SKVC

STUDIJŲ KOKYBĖS VERTINIMO CENTRAS
CENTRE FOR QUALITY ASSESSMENT IN HIGHER EDUCATION

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ARCHITECTURE FIELD OF STUDY

Vilnius Academy of Arts

EXTERNAL EVALUATION REPORT

Expert panel:
1. Panel chair: Patrick Flynn ……………………….. (signature)
2. Academic member: Ole Gustavsen
3. Social partner: Ruta Misiunas
4. Student representative: Laura Unda Liepiņa

SKVC coordinator: Ms Radvilė Blažaitytė

Report prepared in 2025
Report language: English

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I. INTRODUCTION

1.1. OUTLINE OF THE EVALUATION PROCESS

The field of study evaluations in Lithuanian higher education institutions (HEIs) are based on the following:

- Procedure for the External Evaluation and Accreditation of Studies, Evaluation Areas and Indicators, approved by the Minister of Education, Science, and Sport;
- Methodology of External Evaluation of Study Fields approved by the Director of the Centre for Quality Assessment in Higher Education (SKVC);
- Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area (ESG).

The evaluation is intended to support HEIs in continuous enhancement of their study process and to inform the public about the quality of programmes within the field of study.

The object of the evaluation is all programmes within a specific field of study. A separate assessment is given for each study cycle.

The evaluation process consists of the following main steps: 1) Self-evaluation and production of a self-evaluation report (SER) prepared by an HEI; 2) A site visit by the review panel to the HEI; 3) The external evaluation report (EER) production by the review panel; 4) EER review by the HEI; 5) EER review by the Study Evaluation Committee; 6) Accreditation decision taken by SKVC; 7) Appeal procedure (if initiated by the HEI); 8) Follow-up activities, which include the production of a Progress Report on Recommendations Implementation by the HEI.

The main outcome of the evaluation process is the EER prepared by the review panel. The HEI is forwarded the draft EER for feedback on any factual mistakes. The draft report is then subject to approval by the external Study Evaluation Committee, operating under SKVC. Once approved, the EER serves as the basis for an accreditation decision. If an HEI disagrees with the outcome of the evaluation, it can file an appeal.On the basis of the approved EER, SKVC takes one of the following accreditation decisions:

- **Accreditation granted for 7 years** if all evaluation areas are evaluated as exceptional (5 points), very good (4 points), or good (3 points).
- **Accreditation granted for 3 years** if at least one evaluation area is evaluated as satisfactory (2 points).
- **Not accredited** if at least one evaluation area is evaluated as unsatisfactory (1 point).

If the field of study and cycle were **previously accredited for 3 years**, the re-evaluation of the field of study and cycle is initiated no earlier than after 2 years. After the re-evaluation of the field of study and cycle, SKVC takes one of the following decisions regarding the accreditation of the field of study and cycle:

- To be accredited for the remaining term until the next evaluation of the field of study and cycle, but no longer than 4 years, if all evaluation areas are evaluated as exceptional (5 points), very good (4 points) or good (3 points).
- To not be accredited, if at least one evaluation area is evaluated as satisfactory (2 points) or unsatisfactory (1 point).

1.2. REVIEW PANEL

The review panel was appointed in accordance with the Reviewer Selection Procedure as approved by the Director of SKVC.

The composition of the review panel was as follows:

1. Panel chair: Patrick Flynn
2. Academic member: Ole Gustavsen
3. Social partner: Ruta Misiunas
4. Student representative: Laura Unda Liepiņa

1.3. SITE VISIT

The site visit was organised on 20th November 2024 onsite.

Meetings with the following members of the staff and stakeholders took place during the site visit:

- Senior management and administrative staff of the faculties
- Team responsible for preparation of the SER
- Teaching staff
- Students
- Alumni and social stakeholders including employers.

1.4. BACKGROUND OF THE REVIEW

Overview of the HEI

Vilnius Academy of Arts (hereinafter referred to as the "VAA" or the "Academy") is a state higher education institution established by the Seimas of the Republic of Lithuania (the address of the Academy is: Maironio St. 6, LT-01124 Vilnius, Republic of Lithuania). The Academy is a public legal entity functioning as a public establishment. The VAA enjoys autonomy, including academic, administrative, economic and financial management activities, based on the principle of self-government, academic freedom and defined by the Constitution of the Republic of Lithuania, the Law on Higher Education and Research of the Republic of Lithuania and the Statute of the Academy.

The Academy is the only and most significant specialized higher education institution in the area of Arts, Design and Architecture in Lithuania, with academic traditions dating back to 1793, when the Department of Architecture was established at the High School (currently – Vilnius University) of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania, followed by the establishment of the Departments of Painting and faculties in Vilnius, Kaunas, Klaipėda and Telšiai, with more than 1500 students.

Overview of the field of study

The specific nature of the fields of study and the universally recognised features of the Academy, i.e. its wide geographical coverage, interaction of art, science and technology, academic culture and tolerance, creativity and professionalism, identity and internationalism, sustainability and openness, community and individuality, are the key to its uniqueness in the context of other Lithuanian higher education institutions.

It operates in accordance with the latest additions to the EU Directive 2005/36/EC (Directive 2013/55/EU of the European Parliament and of the Council) and all the relevant Governmental Regulations of the Republic of Lithuania (Letter of the Ministry of Environment of the Republic of Lithuania on Architecture Studies (No.(14-2)-D8-8123, dated November 3, 2015), and the Letter of the Ministry of Education and Science of the Republic of Lithuania on Architecture Studies (No.SR-5561), in 2016, the transition was made to the integrated (5 years) architectural study programmes offered by all the state higher educational institutions. Graduates of this programme are awarded the qualifications set out in the Law on the Recognition of Regulated Professional Qualifications (No 47-1747, dated April 24, 2008,) and the Master of Arts (in Architecture) qualification.

Previous external evaluations

The integrated study programme in Architecture has been developed on the basis of Bachelor's and Master's degree programmes evaluated by SKVC and international experts and approved by the EU in 2014 and 2016. In order to achieve a high quality of the integrated study programme, the comments and recommendations of the experts were taken into account during the evaluation process. The programme was launched in 2016.

