

**VILNIUS ACADEMY OF FINE ARTS
KAUNAS FACULTY**

FINE ART Programme

FINAL REPORT

61202M117 BACHELOR OF FINE ARTS (PAINTING)
62102M113 MASTER OF FINE ARTS (PAINTING)
61202M112 BACHELOR OF FINE ARTS (SCULPTURE)
62102M108 MASTER OF FINE ARTS (SCULPTURE)

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1. Introduction

The Panel of Experts (Panel) visited Kaunas Faculty of Fine Arts on Wednesday 23rd April, accompanied by Daiva Buivydiene from the LCQA. The Panel collectively met with: the heads of the Faculty, the teaching staff, past graduates and employers; and divided into two teams to meet the respective Undergraduate and Master's Programme SER team, the teaching staff and the students.

The Panel held discussions and visited all the premises and were shown samples of current and previous works by students.

The institution was well prepared but received too little support from the parent institution in producing the Self Evaluation Report (SER), which was really necessary as it was their first experience of the quality review process. The Panel found that there is no real awareness of the *Bologna* process by the teaching staff, students or senior administration of KFA. No documentation on mapping competencies was submitted and the programme is not structured according to learning outcomes.

As with other programmes under review this programme is based on three sets or blocks of studies.

- 1) Block A Professional specialisation
- 2) Block B General Art subjects
- 2) Block C Humanities/general/university

This model of programme design is problematic as it creates difficulties between the Humanities and the specialised disciplines about the 'ownership' of programmes and who can determine change or development of the programme as an integrated whole.

The Panel is very sympathetic to the problems institutions are confronted with in presenting their documents to an international panel in another language, but the level of translation of the Self Evaluation Report into English is so poor that it is very difficult for them to clearly understand what the programme staff are specifically trying to say. This makes it very difficult for the Panel to be objective, as we are frequently having to interpret as to what is meant. In some cases the Panel has decided to directly quote from the SER in this report, rather than guess what is meant (e.g. the Aims and Goals of BA & MA Painting).

2. Aims and goals of the study programmes:

2.1 61202M117 BACHELOR OF FINE ARTS: PAINTING

- *'In BA level the main task of the programme is to prepare an artist mastered painting specifics and freestanding creative work essentials, to form artistic way of thinking using national and worldwide art traditions, to provide for future artists – painters – professional basics, that painting bachelor study graduates would be able to join into common culture creation process, find their own professional place in the exhibitional life, be able to work as artists, and/or continue the studies on MA level'.*

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- *'In MA level the main task of the programme is to develop independent creative work skills: to be able to describe boundaries of problematic and contextual volume of theme, to evaluate critically theoretical and practical on that theme made works, to find adequate representation form and technical solution, to realize and to represent for public defence final master course practical and theoretical works'*. After finishing this course a Master's degree in Painting is awarded.

2.3 61202M112 BACHELOR OF FINE ARTS: SCULPTURE

- the aims are directly related references to statements of the former Kaunas Art Institute found in chapter 2.1.1. paragraph 6: *'There was decided to re-establish 'pure' art studies in VAFA KAI in 1995'*. It also corresponds with subsequent assertions that new expressions of sculpture can be studied on the basis of classical and modern experiences;
- more direct tasks as reference-points for a sculptor's career are:
 - Shape thinking according to (national and world) art tradition;
 - Teach professional essentials – moulding and drawing from nature;
 - Develop abilities to work in concrete space;
 - Develop abilities to use different artistic means and methods of expression.
- although there is recognition (Introduction. Paragraph 1) that *'interdisciplinary art studies'* are supposed to be included in the programme there is no clear evidence that broader and student centred study possibilities really exist;
- the SER does not clearly express if there are any attitudes of contemporary sculpture planned or practiced during the period of the programme.
- there are no self-reflective comments on the aims by the programme as a sign for future development of KFA.

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- the main aim is to stress individual development and the integration of contemporary processes;
- analytical and critical thinking is also stated as a supportive aim;
- the presence of theoretical backup to sculpture practice seems a complementary element to achieve the general aim;
- the active participation in exhibitions and public discussions, individually and in groups, are stated as objectives to reach the ultimate aim – namely to form a creative personality.

3. Analysis of programmes

- Senior administrative staff (as well as students) believe that the study programmes are outdated and expressed a desire to 're-design' them. During the site visit the Panel were presented with a project for new curricula in which broader choice of planned interdisciplinary optional subjects were offered (Bachelor programme. Section B: Photography, Video basics, Computer Graphics (all of 1 credit), but as yet it is not located in the curricula timeframe.

