STUDIJŲ KOKYBĖS VERTINIMO CENTRAS

VILNIAUS DAILĖS AKADEMIJOS
GRAFIKOS PROGRAMOS (612W10002)
VERTINIMO IŠVADOS

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EVALUATION REPORT

of *GRAPHICS* (612W10002)
STUDY PROGRAMME

at VILNIUS ART ACADEMY

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Išvados parengtos anglų kalba
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INFORMATION ON EVALUATED STUDY PROGRAMME

Name of the study programme	GRAPHICS
State code	612W10002
Study area	Arts
Study field	Fine Arts
Kind of the study programme	University studies
Level of studies	First
Study mode (length in years)	Full-time (4)
Scope of the study programme in national credits[1]	160
Degree and (or) professional qualifications awarded	Bachelor of Fine Arts
Date of registration of the study programme	19.05.1997; Order No. 565

[1] – one credit is equal to 40 hours of student work

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Centre for Quality Assessment in Higher Education

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I. INTRODUCTION

On Tuesday 22nd March 2011 - following analysis of the programme's Self Evaluation Report (SER), the previous Accreditation Reports of 2008 and the preparation of Preliminary Reports - the Accreditation Team (Professor John Butler, Professor George Houliaras, Atis Kampars, Krzysztof Stanislawski, Kirke Kangro and Saulius Valius) visited Vilnius Academy of Arts: BA Graphic Arts.

The visit to the University and Faculty involved meetings with the following groups:

1.   The Senior Management (Administrative Staff)
2.   The SER preparatory team
3.   The Teaching team
4.   The Students
5.   The Employers and Graduates.

Site visits to the physical resources (studios, workshops, library, galleries etc.) were conducted during the course of the day. The Accreditation Team also had the opportunity to view studio work and theses produced by the students to assess the level and quality of the work.

All the people involved in the accreditation process were very positive, co-operative and engaged fully in the process and the team was fully supported by a competent translator for all our sessions. The Accreditation Team were accorded a professional and very hospitable welcome. The team wished to encourage an open, constructively critical discussion with all concerned, and the level of involvement by those they encountered during the visit greatly enhanced the efficiency of the work that was carried out.

Three members of the team were involved in the previous accreditation exercise in 2008 and were pleased to see that the general state of affairs in Lithuanian higher art education has improved considerably.

The Accreditation Team would like to extend its appreciation and warm thanks to everyone involved in organising the event and those participating in the meetings.

II. PROGRAMME ANALYSIS

1. Programme aims and learning outcomes

1.1. Programme demand, purpose and aims

1.1.1. Uniqueness and rationale of the need for the programme

This programme is unique in the higher education sector in Lithuania offering programmes in such domains of professional artistic activity as fine printmaking and the art of the book. The two specialisations, have very old traditions and open up wide career opportunities for its graduates.

The programme stresses high aims and objectives (to educate creative artists - generators of creative contemporary ideas both locally and internationally, analytic

thinkers, good communicators) thus setting high standards for the undergraduate level of Fine Art studies. Taking into account the special role and position of Vilnius Academy of Fine Arts (hereinafter - Academy) in Lithuania it is possible to assume that those ambitious statements have both institutional and national meaning and context and fulfils the demands for undergraduate education in the professional field of graphic arts.

1.1.2. Conformity of the programme purpose with institutional, state and international directives

The Academy recognises the value of a three-cycle higher education system proposed by the *Bologna* process; also the volume and structure of the programme meets the national and institutional requirements. At present it is found to be rational to continue a 4-year period of Bachelor's education, which provides a necessary time frame for a student to complete a competitive undergraduate education.

1.1.3. Relevance of the programme aims

The aims and objectives of the programme were found to be of a high level meeting the requirements for the provision of BA study in Fine Arts – strategic objectives like preparation of "…high level artists – generators of creative ideas both local and international…, specialists with good understanding about the contemporary developments of culture…, analytical thinkers…" (SER p.4). These statements can be substantiated by the significant artistic diversity of the student's work, which demonstrates tolerance to a range of creative initiatives in the Department and prepares students for individual research at the second cycle of studies.