Documents and information used in the review

The following documents and/or information have been requested/provided by the HEI before or during the site visit:

- *Self-evaluation report and its annexes*
- *Sample of work on display*
- *Tour of facilities and studio spaces*

Additional sources of information used by the review panel:

The following additional sources of information have been used by the review panel:

- Study Plans
- Academic Staff Profiles
- Examples of Thesis
- Research Links & Projects with other Schools

All the discussions were in English. The interpreter was present and occasionally used during the meetings with the self-evaluation report team, teachers as well as Alumni and social stakeholders to clarify any issues of interpretation of terms.

II. STUDY PROGRAMMES IN THE FIELD

Integrated cycle

Title of the study programme	Architecture
State code	6011PX001
Type of study (college/university)	Higher education university studies
Mode of study (full time/part time) and nominal duration (in years)	Full-time (5)
Workload in ECTS	300
Award (degree and/or professional qualification)	Master's degree in Arts
Language of instruction	Lithuanian
Admission requirements	Secondary Education
First registration date	May 27, 2016
Comments (including remarks on joint or interdisciplinary nature of the programme, mode of provision)	

III. ASSESSMENT IN POINTS BY CYCLE AND EVALUATION AREAS

The **integrated cycle** of the Architecture field of study is given a **positive** evaluation.

No.	Evaluation Area	Evaluation points[1*]
1.	Study aims, learning outcomes and curriculum	3
2.	Links between scientific (or artistic) research and higher education	3
3.	Student admission and support	3
4.	Teaching and learning, student assessment, and graduate employment	3
5.	Teaching staff	4
6.	Learning facilities and resources	4
7.	Quality assurance and public information	3
	Total:	23

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[1]

IV. STUDY FIELD ANALYSIS

AREA 1: STUDY AIMS, LEARNING OUTCOMES AND CURRICULUM

1.1.	Programmes are aligned with the country's economic and societal needs and the strategy of the HEI

FACTUAL SITUATION

1.1.1. Programme aims and learning outcomes are aligned with the needs of the society and/or the labour market

The Programme documentation is comprehensive and clear and the programme aims are constructively aligned with the objectives. The study programme prepares the students for the labour market with the staff supporting the students learning in construction, technology, social science, history of architecture and the necessary design skills to enter the architectural environment. The staff have a variety of backgrounds and the varied skill base ensures that the student needs are well supported.

The integrated study programme in Architecture which was developed on the basis of Bachelor's and Master's degree programmes evaluated in 2016 is better aligned with European models and the needs of the local and international market. This was evident in the uptake of graduates and the feedback from industry.

1.1.2. Programme aims and learning outcomes are aligned with the HEI's mission, goals, and strategy

The School has worked to ensure that their study programme conform with the mission of the university and are designed to meet the needs of the society and labour market. They are supported in this goal through engagement with social partners and alumni and aligning themselves with government and EU policies. The aims of the programme as well as the learning outcomes are based on the academic and professional requirements. These align with the EU Directive 2005/36/EC (September 7, 2005), Directive 2013/55/EU and at a national level with the Law on Science and Studies of the Republic of Lithuania (Official Gazette of the Republic of Lithuania, 2009, No. 54-2140).

ANALYSIS AND CONCLUSION (regarding 1.1.)

The programme aims are clearly set out and there is a logical order from the international to the national competencies to the programme learning outcomes. These are reviewed at regular intervals to ensure that they are compliant.

The programmes' aims and learning outcomes are in line with the overarching mission and strategy of VAA, which are fostering the development of graduates who are responsible, socially aware, creative, and reflective.

The connection to practice could be further enhanced through the development of more community based learning programmes. This could be stated more explicitly in the programme aims to ensure that these run all through the course.

1.2.	Programmes comply with legal requirements, while curriculum design, curriculum, teaching/learning and assessment methods enable students to achieve study aims and learning outcomes

FACTUAL SITUATION

1.2.1. Programmes comply with legal requirements

The programme documentation provides evidence of compliance with the legal competencies and these are demonstrated through the project work at each stage of the learning process. The 300 ECTs aligns with the EU policy on graduate architects EU Directive 2005/36/EC (September 7, 2005) and the Directive

2013/55/EU of the European Parliament and the Council (November 20, 2013)and nationally with November 16, 2021/V-2069).

The 300 ECTs are divided as follows:

General university subjects - 24 credits (8 percent of the total programme)

Subjects of the study field - 267 credits (89 percent of the total programme)

Elective subjects for special or study field education - 9 credits (3 percent of the total programme)

Given the nature of the required accreditation of the programme and the vocational nature of the education of the architecture this distribution of modules is in line with best International practice.

1.2.2. Programme aims, learning outcomes, teaching/learning and assessment methods are aligned

There is a constructive alignment of the teaching and learning with the assessment methods used. The studio model relies primarily on project based learning and the supporting modules through different forms of assessment as appropriate.

The Study Quality Committee prepares and reviews the overall programme learning outcomes and the subject lecturer defines the subject outcomes under the overall programme learning outcomes. The subject learning outcomes are then mapped onto the programme. The methods employed are lectures, self directed learning, teamwork, regular feedback, workshops, internships all feed into achieving the programme aims and learning outcomes.

1.2.3. Curriculum ensures consistent development of student competences

The curriculum is appropriate to the level of study and is primarily in line with the expected learning outcomes and they are structured to ensure consistent development of the competences of students and their work is reviewed at regular intervals to ensure that they are compliant.

The programme is devised to set out the ten semesters in a holistic way with the learning outcomes scaffolded effectively to ensure that the students' competences are developed in a coherent manner, moving from graphics and composition to contextual architecture to the students thesis in the final stage.

1.2.4. Opportunities for students to personalise curriculum according to their personal learning goals and intended learning outcomes are ensured

The competencies required to be a graduate architect are well defined by the profession and EU directives and this can, at times, limit the amount of freedom for the student to experiment in different fields. However, on the programme the students are encouraged to engage in related fields that support the learning outcomes. The more personalised nature of the learning comes from a sense of ownership over the project work. In addition, optional courses are on the programme and students avail of these to support their learning. The thesis topic is chosen by the student with staff approval.