- the Master's programme 'new' curricula project demonstrates the intention to improve and broaden knowledge in Optional subjects in Humanities: Art Management (2 credits). The Panel supports these developments.

3.1. 61202M117 BACHELOR OF FINE ARTS: PAINTING

3.1.1. Structure, contents and study methods

- the programme is based upon a series of obligatory courses combined with a few optional courses;
- the Panel believes that within the programme there is too little space for the development of an individual study plan originating from the students' own work;
- the programme contains too many subjects with a very small amount of credits (1 or 1,5) - although changes have been made since the SER was written;
- there are plans for the further development of the structure as a result of SER, leading to new departmental division between fine art (visual arts) and applied arts (market focused arts);
- the Panel believes there is too strong a division between the 3 study blocks – A, B and C. The department should have bigger authority to decide about the subjects in block B and C. In the current situation the opportunity for the Department to decide the content of block B and especially C seems to be very small. It is difficult for the Department to be fully responsible for the content of the programme they are offering to their students;
- this is a very paradoxical situation as both the Department and the students proclaim their clear awareness of the importance of interdisciplinary studies but are lacking structured methodologies to including them.

3.1.2. Execution of studies and support for students

- students are encouraged to express their critical opinions and wishes using an evaluation questionnaire;
- study information is found on the announcement board;
- there are discussions between teachers from block A and teachers from block C;
- interdisciplinary studies in the specialized block A are insufficient to support contemporary art practice;
- the Panel believes that the Department Board has too strong position in deciding about the theme of students' final work, students should have more independence here to give them more responsibility for what they do;
- the assessment criteria are too abstract and assessment procedure is too much based on subjective opinion and the considerable authority of the teacher;
- student evaluation is not standardized, students are evaluated through a set of criteria, which may vary in accordance to the assigned tasks and content.

3.1.3. Variation in the number of students

- the following statistics for past 5 years is given in the report:
- admission - over past 5 years consistent average of 10 per year, from which 5 are government funded. Total student number ranges from 32-42;
- selection procedure contains 2 stages: A) examination; B) interview;

- achievement – final course numbers range from 6-9, which indicates a relatively high level of failure.

3.1.4. Teaching staff

- teaching staff are very enthusiastic and have a very good and close relationship with their students;
- at the same time the Panel believes the range of teachers is too small with a lack of different knowledge, skills and experiences, teaching strategies and view points.

3.1.5. Advantages and disadvantages of the programme

- there are good collaborations with Vilnius Academy at a creative level - symposiums, exhibitions, joint assessment Juries (on a voluntary basis) and regular communication is maintained;
- there is a lack of an international dimension to the programme and a lack of international relations and exchanges, which was also mentioned by the graduates and employers;
- the graduates and employers also mentioned there is a lack of visiting professors, both local and international, and lack of different workshops;
- from reading the documentation and through the Panel's discussions there appears to be an apparent lack of critical evaluation and reflection amongst staff and the students;
- *'the local community is too small which produces very narrow communication'* - the graduates and employers;
- the graduates are mostly happy with the skills developed through their programme but would have liked more professional experience during the study to get better prepared for the professional life outside the academy;
- it is the opinion of the current students, graduates and employers that greater autonomy from Vilnius would make the Faculty feel better and more confident, and give the institution a much stronger identity;
- Vilnius Academy is not providing enough help and support to their 'branch' in Kaunas which, according to the graduates and employers might be influenced by the fact that Vilnius and Kaunas are competitive cities in the Lithuanian art scene;
- there is a very strong belief in the Kaunas identity and there is strong local authority support for sustaining the faculty, but there is a danger of an over emphasis on the region which could easily lead to provincialism;
- the Panel believes that the lack of development of independent learning - students are not given enough opportunity to take risks and 'fail' in their work;
- the Panel observed a lack of critical rigor in the students;
- a strong focus on figuration and use of the model is described as a very positive strength of the study programme by students;
- very little Quality Assurance initiative, management and processes at an institutional level.

3.2. 62102M113 MASTER OF FINE ARTS: PAINTING

3.2.1. Structure, contents and study methods

- the MA programme can be seen as a more open continuation of the BA programme;

- there are too many subjects with a very small amount of credits (1);
- there is too strong a division between the 3 study blocks – A, B and C. The Department should have greater authority to decide about the subjects in block B and C. - in the current situation deciding the content of block B and especially C seems to be very small, which makes it difficult to make the Department responsible for the content of the programme they are offering to their students;
- the programme provides too little opportunity for independent learning and too little space for a student to develop an individual study plan based on their own work.