Through alumni and employers the team is able to evaluate that the aims are appropriate to develop graphic artists able to work across a wide range of professions from fine artists exhibiting nationally and internationally, to working in the media, publishing, advertising and the education sector.

1.2. Learning outcomes of the programme

1.2.1. Comprehensibility and attainability of the learning outcomes

The introduction of principles of learning outcomes (hereinafter – LO) as well as descriptors and competences according to the *Bologna* directives have been described at a good level. The general principles and compliancy of the programme content and study volume are clear, but the programme team should still apply a more rigorous implementation of LO's to study modules and courses .

1.2.2. Consistency of the learning outcomes

In the SER the programme described in a simplified way the plan of study to realise its aims as follows:
a) gradual mastery of basic knowledge.
b) creative application of acquired experience and development in a selected field.
c) interdisciplinary expression of ideas (communication and synthesis).
d) graduation project – exhibition.

The learning outcomes enable the aims of this programme to be achieved, especially in the basic phase (the first two years), which is dedicated to providing

students with professional skills, students master new (digital) and traditional technologies and apply them in a targeted manner in realising their creative ideas. The skills developed in the workshops and courses give the students the tools to develop the personal language required as an artist/designer. As they progress to the next stage students' freely select their studies, taking more responsibility for their learning and gaining an increasingly stronger ability to choose a form and a way for developing their ideas and underpinning them with sound motives.

Although the programme teaching staff have made good strides in implementing LOs their deeper embedding needs to be more developed at the level of study courses and modules so that its specific educational qualities can be realised – the thorough application of principles and vocabulary worked-out by the European League of Institutions of the Arts (ELIA) can provide more comprehensiveness and clarity on professional objectives of each single study unit.

The principles of LO at the Graphic Arts Department (hereinafter – Department) are also used to communicate course content - academic staff and students find it as a 'harmonizing and supplementing' system. The team assessed the academic teaching staff's ability to explain the competences and apply them to the required professional knowledge and skills as good.

1.2.3. Transformation of the learning outcomes

Since 2008 the Faculty has carried out considerable work in reviewing the student's learning experience, developing a better understanding of learning outcomes and introducing new outcomes to meet the changing demands of the profession and industry. The SER states the programme team now review the programme and LOs at the end of each semester.

2. Curriculum design

2.1. Programme structure

2.1.1. Sufficiency of the study volume

The volume of the programme is sufficient for undergraduate studies in fine art (160 credits) and the character of its objectives correlate with the content. The programme is compliant with the laws and acts - Republic of Lithuania Law on Education and Science (Official Gazette, 2009 05 12, nr. 54-2140) - orders of the Minister of Education and Science of the Republic of Lithuania "Concerning approval of the General Requirements for the First Degree and Integrated Study Programmes" and "Concerning the general requirements for study programmes" (Official Gazette, 2 August 2005, No. 93-3461) - The Study Regulations of the Academy (2006).

The vast majority of the programme and quality of its objectives are of a good level to satisfy requirements of BA level programme. However the aims need to be revaluated so that the diversity of content can better reflect best international practice and can be flexibly enhanced.

2.1.2. Consistency of the study subjects

The programme has a strong methodological 'backbone' - the continuous development of graphic artists' practical skills. The emphasis on the professional skill requirements to be accessed during the formative studies in the first two years exists as a fundamental element of the study programme – as it is stated in the SER (pp.8&9) it: *"...enables every student to direct and shape his or her further process of studies by giving it a clear direction and target, depending on their individual aims."*

A better system for electives and free choice of subjects will increase greater diversity of graphics' study area as well as the development of independent learning. An implementation of holistic approach to the course structure has been started after accreditation in 2008 (updated theoretical courses, courses in new media) however the programmes should undertake more initiatives to orient the subject matter of all groups of subjects towards competences of the specialty.

