

Vilnius Academy of Arts

Accreditation Team visit: 4 – 8 November 2013

Overview report

BA Ceramics
BA Metal and Jewelry
BA Glass, MA Glass
BA Applied Ceramics, MA Applied Ceramics

Vilnius Faculty
Telsiai Faculty
Kaunas Faculty
Kaunas Faculty

Introduction

The accreditation team received a presentation by SKVC and undertook a scoping exercise prior to the commencement of accreditation visits. This introduction afforded the team the opportunity to ask questions and to explore key areas relating to the documentation supplied prior to arrival. As a result of the three campus visits, a number of overarching observations and some issues relevant to particular areas are noted below.

Strategic matters

The institution is well led and clearly strives to provide a warm student-centred environment within which staff are ambitious for the development of their students and subject disciplines. Central government support for studentships within the art and design umbrella are important for the development and sustainability of the creative industries and for key subjects like ceramics, glass, and metal art. This is to be applauded, but it would assist the institution significantly if a more consistent system of allocating studentships were to be developed. The general level of recording student attainment against learning outcomes could be improved significantly across all levels of the courses. Although student assessment appears to consist of either on-going formative verbal interactions or through numerical summative feedback, the institution should develop a more robust system of recording individual student attainment against pre-defined learning outcomes which should be combined with written feedback on strengths, weaknesses, and points for discussion. This method would allow academic staff and students to better understand attainment and progression across the programme, build a record of student achievement for the purposes of archiving, and importantly generate a visible system for the purposes of curriculum development. There is a groundswell of enthusiastic students willing and able to participate in international exchanges. Unfortunately, the very limited number of places on the Erasmus programme has an adverse impact on student morale and therefore the development and expansion of an internationalisation strategy should be a priority for the institution. Opportunities also exist for the development of business, marketing, and entrepreneurship skills in order to prepare students for employment in the creative industries. While the links with social partners appear to work very well, the institution should perhaps also put in place specialist lectures and competitions, prizes aimed at developing the business awareness of students. Alongside the development of practical craft and design skills the students should also be able to engage in challenging written elements which strongly test their analytical and research skills in order to enhance their employability skills. In some areas there were clear plans to develop new technologies within the campus arrangement, these should now be mainstreamed into the student experience and include the development of CAD skills and opportunities to engage with rapid prototyping. Furthermore, in order to be attractive to an international market the institution should consider if it is possible to deliver Masters level education in English as this would significantly broaden the reach of

the programme throughout Europe and beyond. An effective leadership development programme should be developed across the institution.

Areas of good practice

All programmes appeared to enjoy excellent staff student ratios, and a genuine feeling of staff and students working together for a common purpose. The encouragement by the institution for staff to continue to develop their own practice is beneficial to the learning environment and there is clear evidence of external links with social partners enhancing the student learning experience. Workshops were generally well stocked with appropriate equipment and materials and student access is satisfactory. In most instances the quality and detail of the document was excellent and there was strong evidence of good quality interaction in setting the vision and strategy for the Self Evaluation Review document with all partners being involved in the consultation process. The importance of developing traditional craft, design, and fine art skills was clearly evidenced in the workshop visits and meetings with staff and students and the quality of output remains of a high order. Linked to this the desire to retain and develop these traditional skills is noteworthy, particularly as the creative industries and issues of sustainability rise in importance within the economy. There is also a clear view at Faculty level about the importance of contemporising the student experience, and the investment in new technologies and indeed plans to develop further are clear signs of ambition across the discipline areas. The incubator hub, although not fully operational, sets an important and visible context within which aspiring undergraduates can relate their practice to the employability agenda.

Areas for development

The limited opportunities for students or staff to engage with international exchange or indeed visits is challenging and this is a clear area for development. Are some progression challenges for graduates within the ceramics and metal art and jewelry areas in that two programmes have no Masters level provision and it is recommended this should be reviewed. The area of contemporary critical theory and practice should be reviewed across all programmes in order to develop student skills and expose and prepare students for international level work. Aligned to this is the expectation that students should focus on personal presentation in order that they can confidently enter the marketplace and negotiate with galleries and commercial operators when venturing into the world of business. An extension of this is opportunity within the programmes to have sufficient space to take creative risks, regardless of whether they pay off or not and these opportunities should arise throughout the programme. There are clear health and safety challenges in the ceramics building in Kaunas and these must be addressed as a matter of urgency. In some areas new technologies have not been sufficiently integrated into the student experience and students also lack first hand exposure to key exemplars of international excellence.

Conclusion

The provision is generally very good across all areas, but the institution should be more confident and ambitious about developing its international links and pursuing English as a delivery platform. It should professionalise its recordkeeping and visibility of the assessment evidence base across all levels of programmes under review and seek to develop prizes and awards which are directed towards employability and entrepreneurship/business skills acquisition. The institution should also consider narrowing the array of modules in order to provide greater flexibility and opportunities for students to take creative risks. The students are happy and the staff very caring about the student experience, which is a very strong and positive story, one which should be celebrated well beyond the confines of Lithuania.