1.2.5. Final theses (applied projects) comply with the requirements for the field and cycle

The applied projects demonstrated imaginative and well considered responses to the context provided. They aligned with the programme's stated learning outcomes. The division between research paper and creative project prepares the student well for entering the profession as was evident in the samples provided and the work seen during the visit.

The evaluation of the thesis is composed of 60 % creative component, 30 % for the research paper, and 10% for the presentation that captures and weights the necessary skill set appropriately.

ANALYSIS AND CONCLUSION (regarding 1.2.)

The programme effectively addresses the demands of society and the labour market as it is currently. The engagement with stakeholders permeates through the programme and informs the aims and outcomes. The programmes' aims and learning outcomes are in line with the strategy of VAA, namely the development of graduates who are responsible, socially aware, creative, and reflective.

Table 1.1 in the SER provides a clear mapping of the learning outcomes in each of the modules. The overall structure of the programme by the staff with the carefully considered layering of learning outcomes are aligned at the appropriate stage.

AREA 1: CONCLUSIONS

AREA 1	Unsatisfactory- 1 Does not meet the requirements	Satisfactory - 2 Meets the requirements, but there are substantial shortcomings to be eliminated	Good - 3 Meets the requirements, but there are shortcomings to be eliminated	Very good - 4 Very well nationally and internationally without any shortcomings	Exceptional - 5 Exceptionally well nationally and internationally without any shortcomings
Integrated cycle			x		

COMMENDATIONS

1. The clarity of the documentation provided with the clear programme learning outcomes;
2. The SER with its detailed review of the programme's connection to practice.

RECOMMENDATIONS

To address shortcomings

1. Further connections to industry to ensure that the current and future needs of the profession are addressed in the learning outcomes;
2. Further Consideration might also be given in the programme to clarify the distinction and relationship between practice and creating a space for meaningful experimentation. This could be achieved through engaged research practices, using academic freedom alongside potential approaches to practice and possibly involving other disciplines to create a new conceptual ideas-driven-space for staff and students to inhabit.

For further improvement

1. More clarity of the learning outcomes could be provided in the latter years of the programme as the students move towards more self-directed learning.

AREA 2: LINKS BETWEEN SCIENTIFIC (OR ARTISTIC) RESEARCH AND HIGHER EDUCATION

2.1.	Higher education integrates the latest developments in scientific (or artistic) research and technology and enables students to develop skills for scientific (or artistic) research

FACTUAL SITUATION

2.1.1. Research within the field of study is at a sufficient level

Developing research in the School is one of the aims since and there has been an increase in research activities over the last six years (from SER).

The overall quality of research is evidenced through the evaluation results from the annual evaluation of research and experimental development and artistic activities of Lithuanian universities and research institutes (*annual evaluation* until 2024, *formal evaluation* from 2024 on). Following the Lithuanian Science Council's evaluation of the scientific and artistic works published in 2018, the VAA has become the leader in the field of Visual Arts among all Lithuanian universities and research institutes in terms of both the qualitative expression of the formal evaluation (the Fi rating) and the qualitative expression of the expert evaluation (the Ei rating), and is currently maintaining this rating.

Research activities and outputs include practical architecture exhibitions and experimentation, practically oriented research projects and journal articles some of which are in recognised journals in the field, these align well with the modules taught and overall reflect the courses and learning outcomes (SER).

The research in the programme mostly is at a sufficiently high level. There is room for further development both internationally and at an interdisciplinary level.

2.1.2. Curriculum is linked to the latest developments in science, art, and technology

The programme benefits from being in the Academy of Arts with links to the Arts within the School. The use of the gallery for public displays of the end of year work was a prime example of how this benefits the school and the students as well as providing for a very useful method of communicating with the public. The students can avail of the opportunities for different courses of study in their programme to set the groundwork for opportunities for collaborative research.
There is potential for greater international reach in the development of research opportunities both with Lithuania and across Europe. The programme demonstrates its commitment to the thoughtful integration of artificial intelligence by inviting speakers to give talks on its implications and by allowing students to responsibly use AI tools, provided their use is disclosed. Given the programme's size, new materials and topics are explored through workshops and lectures. If the ideas are well-received by students, they are further developed into full courses. This demonstrates the programme's flexibility in integration with the latest developments in the field.
These initiatives could be further enhanced by linking them to the research profile of the staff and providing research opportunities for the students.

2.1.3. Opportunities for students to engage in research are consistent with the cycle

The research opportunities are placed in the programme according to the students abilities. The Vilnius department carries out second year design tasks in line with the conditions of international competitions,

the Kaunas department consistently participates in international student architectural competitions with 4th-5th year projects.

As they progress through the programme the students of the Architecture programme at the Vilnius Faculty are involved in applied research activities with this research undertaken out as an experimental project in the fifth year. The research is carried out in cooperation with the local municipality, addressing the problems of a particular region. Architecture students from the Vilnius and Kaunas faculties are involved in applied research activities in the Research Work course.

The cross disciplinary nature of this research can enhance the learning at both the undergraduate and postgraduate levels. This engagement with authentic teaching and learning methods gives rise to deep learning as is evidenced in some of the project work. There is a need to develop the business and skills further of the students which as identified in the previous report and has been improved but could be developed further.

ANALYSIS AND CONCLUSION (regarding 2.1.)

The programme's research would benefit from greater interdisciplinary and international development. Its integration within the Academy of Arts offers unique advantages, including collaboration with the Arts and opportunities to showcase work in the gallery. While students can take courses outside their programme, some have noted that the range of interdisciplinary options available feels limited. Efforts to expand international research opportunities, particularly in Lithuania and Europe, are ongoing. The programme demonstrates a commitment to responsible AI integration. Although progress has been made in enhancing students' business and professional skills, further development in this area remains necessary.

AREA 2: CONCLUSIONS

AREA 1	Unsatisfactory - 1 Does not meet the requirements	Satisfactory - 2 Meets the requirements, but there are substantial shortcomings to be eliminated	Good - 3 Meets the requirements, but there are shortcomings to be eliminated	Very good - 4 Very well nationally and internationally without any shortcomings	Exceptional - 5 Exceptionally well nationally and internationally without any shortcomings
Integrated cycle			x		

COMMENDATIONS

1. The connections to the Art programme and the efficient overlapping use the facilities;
2. The location of the school and the tradition of collaboration with other disciplines and the provision of alternative courses of study.

