



Kuriame
Lietuvos ateitį
2014–2020 metų
Europos Sąjungos
fondų investicijų
veiksmų programa

STUDIJŲ KOKYBĖS VERTINIMO CENTRAS

EUROPOS HUMANITARINIS UNIVERSITETAS

VEIKLOS VERTINIMO IŠVADOS

INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW REPORT OF EUROPEAN HUMANITIES UNIVERSITY

Grupės vadovas:
Team leader: Prof. Andrew Steven Goodspeed

Grupės nariai:
Team members: Prof. Neil Cameron Sammells
Assoc. Prof. Dr. Turo Virtanen
Ms Danguolė Kiznienė
Mr Benas Gabrielis Urbonavičius

Vertinimo sekretorius:
Review secretary: Dr. Trish O'Brien

© Studijų kokybės vertinimo centras
Centre for Quality Assessment in Higher Education

Vilnius
2017

CONTENTS

I. INTRODUCTION.....	3
II. BACKGROUND INFORMATION ABOUT THE INSTITUTION.....	4
III. STRATEGIC MANAGEMENT	5
IV. ACADEMIC STUDIES AND LIFE-LONG LEARNING	19
V. RESEARCH AND ART	23
VI. IMPACT ON REGIONAL AND NATIONAL DEVELOPMENT	27
VII. GOOD PRACTICE AND ENHANCEMENT RECOMMENDATIONS.....	28
VIII. JUDGEMENT	31
ANNEX. EUROPEAN HUMANITIES UNIVERSITY RESPONSE TO REVIEW REPORT ..	32

I. INTRODUCTION

1. The review of the European Humanities University (hereafter referred to as EHU or the university) was organised by the Centre for Quality Assessment in Higher Education (SKVC) and carried out in 2017 by a Team of international experts (the Team). It was conducted in accordance with the Procedure for the External Review of Higher Education approved by Government Resolution no. 1317 of 22 September 2010 and the Methodology for Conducting an Institutional Review in Higher Education approved by Order no. 1-01-135 of the Director of the SKVC of 25 October 2010 (the Methodology). In 2014 EHU was subject to a review carried out on the same basis by a team of international experts gathered by the SKVC. That review resulted in a negative evaluation.
2. At the preparatory stage of the review, the Team received EHU's Self-Evaluation Report (SER) with annexes. Included in the documentation was EHU's Follow-Up Plan Institutional Evaluation Report (SKVC, 2014), its Strategic Plan 2016-2021, and a range of data relating to students, staff and other stakeholders. The Team was also provided with the MOSTA report on EHU by the SKVC. Additional documentation and information was requested from EHU during the visit, including appendices to the Strategic Plan 2016-2021; the Statutes of EHU; the locations of internships; requirements for theses, including regulations for the preparation, protection and storage of final Bachelor and Master's works; the status of editorial / publishing activities in the university; the research strategy of the university; the curriculum plan of the university; and the university's plagiarism policy.
3. The site visit was undertaken after a briefing session and a preparatory meeting at the SKVC on 16 October 2017. The Team visited the university between 17 and 19 October where it had meetings with EHU's internal and external stakeholders. Subsequently, the Team met to review and agree conclusions and recommendations. The review report was finalised by correspondence and submitted to the SKVC.
4. In line with the Methodology, the review focused on four areas covered by the evaluation criteria (and related sub-criteria): strategic management, academic studies and lifelong learning, research and / or art activities, and impact on regional and national development. In analysing the evidence collected, the Team also gave due consideration to the recommendations of the previous review (2014).
5. The Team consisted of the following members:
 - Prof. Andrew Steven Goodspeed (Team Leader), Provost (Senior Vice Rector) and Vice-Rector for Research in South East European University, Macedonia.
 - Ms Danguolė Kiznienė (Team Member), Head of Queen Morta Primary School, Lithuania.
 - Prof. Neil Cameron Sammells (Team Member), Deputy Vice Chancellor and Provost in Bath Spa University, the United Kingdom.
 - Mr Benas Gabrielis Urbonavičius (Team Member), doctoral student of Material Engineering in Kaunas University of Technology, Lithuania.
 - Assoc. Prof. Dr Turo Virtanen (Team Member) – Associate Professor / Senior Lecturer in University of Helsinki, Finland.
 - Dr Trish O'Brien (Team Secretary), consultant in O'BRIEN/Governance Design, former Head of Strategic Planning and Communications in Quality and Qualifications Ireland, Ireland.