2.2. Programme content

2.2.1. Compliance of the contents of the studies with legal acts

The Bachelors study programmme adheres to the regulationd of the Law on Science and Studies of the Republic of Lithuania (April 30, 2009) and is compliant with the legal acts. Compliance of the programme content with general requirements for the study programmes as well as with the regulations for study field is satisfactory.

The future compliance with the Bologna process and the shifting from national credits to the European Credit Transfer System (ECTS) is recommended.

The programme is 160 credits, delivering a maximum of 7 subjects per semester with 12 credits for the preparation of the final project and 12 credits for practical training. General subjects at the Universal level studies and subjects of the study field are compliant with the legal requirements. The number of electives (24 credits compulsary and 10 credits free choice) similarly are sufficient.

2.2.2. Comprehensiveness and rationality of programme content

Definite activities to create a homogeneous content of studies has been started – these include the adoption of the Departments' inner quality assurance mechanisms, the comprehensiveness and clarity of course content and the basic features of multidisciplinary behaviour towards teaching and learning.

The structure of the study curricula clearly relates to the objectives of the programme and demonstrates the principles of learning and teaching methods: *"...gradual mastery of basic knowledge, creative application of acquired experience and development in a selected field, interdisciplinary expression of ideas (communication and synthesis), graduation project – exhibition."* (SER p.9). This approach also compensates for the impact created by the recent changes in practice of admission in Lithuania where the Academy has to increasingly provide the very basic learning prerequisites for art studies at the university level.

The forms of instruction and learning (lectures, practical classes, seminars, creative workshops) and methods (demonstration, visiting exhibitions, discussions) create a conducive environment and flexible circumstances for the intellectual development of students. The theoretical content of a particular programme is presented during lectures. At the same time, a problem is formulated. Later it is being elaborated and focused. Practical classes are coordinated with theoretical sessions and individual (independent) work. The scope of independent student's work increases gradually from 25% in the first year to 50% in the fourth year. This helps to build students' responsibility and independence.

The team recommends theoretical subjects need to be integrated to the core content of the programme and practical studies need to be more diversified. The Department need to encourage interdisciplinary study and enhanced elective system of subjects. The adaptation of managerial competences to the course projects is highly advisable. Further enhancement to explore intellectual and technical resources of all Departments of the Faculty of Visual and Applied Arts in particular and other Faculties of the Academy will be a continuous requirement.

3. Staff

3.1. Staff composition and turnover

3.1.1. Rationality of the staff composition

There are 9 teachers in the Department (2 professors, 3 associate professors (one of them with the PhD degree), 1 lecturer and 3 assistants). Young members have been introduced into the academic personnel – an especially positive outcome was their introduction was followed by new content of studies. There are also personnel for technical assistance – 4 persons who serve the practical need of studies as well as coordination.

3.1.2. Turnover of teachers

The turnover of the teachers was found to be of a good level and according to information presented in the SER has reached 50% within the last five years. Still there is a need expressed by students for an active programme of international visiting lecturers and use of exchange lectures and classes on a more regular basis.

3.2. Staff competence

3.2.1. Compliance of staff experience with the study programme

The average age of the staff member is 42 but 44% of the staff comes from the youngest group (25 – 34years); the average length of academic experience is 15 years which allows the review team to conclude that level of professional and academic experience is high and fully complies with the objectives of the BA programme.

3.2.2. Consistency of teachers' professional development

The system of recruitment at the Academy requires active participation in creative processes nationally and internationally so the existing combination of staff provides the programme with specialists in various areas – highly prized specialists in the

Fine Art Graphics and book designers, experts and internationally recognized teachers. The staff members also participate in international study tours and attend courses on teaching methods and quality assurance principles organized by the Academy. However it is to be mentioned that better mechanisms of teacher's development and institutional academic communication are advisable because personal quality improvement activities are mostly based on the individual's own academic initiative.