RECOMMENDATIONS

To address shortcomings

1. Develop further the connections to other disciplines;
2. Progress further the internationalisation of the programme.

For further improvement

1. Allow staff time to put forward more research proposals and support for staff to develop their research further.

AREA 3: STUDENT ADMISSION AND SUPPORT

3.1.   Student selection and admission is in line with the learning outcomes

FACTUAL SITUATION

3.1.1.   Student selection and admission criteria and procedures are adequate and transparent

Applicants who have gained secondary education in Lithuania and who apply for state-funded university first-level studies and integrated studies (for 2024 the same applies for the fee-based studies) must meet the specified minimum learning achievement criteria. Entry to the state-funded or fee-based programmes in the field of Arts requires passing two state matriculation examinations. In addition admission to the architecture programme is administered by Kaunas University of Technology, Vilnius Academy of Arts and Vilnius Gediminas Technical University, via the *Preparation of the Assignments and Execution of the Jointly Administered Entrance Examination for Artistic Architectural Education*. The details on entry requirements are accessible via the website and from the student meeting on our visit are well understood by all.
This is reviewed annually by the Senate of the VAA approves the rules for admission to studies at Vilnius Academy of Arts, which are in line with the regulations of the Ministry of Education, Science and Sport of the Republic of Lithuania.
The student selection process is conducted at a national scale and sets out clear admission criteria and on the evidence seen is fair, appropriate and provides a student centered method of determining entry to the programme. It provides a reasonably good indicator of suitability for the programme.

The admission process for the Architecture programme at Vilnius Academy of Arts (VAA) adheres to national guidelines, ensuring transparency and accessibility for applicants. Entry requirements include a minimum achievement in two state matriculation examinations: Lithuanian language and literature, and an examination of the applicant's choice. For architecture applicants, an additional two-part entrance examination (*Composition of Architectural Forms* and *Academic Perceived Drawing*) is administered in collaboration with Kaunas University of Technology (KTU) and Vilnius Gediminas Technical University.

This process is governed by admission rules approved annually by the VAA Senate, ensuring alignment with the regulations of the Ministry of Education, Science, and Sport of Lithuania. Clear information about criteria, procedures, tuition fees, and competition rankings is readily available on the VAA website. Feedback from students during site visits suggests that these details are well-understood and provide clarity for prospective candidates.

Recent data indicates a steady increase in the number of applicants, with architecture consistently ranked as a top choice among those seeking state-funded places. Non-state-funded applicants often prioritise architecture as a secondary option. These trends underscore the programme's growing appeal and demonstrate the effectiveness of the student-centred selection process in identifying suitable candidates for the programme.

3.1.2.   Recognition of foreign qualifications, periods of study, and prior learning (established provisions and procedures)

Recognition of qualifications acquired abroad is carried out in accordance with the "Rules for Admission of Foreign Citizens to Vilnius Academy of Arts" and the "Description of the Procedure for Crediting Learning Outcomes at Vilnius Academy of Arts." Academic recognition is carried out by the International Relations Office of Vilnius Academy of Arts. From Table 1 provided in the SER between 2021 and 2023, six students were admitted from 2021 to 2023 with the majority coming from Ukraine. The process for establishing the recognition of foreign qualifications along with recognition of prior learning is clear and in line with best practice. The examples provided describe the variety of likely student entry scenarios for the programme.

This process aligns with national standards outlined by the Ministry of Education, Science, and Sport of Lithuania.

Applicants must submit documents for qualification recognition, subject equivalence assessment, and grade conversion into the Lithuanian system. For students transferring from other institutions, prior learning outcomes are credited based on the aforementioned descriptions and protocols. Specific guidelines also govern the issuance of academic certificates for learning outcomes achieved at VAA, ensuring transparency for students seeking to transfer to or from other higher education institutions.

The numbers of foreign students highlight the programme's commitment to inclusivity and its alignment with international practice. The process accommodates various entry scenarios, providing flexibility and support for students transitioning into VAA's academic environment.

By maintaining clear procedures and offering comprehensive support, VAA ensures that students with diverse educational backgrounds are given equal opportunities to pursue architectural studies. This approach strengthens the programme's international profile and accessibility. More could be done to raise the profile of the University to draw in more international students.

ANALYSIS AND CONCLUSION (regarding 3.1.)

The SER provided much detail on the admission process and the profile of the student along with their success rates. The website links provided describe in detail the process and is clear to the students as evidenced by the feedback and on the visit discussions with the students. Foreign qualifications, non-formal and informal learning recognition processes are accommodated in the admission process.
Fair and transparent support for the student on entering the programme and the progression rates for students through the subsequent years of study indicate a thorough process. More clarity could be provided on the appeals process for the student if they have a query with the result achieved.

3.2.   There is an effective student support system enabling students to maximise their learning progress

FACTUAL SITUATION

3.2.1.   Opportunities for student academic mobility are ensured

The University provides clear guidance in its "International Relations" section of the VAA website. The main routes are providing for exchange study programmes, internships or short study programmes. Up-to-date information on Erasmus+ studies and internships is provided in the news section and the VAA newsletter.

Students can participate in exchange study programmes, internships, and short-term courses. The university ensures that up-to-date information on Erasmus+ opportunities, NORDPLUS programmes, and blended intensive programmes (BIP) is readily available via newsletters, social media, and dedicated sections on its website.

Students can study at VAA partner institutions through Erasmus+ (1-2 semesters) or NORDPLUS (1-12 months) in the Nordic-Baltic region, Erasmus+ internships allow students to gain professional experience in European organisations for 1-2 months. Similar opportunities are available under NORDPLUS in the Nordic-Baltic region. Students can attend BIP courses or short-term workshops through the KUNO, CIRRUS, and NBAA networks, providing exposure to international perspectives in art and design.

The supports and information available on the website are adequate for the students needs and a variety of options available ensure that there is adequate mobility for the student. However more promotion of

the opportunities could be provided by using a mentoring system more - students can share their experiences from these programmes to provide more encouragement.

