has a strong and active group of social partners who fully engage with all activities of Academy (see also under Strategic Management).

RECOMMENDATIONS:

- The Team advises to introduce action planning at all levels of activity (e.g. strategic plans, annual reports, programme evaluation).
- Student feedback collection should be standardized over the whole institution.
- Staff development policy should be developed, and funds dedicated towards it.
- The use of statistical data and quantitative indicators of study, research and strategic management performance should be enhanced. The development of meaningful indicators of success should be linked to an ongoing analysis of threats and risks.
- VAA should create meaningful international agreements with different partner institutions in response to students desire to have wider choice.
- Remunerate students for the participation in the VAA decision-making structures and processes from all faculties.

## VIII. JUDGEMENT

Vilnius Academy of Arts is given positive evaluation.

Grupės vadovas: Team leader:	Prof. John Butler
Grupės nariai: Team members:	Richard Fajnor Dr. Annie Doona Maren Schmohl Saulius Valius Rita Bieliauskaitė
Vertinimo sekretorius: Review secretary:	Dr. Liudvika Leišytė

## ANNEX. VILNIUS ACADEMY OF ARTS RESPONSE TO REVIEW REPORT

Vilnius, 2013-05-10

Review report is clear and no significant inaccuracy was observed.

It worth to notice only that in accordance to the Statute VAA management structure consists of the Council, the Senate and the Rector but no the Rectorate as is referred at pages 4, 7 and 17 of the Report.

The Rector's Office (Rectorate) is exclusively a collegiate advisory body.

Another small comment concerns the title of law quoted at the page 4 of the Report. Instead of Law on Higher Education it should be Law on Higher Education and Research.

Rector

prof. A.Klimas