4. Facilities and learning resources

4.1. Facilities

4.1.1. Sufficiency and suitability of premises for studies
The team finds the current premises appropriate for undergraduate studies in the arts. The Department is striving to improve both technical and hygienic conditions of existing study spaces and definite improvements have been done since 2008. However there is a need for a better developed learning environment especially considering the tendency for cross-disciplinary study process. The plans of the Administration (expressed at the meeting with the accreditation team) to join the technical resources are a positive indication for the programme as long as the core studies will have continuous access to the premises.

4.1.2. Suitability and sufficiency of equipment for studies

The department operates the practical studies of printing techniques in the rooms specially built for this purpose. Recently obtained printing equipment has to be installed by the end of 2011. A newly equipped computer classroom is a very significant addition to the resources where studies in digital media can be performed. The workshops are equipped according to the technical needs, but certain modernisation is needed to guarantee health and safety requirements. It is also necessary to mention that present and positive activities to extend the technical resources demand significant contribution from the Academy, especially if there is a plan to open technical workshops for students from other departments. Without institutional plans and financial assistance these positive tendencies may collapse before completion.

4.1.3. Suitability and accessibility of the resources for practical training

The Academy is running an art gallery & book store located in the centre of the old town in Vilnius – together with the exhibition space at the new building of the Academy – the so called 'Titanic'. This is a fundamental resource to make students' activities be publicly accessible – especially significant is the possibility to defend students' graduation works openly and according to the plans of the Academy. Exhibitions of local and foreign artists also are presented there. The Academy has several facilities out of Vilnius – the one in Nida recreation zone should be separately mentioned as a great resource for plain-air studies and international artists' residencies.

4.2. Learning resources

4.2.1. Suitability and accessibility of books, textbooks and periodical publications

The library located at the main building of the Academy is an important and well-equipped learning resource which can serve as a centre for theoretical and research studies. It contains a significant number of books on art history, philosophy, humanities and periodicals.

The learning resources of the Academy's main library in Vilnius are accessible on the website since 2001, an electronic catalogue of the library has been available (http://vda.library.lt) and additionally, a national virtual library www.library.lt can be used as a search tool. There is also a substantial collection of contemporary art magazines with back copies. As a member of the Lithuanian Association of Academic Libraries, the Academy's library subscribes to the following database: EBSCO Publishing http://search.epnet.com/ (eIFL.net database package of 10 databases); Oxford Art Online http://www.oxfordartonline.com/subscriber/. The library also stores exhibition catalogues, methodological materials prepared and published by its teachers and DVD on famous artists.

The Department has its own 'methodological archive' where materials (both analogue and digital) are kept adjacent to student's study spaces.

4.2.2. Suitability and accessibility of learning materials

The Academy has developed self-sufficient premises for independent learning and research - it clearly meets the overall aims and demonstrates the far-reaching attitudes of the institution. The methodological selection at the Department's disposal is an important and positive academic factor providing students with examples from earlier periods. It is also accessible from on the Department's own website.

5. Study process and student assessment

5.1. Student admission

5.1.1. Rationality of requirements for admission to the studies

The accreditation team finds the recently adopted national admission system (according to the Lithuanian Law on Higher Education and Research [Official Gazette Valstybės žinios No.54-2140, 2009]) potentially damaging to the quality and standards of higher arts education in Lithuania. Removing the teaching staff's ability to select and choose their students based not just their past academic record but also their creative attributes, skills and their passion for the subject - realised through the portfolio and at interview - greatly reduces their ability to sustain the high standards. This process also challenges the principles of the Bologna process - of equal opportunity, transparency and accessibility for all potential applicants - and is greatly undermining the expertise of its Professors and artists.

However as it is stated in the SER the Department still can provide necessary competences at the undergraduate level but there is a definite risk of losing out on mostly talented applicants because of the non-transparent and indiscriminate character of the admission process.