Student mobility was significantly impacted by COVID-19, with restrictions leading to a temporary decline in participation. However, there has been a steady recovery, with all allocated Erasmus+ funding fully utilised in recent years. Despite this, students expressed concerns about limited programme choices and the competitive nature of securing spots in desired destinations. Some students noted issues with credit transfers and delays in completing their courses due to mismatched curricula at partner institutions.

While professors make an effort to provide additional guidance, the faculty is not fully equipped to handle the unique needs of exchange students.

3.2.2. Academic, financial, social, psychological, and personal support provided to students is relevant, adequate, and effective

The staff are well placed given their familiarity with each year's cohort of students to address the type of support needed. In addition the VAA website provides information on the study programme, along with links to where to access the necessary supports.
Students benefit from close interaction with faculty through one-on-one tuition in studio modules. Academic coordinators serve as the first point of contact for students needing assistance. Depending on the issue, coordinators either resolve problems directly or facilitate communication with the appropriate university department. Academic support includes the opportunity to retake exams, repeat courses, or take academic leave when necessary. Faculty members allocate additional time for individual consultations to ensure that students receive tailored guidance.

Vilnius Academy of Arts provides various scholarships to encourage and support students. The topics vary from: community activities, targeted promotion of scientific, artistic activities, targeted social scholarship to support for scientific, creative projects. The data shows a decline in Incentive Scholarships towards the second semester on 2022/23. The number of students paying lower fees also reduced in 2023.

There is adequate provision for each of the challenges of providing support for students. The relatively small class sizes and the one to one tuition in the studio modules allows for identification of the students need be it academic, financial or psychological. There is a clear set of guidelines developed for each scenario. There is an ongoing issue with the amount of funding to support this however.

Additionally, students can use the university's facilities and equipment for project work, with materials partially subsidized for academic assignments.

The academy emphasizes student well-being through its mental health promotion programme. Students can access confidential counselling services with a university psychologist. Systemic issues identified during counselling are addressed collaboratively with faculty while maintaining student confidentiality. Students also receive encouragement to participate in workshops and extracurricular activities to build their skills and confidence.

Students noted during meetings that faculty members are generally approachable and responsive to their needs. However, concerns were raised about inconsistent feedback and the workload in certain courses. Additionally, students suggested integrating workshops into the curriculum to foster collaborative learning and enhance skill development.

3.2.3. Higher education information and student counselling are sufficient

The students are introduced into the counselling support system in first year and an anonymous questionnaire survey of students is conducted after each semester. This helps to reveal students' attitudes towards the programme and identifies issues.

The guidelines described are in line with good practice and the student meeting bore out the feeling that the students are well supported in their studies.

VAA ensures that students have access to comprehensive academic and personal support through well-structured counselling and information systems. First-year students are introduced to the available support services during an orientation session, followed by department-specific introductions. Information about the study process, course requirements, and extracurricular opportunities is available through the VAA website and departmental communications.

Students are invited to provide feedback through anonymous surveys conducted each semester. This feedback informs programme adjustments and the development of new initiatives, such as workshops that encourage interdisciplinary collaboration. Faculty members also hold regular discussions with students to review their progress and address concerns.

Workshops are a significant component of the VAA experience, offering students opportunities to engage with international partners, explore different cultural contexts, and collaborate with peers from other disciplines. These initiatives help students build professional networks and develop practical skills. First- and second-year students are particularly encouraged to participate, and faculty members regularly check in to ensure students are aware of these opportunities.

ANALYSIS AND CONCLUSION (regarding 3.2.)

The staff have a good knowledge of the issues affecting students due to the small class sizes any matter that arises can be dealt with swiftly and directed to the appropriate support be it academic, financial or psychological.

The decline in students receiving financial support in the 2023 academic year does need to be monitored to see if this a trend of a one off for that year.

While students appreciated the efforts to provide academic and personal support, they expressed several concerns:

- The lack of detailed feedback during critiques, with some suggesting dividing critiques over multiple days to allow for more individual attention.
- Certain courses felt overly extended, with students noting that content could be covered more efficiently.
- A perceived disconnect between the design studio workload and the credits allocated, leading to suggestions for better alignment.
- Limited opportunities to defend final projects, as exhibitions do not always allow for in-depth presentations or feedback.
- A need for clearer course structures and expectations to improve understanding and engagement.

Despite these challenges, students expressed confidence in their ability to seek support from both faculty and administration, noting that issues are generally resolved promptly. The open communication channels and responsive faculty contribute significantly to the positive academic environment at VAA.

AREA 3: CONCLUSIONS

AREA 3	Unsatisfactory - 1	Satisfactory - 2 Meets the requirements, but there are	Good - 3 Meets the requirements, but there are	Very good - 4 Very well nationally and internationally	Exceptional - 5 Exceptionally well nationally and

	Does not meet the requirements	substantial shortcomings to be eliminated	shortcomings to be eliminated	without any shortcomings	internationally without any shortcomings
Integrated cycle			x		

COMMENDATIONS

1. The variety of options for engagement with the student study programmes abroad;
2. The level of care in the admission process;
3. The progression rates for students who are admitted through this process.

RECOMMENDATIONS

To address shortcomings

1. The students who have successfully completed the exchange abroad can be used to act as mentors to the students who are contemplating travelling;
2. More regular reviews of schools that have a similar profile to the school and would be a good match for studying.

For further improvement

1. More clarity for students who wish to appeal a decision on admission.

AREA 4: TEACHING AND LEARNING, STUDENT ASSESSMENT, AND GRADUATE EMPLOYMENT

4.1. Students are prepared for independent professional activity

FACTUAL SITUATION

4.1.1. Teaching and learning address the needs of students and enable them to achieve intended learning outcomes

The Programme Learning outcomes are structured to ensure that there is an incorporation of subject matter and studio based learning to realise the design concept, creating a continuum between design ideas and the subject matter. Employers and social partners praised the students' strong creative skills and software literacy but noted room for improvement in their technical skills. The program's workshops support skill development by offering training in software like Grasshopper and encouraging students to experiment with other software of interest in their courses.