3.2.2. Execution of studies and support for students

- students are encouraged to express their critical opinions and wishes using an evaluation questionnaire;
- study information is found on the announcement board;
- there are discussions between teachers from block A and teachers from block C;
- interdisciplinary studies in the specialized block A are insufficient to support contemporary art practice;
- the assessment criteria are too abstract and assessment procedure is too much based on subjective opinion and the considerable authority of the teacher;

3.2.3. Variation in the number of students

- admission - over past 5 years there is a consistent average of 10 students enrolling per year, from which 5 are government funded.
- total student number ranges from 32-42.
- the selection procedure consists of 2 stages: A) examination; B) interview;
- achievement – final course numbers range from 6-9, which indicates a relatively high level of failure;

3.2.4. Teaching staff

- teaching staff are very enthusiastic and have a very good and close relationship with their students;
- at the same time the Panel believes the range of teachers is too small with a lack of different knowledge, skills and experiences, teaching strategies and view points.

3.2.5. Advantages and disadvantages of the programme

- there are good collaborations with Vilnius Academy at a creative level - symposiums, exhibitions, joint assessment Juries (on a voluntary basis) and regular communication is maintained;
- there is a lack of an international dimension to the programme and a lack of international relations and exchanges, which was also mentioned by the graduates and employers;
- as with the Bachelor programme, there is a very strong belief in the Kaunas identity and there is strong local authority support for sustaining the faculty, but there is a danger of an over emphasis on the region which could easily lead to provincialism;
- similarly the Panel believes that at Master's level there is a lack of development of independent learning - students are not given enough opportunity to take risks and 'fail' in their work;

- practical works made by Master's level students are not that much more developed in their quality compared to the works made by BA level students – as works made at BA level are sometimes more experimental, challenging and ambitious - works made at Master's level are too “right”, “normal” and “traditional”. Students seem to be afraid to take risks and push the boundaries.

3.3 61202M112 BACHELOR OF FINE ARTS: SCULPTURE

3.3.1. Structure, contents and study methods

- the existing (approved) academic plan is complicated and fragmented, which originally included a large number of 1 credit units that have now been amended;
- the Panel are convinced that there should be greater possibilities for students to choose theoretical subjects which support their creative endeavours;
- the distribution of credits in theoretical disciplines is strongly in favour of fundamental subjects – 9 for Art History, 13 for general History and Philosophy, 4 for Modern and Contemporary Art. Part C (General university education elective subjects) demonstrates a curriculum where only two are on Modern and Contemporary Art. At the same time it includes several theoretical disciplines, which hardly could be identified as part of contemporary sculpture studies (e.g. *'Architecture and Art in Lithuania till 18th century'* SER Table 1, page 10, 11). There is one single discipline in the field of Economics *'Basis of Economic'* (2 credits) planned for 5th study semester, study year 3. Though the Panel agrees that certain knowledge in marketing is very much needed, it is not clear why this subject is allocated exactly in this study period and there is no comment in the SER about its' meaning and value;
- in Paragraph 14 it attempts to explain the interdisciplinary character of the programme, but courses identified as a part of *'interdisciplinary art studies'* do not demonstrate the inter-relationship of these subjects (or content) with the core subjects, but rather show a marginal collection of 1 credit units (video, photo, computer graphics) which, due to the small size, cannot provide the possibility to master these skills. Some of these subjects even come from the project of new curricula;
- overall there is a level of awareness of the importance of *'interdisciplinary studies'* but the programme is lacking deep understanding and a structured methodology to including them.

3.3.2. Execution of studies and support for students

- the programme has to be more open to various approaches to student centred learning and teaching;
- it is a common point of view of the students, teaching staff, employers and graduates that more external input to teaching and visiting lecturers would be welcome;
- the integration of all elements (courses, sections) of the programme is a key factor for a comprehensive education that according to students is very much needed;
- the Panel is concerned that themes for Bachelor Final works have to be approved by the Department (paragraph 21, page 13) and *'has to correspond requirements of*

classical sculpture', and though the SER states that work '*...can implicate characteristics of contemporary and post-modern art*', this is questionable - limiting artistic expression and development and prohibiting independent learning;

- discipline in teachers according to student opinion could to be improved;
- students receive good academic and professional support and some basic materials for studies are provided by KFA;
- a positive aspect is that, in addition to KFA's own resources, students can access other libraries (e.g. the Kaunas National Museum of Art).