II. BACKGROUND INFORMATION ABOUT THE INSTITUTION

6. The EHU is a private university currently situated in Vilnius. It was established in Minsk, Belarus in 1992, and relocated to Vilnius in 2004 after its forced closure in Minsk for political reasons. As such, it characterises itself as a university in exile. Registered in 2006, the university is now part of the Lithuanian higher education system and is required to operate in accordance with Lithuanian legislation. It has an affiliate centre in Minsk that is supporting the preparation of students, practically and intellectually, to enrol with EHU.
7. The university offers first and second cycle degree programmes in the fields of Humanities and Social Sciences, and first cycle degree programmes in the field of Arts. 16 study programmes are identified in total. It also offers a PhD programme in partnership with Vytautas Magnus University (VMU) and the Lithuanian Institute for Cultural Research.
8. EHU offers its undergraduate programmes in what it terms low-residence and high-residence formats. Low-residence students participate in EHU programmes on-line and are based in Belarus. They attend the Vilnius campus for a limited number of face-to-face sessions. High-residence learners are based full-time at the Vilnius campus. Master's programmes are offered in a blended learning format which combines campus-based classes and distance learning. Programmes are largely taught in Russian and Belarusian.
9. The substantial majority of instruction and internal communication of the University appears to be in the Russian language. The issue of documentation and the Lithuanian language is referred to in para 60. The Team did not request explicit information on the Lithuanian language competence of administrative and academic staff.
10. EHU estimates that 781 students are currently enrolled with the university. Of that number, 731 are Belarusian citizens.
11. 80% of the budget of EHU is derived from donors and 20% from tuition fees. Donors are represented on the highest level of governance of the EHU, the General Assembly of Part-Owners (GAPO). The European Commission established a trust fund for EHU in 2008 which was administered by the Nordic Council of Ministers (NCM). Contributors included the NCM itself, the European Commission, and the governments of the United States, Sweden, Finland, and Lithuania. The mandate of the trust fund expired in 2016 and it was closed by the NCM. Since 2016, the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (SIDA), administers financial assistance on behalf of the European Union and other donors. The main donors of EHU currently are the European Commission, the Lithuanian Government, and Sweden.
12. The institution has undergone significant governance and management changes since its last review in 2014. A new Governing Board was introduced, a new rector was appointed and dismissed, and revised Statutes were developed, which made some limited modifications to the roles of the GAPO and the Governing Board. There are now five student representatives from the Students' Union on the Senate with the purpose of assisting staff and students to work together to contribute to the quality of education and research.
13. At an organisational level the university has reduced from five academic units to two. It now has a Department of Social Sciences and a Department of Humanities and Arts. In terms of other structural changes, the vice-rector management role has been made redundant, and development and communication functions have been integrated into the Academic Development Unit and the Rector's Office. Voting members of the Rectorate (an advisory body of the Rector that has budgetary decision-making powers) now include academic and administrative representatives to better integrate the management of these functions. EHU

considers that these reforms to governance and management have created structures that are more appropriate to its size and objectives.

14. The university does not own the premises from which it operates. The Government of the Republic of Lithuania supports EHU with a user-agreement to utilise part of the premises of the Mykolas Romeris University. The university also leases other premises in Vilnius and in Minsk. Planning continues for the transfer of a suitable building by the government to EHU. Whilst it was reported that significant progress has been made in this regard, a signed agreement for this transfer was not in place at the time of this review.
15. 95% of faculty and 60% of the administrative staff of EHU are from Belarus. Under the terms of revised contracts that it has made available since 2014, staff were required to move to Vilnius, and were provided with compensatory incentives to do so.
16. Following a Rector's order in November 2016, a working group was established by EHU to conduct a self-analysis and to develop a self-evaluation report (SER) on behalf of the university in preparation for this review. The members of the working group included heads of academic departments, administrative units, and the president of the Students' Union.

III. STRATEGIC MANAGEMENT

STRATEGIC PLANNING

17. A key observation arising from the review of EHU that was undertaken in 2014, was that the university did not yet have a mission that was universally understood. The associated recommendation was to achieve consensus on mission; particularly to avoid the university being pulled in opposite directions, to the detriment of its core functioning as a university (2014, pp.6-7). Whilst progress has been made by EHU on a number of the strategic planning recommendations made in 2014, and these are acknowledged below, **the university remains without a consistently documented and understood mission.**
18. The mission described in the Statutes of EHU is “to promote research-based university higher education in accordance with present day levels of knowledge and technology” (EHU Statutes, 2.1). The introduction of the SER for this review event says “The mission of EHU is to facilitate and deepen the contribution that its students, graduates and faculty can make to the quality and potential of their own lives and to their respective civil societies. By doing so, they contribute to Belarus and its integration into the European and global community” (SER, para. 1). The EHU Strategic Plan 2016-2021 includes what the university describes as its revised *Statement of the European Humanities University Mission and Values* (2016, p.7). The one-page statement doesn't explicitly identify its mission, but rather refers to its aspiration to “pursue its mission within a community in which caring and concern for others is a core value” and states that “at the heart of EHU is the production and dissemination of socially responsible and critical knowledge in the social sciences and the humanities...” (2016, p.7). During meetings with the Governing Board, GAPO and staff of EHU, the university's mission was referenced in a range of different contexts, including as a reason for the lack of progress in diversifying the student body from its Belarusian core; and as the motivation for developing incentives for staff to carry out more research. External stakeholders referred to the wish of EHU to raise its profile in Belarus as part of its mission; it was also referred to as having a cultural mission.