4.1.2. Access to higher education for socially vulnerable groups and students with individual needs is ensured

The study process is adapted for students with special needs in accordance with point 16.5 of the Code of Academic Ethics of the Vilnius Academy of Arts(VAA). The issue for many Universities is the challenge of supporting students who needs that may not be immediately apparent. The University has adopted principles that would be in line with international practice in this area.

Vilnius Academy of Arts(VAA) demonstrates a strong commitment to supporting socially vulnerable students and those with individual needs. The study process is adapted to align with the *Code of Academic Ethics of the VAA*, which mandates that lecturers provide appropriate conditions for students with disabilities or learning challenges during assessments and classroom activities.

Support measures include the creation of individual study plans tailored to the specific needs of students. Adaptations such as hybrid learning options are offered to ensure real-time participation for students unable to attend in person. Financial assistance is also available through government-funded scholarships and other targeted financial support schemes for students with special needs.

The university has taken steps to enhance accessibility through infrastructure improvements, such as installing elevators and modern daylight facilities in its buildings. Faculty members receive guidance to ensure inclusive teaching practices and to help students fully engage in classroom activities. A psychologist is available on campus to provide additional emotional and psychological support when needed.

ANALYSIS AND CONCLUSION (regarding 4.1.)

The programme is structured to include essential subject matter within its coursework while promoting studio-based learning, effectively preparing students for independent professional practice. Students are taught fundamental software skills and develop strong creative abilities essential for success in the field. Access to higher education for socially vulnerable groups and students with individual needs is ensured through the VAA Code of Academic Ethics.

4.2. There is an effective and transparent system for student assessment, progress monitoring, and assuring academic integrity

FACTUAL SITUATION

4.2.1. Monitoring of learning progress and feedback to students to promote self-assessment and learning progress planning is systematic

The students' learning is scaffolded at each stage of the process through the design of more complex building types at each stage of the programme. The students are assessed through end-of-term assessments and mid-stage assessments. The staff apply problem-based and project-based teaching methods, which are orientated to develop the students own self directed learning and inquiry. The students are supported in the other teaching modules to understand the latest construction technologies and design processes. Some students have expressed concerns about the lack of feedback provided during mid-stage and end-of-term assessments in their design courses.

4.2.2. Graduate employability and career are monitored

The University has links via the Alumni and informal work placements during the programme which ensures a connection to practice. The Study Programme Committee and Alumni surveys provide support for the students development and an oversight of the programme and its relationship to practice. Detailed data on student employment post qualification was provided to the panel.

4.2.3. Policies to ensure academic integrity, tolerance, and non-discrimination are implemented

The programme adheres to the policy as defined by the University Code of Ethics and employs software to check for the integrity of the students work submitted to ensure that the students are treated fairly. Under General Protection Data Regulations the students' data is protected. There were no cases of academic dishonesty, intolerance and discrimination in the Department of Architecture during the period that the department undertook the study.

4.2.4. Procedures for submitting and processing appeals and complaints are effective

The nature of the small classes and tutor system used ensures that the students are well supported and that any issues are immediately brought to the attention of the staff. However a more formal process working alongside this would ensure that no issue escapes attention.

ANALYSIS AND CONCLUSION (regarding 4.2.)

Mid-stage and end-of-term assessments would benefit from a more structured feedback system to ensure that each student receives sufficient review time and constructive comments. Although students stated that they can reach out to lecturers for additional feedback afterward, greater emphasis should be placed on providing comprehensive feedback during the assessments. The feedback to support this learning could be enhanced further through the use of more interactive feedback sessions and more scheduled feedback to ensure that all the students receive a consistent level of feedback. Graduate employability and career outcomes are monitored through surveys; however, the programme would benefit from increased interaction with its graduates.

AREA 4: CONCLUSIONS

AREA 4	Unsatisfactory - 1 Does not meet the requirements	Satisfactory - 2 Meets the requirements, but there are substantial shortcomings to be eliminated	Good - 3 Meets the requirements, but there are shortcomings to be eliminated	Very good - 4 Very well nationally and internationally without any shortcomings	Exceptional - 5 Exceptionally well nationally and internationally without any shortcomings
Integrated cycle			x		

COMMENDATIONS

1. The availability of staff and small class sizes ensure that the students always receive feedback when they request it;
2. The caring nature of the staff in ensuring that the students are not under stress and their learning is scaffolded at each stage of the process.

RECOMMENDATIONS

To address shortcomings

1. More structured feedback should be provided in the studio project. In particular ensure that it is delivered in as equal measure as possible to all the students. This would ensure that both the mid term reviews and the end of semester reviews prepare the students for each stage of the design process;
2. The students are currently working at an uneven pace through the semester with the latter part of the semester having a bigger workload than the early part. It would be beneficial to the learning to try techniques to even this out either through earlier submissions in module work or project work.

For further improvement

1. The students would benefit from more formal training in time management and setting intermediate work deadlines. This would be especially helpful in the early years of the programme to set the students up to be self directed learners;
2. A more detailed assessment schedule at the start of the year with clearly defined goals for the students would also assist in the pacing of the students workload.

AREA 5: TEACHING STAFF

5.1. Teaching staff is adequate to achieve learning outcomes

FACTUAL SITUATION

5.1.1. The number, qualification, and competence (scientific, didactic, professional) of teaching staff is sufficient to achieve learning outcomes

The nature of architectural education is that it is primarily vocational driven with a clearly defined path from education to profession. To support this the VAA has a staff profile from varied backgrounds to ensure the particular needs of the education of an architect are met. VAA supports creativity and scientific research through its support for continuous development of its staff. All lecturers, researchers and artists teaching in the programme have a field of activity that is relevant to the subjects they teach and at least 3 years of professional experience relevant to the subjects they lecture on. The average work for the organisation and implementation of studies (contact work with students and non-contact work necessary for studies) accounts for 60 %, with research and experimental development making up the remainder. The profiles of the staff provided demonstrated a good alignment between practical, theoretical and research work.

In total, 11 (22 %) professors, 18 (36 %) associate professors and 8 (16 %) PhDs teach in the field of architecture. The ratio of teaching staff to students is sufficient for the size of students and classes provided on the programme and the ratio has been consistently maintained over the years shown in the study provided.