5.1.2. Efficiency of enhancing the motivation of applicants and new students

The observations mentioned in the paragraph 5.1.1. relate also to this paragraph as unified attitudes on the entrance process can hardly motivate young people to commence their studies therefore existing system of admission should be described as illogical and inappropriate for arts studies.

5.2. Study process

5.2.1. Rationality of the programme schedule

The rationality of the programme schedule was found to be of a good level.
The plan of the study schedule achieves the programme objectives by developing the competences and skills as follows:
a) gradual mastery of basic knowledge.
b) creative application of acquired experience and development in a selected field.
c) interdisciplinary expression of ideas (communication and synthesis).
d) graduation project – exhibition.

As the programme develops its subject-specific features, contemporary aspects and effectiveness it will need to be constantly reviewed, updated and amended.

5.2.2. Student academic performance

As the self-evaluation report states there are no drop-outs because of students' dissatisfaction but because of poor performance or personal reasons – the drop-outs are minor – 95% of students graduate from the programme. There is also a 'horizontal' dynamic of students; some leave and some enter (1 from textile and 3 from monumental art) the Graphic Art programme from other study programmes of the Academy. The fluctuation in student numbers is mainly on a termly basis (academic leave).

The quality of the work observed by the accreditation team was of a good standard demonstrating a wide range of graphic practices.

A survey of graduates shows that students have been successful at achieving a wide range of professions to a high level.

5.2.3. Mobility of teachers and students

A teaching staff and students mobility scheme is good and has a positive effect on the programme development – 3 teachers from the Department have visited the universities abroad within the last five years. In the period from 2008 till 2009 the Department organised five international creative workshops on new trends and new technologies. Mobility of students since 2008 is stable at the average level of 10,2%. That there are 50% lesser incoming students should be a consideration for the Department and the Academy.

5.3. Student support

5.3.1. Usefulness of academic support

Academic support was found to be of a level satisfying the academic and professional needs of students. A good personal teacher-student relationship provides the opportunity for open formal and informal communication – teachers see students as their colleagues, but there is still the need for more active academic guidance for students' career development.

5.3.2. Efficiency of social support

The level of social support is satisfactory and is comparable with social support in other Lithuanian universities - the Academy provides dormitories for students as well as State funded scholarships. Students can access a gym at the old town and it is also possible to use the Academy's recreation facilities in Nida and Mizaros.

5.4. Student achievement assessment

5.4.1. Suitability of assessment criteria and their publicity

In general the criteria of assessment relate directly to the system of learning outcomes; the assessment criteria are structured in three parts each relating to the stage of studies and taking into account the specific requirements of the stage. Criteria also can be moderated according to the character or type of subject but LO principles are not fully embedded at the level of course and module descriptions. The final examinations of the graduation work have a public aspect however semester shows can also be attended – teachers from other departments consult students and express their opinion. The methodical aspect generally considered by the teaching staff is the prevailing tendency to discuss and evaluate just the 'work'; not the other aspects of the student' learning.

5.4.2. Feedback efficiency

Although the information on study results can be accessed on the website the feedback in general is provided on an informal basis and was found to be satisfactory. Teachers discuss the student's work at the programme commission and afterwards with students giving them explanation on the grade. This process needs to be formally incorporated into a student record system and should not be over reliant on the informal nature of staff - student contact. Activities to shape more flexible methods of student's self-evaluation (motivational aspects, critical approach) were started in autumn 2010; aspect of strengths and weaknesses of the study prospect could be a matter of academic discussions at the Department as well.

5.4.3. Efficiency of final thesis assessment

The final examinations of the graduation work (final project) have a public dimension – the examination commission consist of representatives from other faculties and

departments of the Academy; representatives from the professional field are also officially involved in the assessment. There are certain regulations given by the Senate of the Academy for evolution of the graduation project – the procedure is well elaborated and can provide an individual approach to each personality.