3.3.3. Variation in the number of students

- the recruitment of students in the programme has remained stable since 2002.

3.3.4. Teaching staff

- the programme is run by 7 professionally qualified staff in the Sculpture Department – 3 docents and 4 lecturers;
- 3 docents and 3 lecturers from Sculpture Department involved in the Bachelor's programme are not elected into appropriate positions. Table "Staffs" (p.17) shows that the highest level of the teaching staff is docent (taking in average about 40% of the programme load), which is appropriate at Bachelor level;
- the procedures for electing new teaching staff is described in the SER (p.17 para.29). The Panel believes that, due to the special position of KAF, there should be an academic development plan approved in VAFA Senate that would approve the development of the academic structure;
- the method used whereby teaching duties are distributed throughout a study year – one specialist teacher conducts special subjects for the whole year - could be described as an outmoded traditional way of tutoring. The Panel questions to what extent do students benefit from being left in all of the core subjects (Part A: Sculpture, Composition, Technology, table 1, pp 8&9) in the hands of one teacher for one or even two study years?
- according to the study plan the tutoring of Bachelor's graduation work is the responsibility of one teacher (Table 1, p.9) – the Panel therefore assumes that a choice of teacher for the Final work, or a range of input/experience is not available?

3.4 62102M108 MASTER OF FINE ARTS: SCULPTURE

- The Master's programme has a number of features similar to the Bachelor programme therefore some observations will be repeated.

3.4.1. Structure, contents and study methods

- with a total of 80 credits for the 2 year Master's degree, the main accent on Sculpture studies (Part A), which accounts for approximately 65% of the programme with the graduation work being 20 credits;
- a strong positive factor is that in each semester there is continuous analysis of Master's work in the form of supportive theory subjects (Approved plan: "Analysing work" - 15 credits; New curricula project – "Research work" – 16 credits) added to the Part A – a clear indication of curriculum reform;

- the breakdown of the programme into three main parts or sections (those of: A, B and C) is a common VAFA study planning method. Although this type of planning has a number of positive aspects – grouping related thematic subjects (A – Compulsory subjects of special education, B – Compulsory and elective common art subjects, C – Compulsory and elective general university education subjects), it also create a structure where, due to teaching responsibilities shared with different departments and with weak communication and little academic planning between them, it does little to support the programme's main objective - i.e. support individual Master's graduation work;
- overall there is an awareness of the importance of 'interdisciplinary studies' but the programme is lacking deep understanding of and a structured methodology for including them.

3.4.2. Execution of studies and support for students

- the Panel found good educational practice at Master's level with the established procedure and methodology whereby the student has to make his/her study plan – detailed aims, timetable, choice of material, formulations – all in collaboration with the *'instructor'*;
- the amount of independent study is significantly high (up to 40% of the total programme), which is appropriate to this level and corresponds to the programme's objectives which stress individual development;
- there is a common point of view (students, teaching staff, employers, graduates) that more visiting lecturers would be welcome. This aspect has very crucial because of the academic and quality management relationships with VAFA – the Panel understands that it is the responsibility of the 'parent' institution to provide appropriate academic support for Masters' degree studies research methodology courses in particular;
- the programme staff team have to be more open to various approaches of student centred study process;
- the students report all elements of the programme should be 'deeper';
- the students expressed their problem with their preparation for theoretical studies. The Panel believe that considering the Master's programme at KFA (registered in 1997) has been in existence for more than 10 years, the introduction of research and the theoretical studies could be better integrated and developed within the programme. This problem should be addressed in close collaboration with VAFA and involve international teachers and professionals;
- examples of Master's works shown to the Panel demonstrate recognizable professional qualities and different approaches, but are largely missing contemporary references.
- during the student meeting the following aspects were expressed:
 - the programme provides too little knowledge about professional life after graduation;
 - Block C contains not enough subjects about contemporary art also theory studies are not supporting their practical studies.

3.4.3. Variation in the number of students

- the SER only provides information on the total amount of students. No numbers are given on entrance competition as well as no data on students' background – which institution or programme they are coming from;

- the total involvement of students in the programme is critically low – around 10 students. The total for 2007 is not shown (SER page 23, Table 1). This demands serious consideration about what would happen to the programme if a few of current students would fail, interrupt or go on academic leave.