ANALYSIS AND CONCLUSION (regarding 5.1.)

The teaching staff's number, qualifications, and competencies are appropriately aligned with the programme's learning outcomes. The faculty demonstrates a balanced mix of practical professional experience and academic expertise, essential for maintaining the dual focus of architectural education—vocational training and critical academic development. The programme ensures an effective range of staff, from early-career professionals to seasoned academics, fostering diverse perspectives in teaching and mentorship. Additionally, the student-to-staff ratio is adequate, supporting personalised engagement and the delivery of high-quality education.

In conclusion, the current composition and qualifications of the teaching staff effectively meet the programme's educational objectives and ensure a supportive learning environment for students.

5.2. Teaching staff is ensured opportunities to develop competences, and they are periodically evaluated

FACTUAL SITUATION

5.2.1. Opportunities for academic mobility of teaching staff are ensured

International mobility opportunities were hampered by the COVID pandemic. However post pandemic the academic staff of Architecture, through national projects, ERASMUS+, NORDPLUS programmes, as well as through the NBAA Association, and on their own initiative engaged in a number of international initiatives. The process for engaging in mobility is encouraged and is supported via information freely available to all the staff.

5.2.2. Opportunities for the development of the teaching staff are ensured

A comprehensive list of all the external presentations and exhibitions along with examples of research projects was provided to the panel and demonstrated an impressive range of opportunities for the staff to develop their careers. Some additional guidance around career planning and staff feedback would be beneficial to the staff.

ANALYSIS AND CONCLUSION (regarding 5.2.)

Teaching staff have access to opportunities for competence development and international mobility, supported by initiatives like ERASMUS+, NORDPLUS, and NBAA. Post-pandemic engagement in international activities has been strong, and staff are encouraged to participate. Career development opportunities are robust, though additional guidance on career planning and feedback would enhance support. Periodic evaluation ensures continuous improvement and alignment with professional goals.

AREA 5: CONCLUSIONS

AREA 5	Unsatisfactory - 1 Does not meet the requirements	Satisfactory - 2 Meets the requirements, but there are substantial shortcomings to be eliminated	Good - 3 Meets the requirements, but there are shortcomings to be eliminated	Very good - 4 Very well nationally and internationally without any shortcomings	Exceptional - 5 Exceptionally well nationally and internationally without any shortcomings
Integrated cycle				x	

COMMENDATIONS

1. The variety of skill sets and support available to staff to support their development.
2. The proactive participation in mobility programmes and the diverse range of professional engagements underscore a strong commitment to fostering excellence.
3. The dedication of the staff who are self-reflective and address issues in a proactive manner.
4. The upskilling that the staff have undertaken on a mostly voluntary basis.

RECOMMENDATIONS

To address shortcomings

No comments

For further improvement

1. Increased internationalisation of the programme and more staff to be engaged in international research / collaborative research.
2. More formal career coaching and stage of career advice would allow the staff to plan their careers more effectively.
3. Create spaces for informal sharing of ideas, peer learning, and discussions about pedagogy and practice.
4. Facilitate more cross-disciplinary projects, workshops, and design studios that expose staff to diverse approaches and foster creative thinking.

5. Provide more formal training in pedagogical methods to the staff to encourage experimentation with new teaching approaches, such as flipped classrooms, studio-based critiques, and collaborative design challenges.
6. Allow even more space and time in the academic calendar for international projects and research.

AREA 6: LEARNING FACILITIES AND RESOURCES

6.1.	Facilities, informational and financial resources are sufficient and enable achieving learning outcomes

FACTUAL SITUATION

6.1.1. Facilities, informational and financial resources are adequate and sufficient for an effective learning process

The buildings, classrooms and infrastructure used for the implementation of the programme meet the requirements of current legislation in the Republic of Lithuania. The equipment available to the staff and students is adequate for the staff and student class sizes and the access and support from the library provides the students and staff with research information needs. The area of the premises (excluding auxiliary premises) directly dedicated to the integrated study programme is 488,5^{m2}, i.e. approx. 5,5^{m2} per student. In Kaunas, the Department of Architecture conducts the study programme at the premises of the Academy of Fine Arts (Muitinės St. 2, Kaunas). The area of the premises (excluding auxiliary premises) directly dedicated to the integrated study programme in Kaunas is 297^{m2}, i.e. approx. 6.3^{m2} per student. Each course has one studio for individual and group practical work.

The Art and Design Laboratories provide access for the VAA students to get familiar with various materials. These laboratories are shared with other disciplines from creative programmes. The Art and Design Laboratories offer advanced equipment for experimenting and layout (wood, plastic and metal, electronics, jewellery, furniture restoration, printmaking, ceramics, textiles, glass processing and digital printing). They are used on a continuous basis by the students with some not unexpected pressure for use towards the end of each semester.

6.1.2. There is continuous planning for and upgrading of resources

The programme is being delivered in an historic building with limited scope for modifications to comply with codes. A Universal Design Assessment of the building could assist in considering how to future proof the building.

ANALYSIS AND CONCLUSION (regarding 6.1.)

The facilities, informational, and financial resources are sufficient to support the learning outcomes. While the historic building poses challenges for modifications, the infrastructure and equipment meet current requirements and adequately serve staff and students. Continuous planning for resource upgrades is evident, and a universal design assessment could help future-proof the building.

The finances are being strained to meet the requirements of equipment and maintaining an historic building.

AREA 6: CONCLUSIONS

AREA 6	Unsatisfactory - 1 Does not meet the requirements	Satisfactory - 2 Meets the requirements, but there are substantial shortcomings to be eliminated	Good - 3 Meets the requirements, but there are shortcomings to be eliminated	Very good - 4 Very well nationally and internationally without any shortcomings	Exceptional - 5 Exceptionally well nationally and internationally without any shortcomings
Integrated cycle				4	

COMMENDATIONS

1. The availability of different expertise to the students be it photography, model making skills or computer skills and the provision of space in the buildings. The gallery space for the end of year show is an important connection to the city as well as an opportunity to highlight the work of the School.
2. The support of the VAA for the programme and the recognition of Architecture's programme particular needs.
3. The efficient use of teaching resources and the way they are being adapted to ensure co operation across different disciplines.
4. The extensive library and the constant updating of relevant sources.