5.4.4. Functionality of the system for assessment and recognition of achievements acquired in non-formal and self-education

Positive attitude towards students' independent initiated studies are not yet fully established – courses taken on extra-curricular basis are not accredited to the programme. The teaching staff show a clear interest for students' personal development but there is a lack of flexibility in the programme. Although the independent studies may not be the most characteristic feature of the undergraduate programme the respect for independently motivated creativity has to be officially shown to shape truly creative and democratic study environment

5.5. Graduates placement

5.5.1. Expediency of graduate placement

The Graphic Arts BA programme graduates expediency was found to be of a good quality – the programme provides necessary skills to access the professional filed both as a free lance artists or employees at the publishing houses. The experience obtained through the study period also allows working as curators - this aspect has been considered by the Department concluding that there should be more entrepreneurship courses. This was mainly confirmed during the meeting with the Employers and Graduates who clearly support the Department but have definite doubts if advice coming from stakeholders would be taken into account.

6. Programme management

6.1. Programme administration

6.1.1. Efficiency of the programme management activities

The programme is performed by academic staff having both long academic and professional experiences. Considering the fact that the composition of the Department has a certain balance of generations and overall a positive attitude to the teaching process and Department's continuous efforts to improve study environment the managerial environment is evaluated as good. In addition the position of the Department in the context of the Faculty should be considered in enhancing the forms and methods of development.

6.2. Internal quality assurance

6.2.1. Suitability of the programme quality evaluation

A regular and stable system of teaching quality evaluation has been implemented through the programme's assessment process the direct feedback from the self-evaluation process is the recognition of need for new descriptions of graphic artist's profession. Still the Department has to establish its own culture of critical self-reflective analysis - this process is only at the starting phase, therefore its

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effectiveness is yet to be proven. Also the all-embracing mood of separateness should be changed for open collaboration with other academic and social partners.

6.2.2. Efficiency of the programme quality improvement

The recommendations of the accreditation in 2008 were used as a stimulus for changes and improvements. The programme teaching staff needs to take its own ongoing initiatives for quality assurance and enhancement. The impact from the current economical and national situation has to be accounted to shape a flexible and transferrable content of the programme.

6.2.3. Efficiency of stakeholders participation

The participation of stakeholders is still at the initial stage and has to be improved. At the moment the Department can enjoy the credit of professional confidence, yet closer links and formal mechanisms of mutual consultations and discussions need to be established at a higher level.

III. RECOMMENDATIONS

1. The Academy needs the quality assurance policy and strategy fully devolved and embedded in its faculties; organised into an efficient transparent process with faster communication and decision making at both Faculty and Department levels where both staff and students may have a meaningful effect. There must be clear and effective mechanisms to check and test if this is happening;

2. It is essential to establish a regular formal and business-like consultation process with external stakeholders - introduction of regular meetings at the Department on contemporary processes and the recorded collection of external stakeholder responses will provide more focused future developments.

3. More rigorous implementation of principles of learning outcomes to study modules and courses remains a continuous demand for the programme.

4. Learning outcomes and assessment criteria should be written in comprehensive form that students can understand, language that avoids educational and academic jargon and acronyms so that they are comprehensible and truly transparent.

5. The programme needs to have clearer and more focused vision of its profile and the characteristics of the graduates that it is trying to produce.

6. More interrelation between the full spectrum of all Departments of the Faculty of Visual and Applied Arts in particular and other Faculties of the Academy will be a continuous requirement.

7. The theoretical subjects need to be integrated to the core content of the programme and practical studies need to be more diversified. The Department need to encourage interdisciplinary study and enhanced elective system of subjects. The adaptation of managerial competences to the course projects is highly advisable.

8. The need expressed by students for activate and regular system of visiting lecturers from abroad and use of exchange lecturers should be fulfilled.

9. An enhancement of independent or negotiated learning as an integrated part of the programme is required. Currently extra-curricular courses are not adapted to the programme. Students have to be more capable of learning independently and take responsibility for their own actions as necessary.

10. The Academy needs to use its authority and expertise to make a strong case for changing the new State admission regulation to minimise its impact of potentially damaging the quality and standards of higher arts education in Lithuania.