3.4.4. Teaching staff

- the programme is run by 7 professionally qualified staff – (3 docents and 4 lecturers), with 1 lecturer from the Sculpture Department and 5 teachers from other Departments – 3 of them docents) still not elected into appropriate position;
- there are no Professors involved in teaching the programme, which is contrary to the “Description of General Requirements for Master’s Study Programmes” paragraph #21, which states that no less than 20 per cent of the programme should be taught by Professors;
- there are no strategic plan for electing future teaching staff. The experts are convinced that due to the special position of KAF there should be a special academic development plan approved in VAFA Senate what would guarantee an evolution of academic structure;
- a large proportion of the Sculpture Master’s programme in Part A is taught by only 2 staff members. 35 credits (of the allocated 50; including 20 credits for graduation dissertation) are provided by only one lecturer - see SER page 20) - so there is no real choice for teaching support for the final project. The Panel is concerned about the dominance of one personality, even if there are no doubts about teachers’ professional competences and capabilities, as this might limit the students learning and teaching experiences.

3.4.5. Advantages and disadvantages of the BACHELOR and MASTER programmes

Advantages:

- there is a strong perception of institutional autonomy and pride – a united feeling of the KFA cultural mission;
- positively recognized subjects of the Part B (especially Drawing, provided by another Department) and thematically connected with subjects of Part A.
- a strong support from the cultural community of Kaunas City;
- there is a general tendency to re-think the content of existing programme;
- the VAFA resources and contacts are in the background available for evolution of the academic staff and professional requirements;
- there are ongoing projects to develop new study facilities.

Disadvantages:

- there is a low level of awareness of the *Bologna* process: quality assurance schemes are not elaborated; a weak understanding of student centred learning process etc. Continuous accumulation and processing of information is missing.
- the process of Learning Outcomes in an informed way is not used. Even if ‘*learning outcomes*’ as a term is used in the VAFA Study module programmes’ (SMP) legal form, there is no common approach or understanding to what it means which indicates a lack of awareness;
- the strategic aims are not adapted to the contemporary situation;

- there is a fragmented plan of studies and weak interconnections between study subjects. There is a significant number of courses with 1 credit allocated;
- there is a lack of subjects providing insight to entrepreneurship skills. Non-satisfactory theoretical support to the students;
- the students complain that knowledge obtained from study courses is not deep enough;
- the overall academic capacity of teaching staff is limited;
- the KFA library resources – books, periodicals, IT - are very modest and do not meet the academic requirements;
- there is an absence of a VAFA approved plan to develop positions of KFA academic staff;
- the Panel is concerned about the programme's tendency to control the matter and procedure of Final Works;
- there is a low level of interdisciplinary understanding;
- there is a lack of resources for sculpture courses.

4. Material conditions

- the material conditions at KFA are to be improved in all aspects;
- the library, as well as the ICT network is inadequate for this level of study;
- the project for the renovation of the buildings gives a brighter prospect to the future development of KFA.

5. External relations

- external relations are at an average level, students and especially teachers should be encouraged to make more of the opportunities available for exchange programmes.

6. Feedback

- the local community is relatively small and the programme has worked hard to establish good communication with local professional organisations;
- employers reported that the alumni are appreciated in the local art institutions and are seen as well trained professionals with very good professional skills - good at organizing art exhibitions, projects and good at collaborating.

7. Internal assurance of study quality

- the institution has to work closely with Vilnius Academy to establish a more robust KFA Quality Assurance policy and management system with learning outcomes described for all levels of programmes.
- the institution needs to make the academic community better informed and aware of the *Bologna* process;
- students reported that they were 'not involved' in the SER process and internal communication at KFA could be improved;
- student opinion on the programme is sought regularly and the SER appendixes provide examples of *Resume of Students Interviews* data.

8. General assessment of the programmes within the study field

8.1. Recommendations to the higher education institution

Compulsory -

- the Faculty should concentrate all effort on developing both the Bachelor's and the Master's programmes;
- there should be more active and regular contacts established for interregional sharing of knowledge and experience to broaden programme content;
- there should be more active and regular contacts established nationally and internationally;
- there should be less subjects, and no subjects of 1 or 1.5 credits in the study programmes;
- both the Bachelor and the Master programmes should demonstrate a more progressive learning and teaching strategy in developing the level of studies;
- the study programmes should encourage students to be more ambitious and challenge them to push limits and take risks and move towards more independent learning;
- the institution needs to urgently develop the library together with IT equipped reading-room and internet connections;
- the institution needs to urgently approve a strategic plan in VAFA Senate to develop positions of KFA academic staff;
- the institution needs to urgently survey its strategic mission and aims in the context of international contemporary art practice.

Highly recommended –

- the Department should encourage both students and teaching staff to be more active in using Socrates/Erasmus exchange programmes.