RECOMMENDATIONS

To address shortcomings

No comments

For further improvement

1. Explore how the existing facilities can be updated for accessibility needs and respect the history of the building.
2. Enhance collaboration with external stakeholders to secure additional resources and support for long-term strategic planning.
3. Develop a comprehensive workload management plan to support architecture management staff and ensure sustainable program development.
4. A significant volume of work is expected from a small number of architecture management staff within the programme. These conditions are creating difficulties for long-term planning, such as strategies for the sustainable provision of both physical and human resources.

AREA 7: QUALITY ASSURANCE AND PUBLIC INFORMATION

7.1.	The development of the field of study is based on an internal quality assurance system involving all stakeholders and continuous monitoring, transparency and public information

FACTUAL SITUATION

7.1.1. Internal quality assurance system for the programmes is effective

The current system of QA consists of Department meetings and the Study Programme Committee. The activities of the Department and its Chair are regulated by the VAA Department Statutes, while the activities of the Study Programme Committee are governed by the Committee Statutes approved by the VAA Senate. This ensures that there is an oversight of the programme. This could be enhanced by an additional review of the whole programme on a regular basis.

7.1.2. Involvement of stakeholders (students and others) in internal quality assurance is effective

Students are involved with regular meetings with the staff via the Study Programme Committee along with alumni and partners. The Social partners, including faculty from other institutions, researchers, and practicing architects, are invited to review final projects to review the students' work.

7.1.3. Information on the programmes, their external evaluation, improvement processes, and outcomes is collected, used and made publicly available

The students complete anonymous surveys twice a year to evaluate the content and teaching methods. The alumni form part of the Study Programme Committees (SPC) which – analyse, evaluate, and improve the content, process, and outcomes of study programmes; annually certify subjects and approve the study plan.

7.1.4. Student feedback is collected and analysed

Student feedback is gathered in an informal manner on a regular basis and is responded effectively either through action or through an explanation. This was evident in the meeting with the students who highlighted the swift response to matters they raised. The staff collect the student feedback at the end of the year for review and consideration of the following year.

ANALYSIS AND CONCLUSION (regarding 7.1.)

The internal quality assurance system is effective, with oversight provided by the department and study programme committee. Stakeholders, including students, alumni, and social partners, are actively involved in the process. Public transparency is maintained through surveys, programme reviews, and published information. Regular feedback collection ensures continuous improvement, though a periodic comprehensive review of the entire programme could further strengthen quality assurance.

AREA 7: CONCLUSIONS

AREA 7	Unsatisfactory - 1 Does not meet the requirements	Satisfactory - 2 Meets the requirements, but there are substantial shortcomings to be eliminated	Good - 3 Meets the requirements, but there are shortcomings to be eliminated	Very good - 4 Very well nationally and internationally without any shortcomings	Exceptional - 5 Exceptionally well nationally and internationally without any shortcomings

Integrated cycle			x		

COMMENDATIONS

1. The direct connection between the small classes and the staff allows for any issues to be raised at the early stage.
2. The staff are open to receive feedback and feedback from students is seen to be acted on promptly or an explanation is provided to the students in a timely manner.

RECOMMENDATIONS

To address shortcomings

1. A more structured regular review of the programme every five years or so to allow the staff time to reflect on the programme and develop a more cohesive vision of the programme.
2. A more detailed developed strategic plan of the programme to address the changing nature of the programme and demonstrate how the programme can make a contribution to societal needs around climate change, social shifts in population demographics and housing needs.

For further improvement

1. Establish a structured five-year programme review cycle to foster long-term strategic reflection and cohesive vision.
2. Develop a detailed strategic plan addressing societal challenges like climate change, demographic shifts, and housing needs.
3. Strengthen integration of stakeholder feedback into programme development to enhance relevance and alignment with societal needs.

V. SUMMARY

1. There is an opportunity to develop **interdisciplinary** project work and research that is unique to the University - as the School shares facilities with other disciplines and is in an Art academy. This would enrich the programme further and allow a development of the teaching and learning;

2. **Internationalisation** is an area that could be much more developed by the School. Possibly allocate a staff member part time to a role to explore good examples of schools abroad and 'vet' and identify the schools that would be a good match;

3. It is important to ensure that **feedback to students** on the project work is timely and delivered at the appropriate moment in the development of the project. That will ensure that the students engage in deeper learning and will further enhance the current supportive environment;

4. Provide students with additional support around **time management** of different assessments and the necessity to space out the workload over a semester. Students often struggle with an uneven workload and this leads to excessive workloads towards the end of the projects;

5. A **Quality Assurance** process that provides a bigger oversight would benefit the programme. A regular review of the programme every 5 years approximately with a board consisting of other academics and practitioners could provide this additional layer of support;

6. The **management team** needs more time in their work to engage in long term planning scenarios and allow time for them to develop international opportunities. There is a heavy workload placed on the team and this often can lead to a reactive situation rather than allowing for long term planning;

7. The links to the graduates could be developed further to support the school and provide a connection to practice. Developing the **alumni links** with more invited talks, lectures, reviews and provision of CPD would strengthen this further.

VI. EXAMPLES OF EXCELLENCE

1. The relatively smaller size of the school gives rise to an agility in the learning environment;

2. The students are supported in a 'healthy learning environment' with stress minimised;

3. The graduates are well regarded and their strengths in spatial awareness and creativity are acknowledged by members in practice and the graduates are well prepared for practice;

4. The students feel that their voices are heard and their feedback is valued in the development of the programme. The staff are approachable and are open to comments on how the programme can be improved. The feedback the students give is seen to be acted on in a timely manner;

5. The staff feel supported in their work by the management and feel that they are given academic freedom to develop their career;

6. The panel were impressed at the quality of the information provided, the reflection of the staff, and at each meeting, management, self evaluation team, teaching staff, employers and the students were very supportive of the process and were open to feedback from the panel;

The panel would like to thank all the staff and students who produced the SER report and were available on the day to provide feedback, answer queries and show the work and facilities to the review team.