19. In its Strategic Plan 2016-2021 EHU identifies itself as “an institutional hybrid with a mission that differs dramatically from other higher education institutions” (SP 2016-2021, p.4). The hybrid characterisation refers largely to the conflict described by the university in its SER of its dual identities as political project and higher education university. The EHU has had three individuals acting in the role of Rector since 2014. The founder of EHU, Mr Anatoli Mikhailov, left the position of Rector to become President of EHU. An external appointment to the role of Rector was then made. The reasons for this individual subsequently leaving the post were not explained to the Team, as referred to further in para 67. An Interim Rector was then appointed to stabilise the university while a new permanent Rector is sought. The Team was informed that the university plans to replace the Interim Rector with a permanent appointment by the end of the year. Notwithstanding the significant organisational progress that has been achieved by the Interim Rector, and which is returned to below, stable and academic leadership for a university is essential in building consensus around purpose, and the Team understands that this level of change can prevent this. Notwithstanding these circumstances, documented (and oral) formulations of EHU’s mission are different and, as a result, the Team is unclear as to the mission of EHU.
20. Taken separately, the Strategic Plan (2016-2021) is not incompatible with the principles of the European Higher Education Area (EHEA) or the European Research Area (ERA). The Team is aware that a number of Lithuanian State policies are relevant to EHU, these include, *Progress Statement Lithuania 2030*; the *State Education Strategy (2013-2022)*; and the Government’s *Resolution regarding approval of the national programme for the development of studies, scientific research and experimental (social and cultural) development for 2013-2020*. EHU positions itself as contributing to point 3.6 of *Lithuania 2030* in its provision of a liberal arts education "together with a solid foundation of professional skills" (SER, para.196). It further identifies that its percentage of outgoing teachers surpasses the evaluation criteria for this activity, identified in point 1 of the 2013-2020 programme approved by the Ministry of Education and Research (SER, para. 192). The university does not comment on its contribution to the State Education Strategy (2013-2022) within its SER.
21. **Recommendation:** In a university with the complex origins and existence of EHU, the Team highlights the importance of confirming, documenting, and articulating a unified and consistent mission across the governance, management, staff and external stakeholders of EHU.
22. The Strategic Plan 2016-2021 is a frank document that sets out the circumstances faced by EHU. The production of the strategic plan is described in the document, and by staff members, as having been a collaborative effort that involved faculty, administrators and students (SP, p.5); for instance, working groups were established to look at strengths and weaknesses, and opportunities and threats. The strategic plan was developed under the previous Rector and managed by a Strategic Planning Committee. The current Interim Rector led the development of associated action plans for 2016-2017 and 2017-2018.
23. EHU very comprehensively summarises in the strategic plan why the university was embarking on a new round of planning at that time:

Enrollment is declining as a result of external economic forces ... amidst competing political claims, donor financial support is diminishing ...the external political environment is becoming increasingly volatile and unpredictable, particularly in relation to EHU’s Belarusian-East European mission and ...there is growing realisation that the old plan did

not address the “central core” of the EHU educational enterprise, the teaching and learning process” (Strategic Plan 2016-2021, p. 4). Having reviewed the documentation provided by EHU, and met with representatives of its governance, management, staff, students and stakeholders, the Team considers this self-analysis to be accurate.

24. Without wishing to focus further on the use of the term ‘mission’, it is again clear from this paragraph that the mission of EHU is Belarusian-focused and it seems that, in this context, teaching and learning is the core purpose of the university. Putting lack of clarity regarding mission to one side, this paragraph is very instructive in terms of the range of complex factors that are impacting upon EHU and which are influencing the extent to which it is capable, and in control of, translating strategy into reality. As noted previously, EHU is funded by three main donors, the European Commission, the Lithuanian Government, and Sweden. The SER notes the intention behind the strategic plan to increase the financial stability of the university and refers to its uncertain status as “an academic or political project” due to its dependency on donor contributions (SER, para.8). The fact that donor funding is by its nature, short-term, and subject to regular renewal, or otherwise, is identified by the university as inhibiting it from planning long-term and strategically; as such soft funding is producing soft planning (SP, p.4). In its SER the university confirms that it wishes to address this situation by becoming a self-sustaining institution. In turn, the university’s Action Plan includes the need to explore opportunities for increased revenue streams to attain a state of financial sustainability, and it identifies the Governing Board and Rector as the parties responsible for this (SER, annex 2, Strategic Goal 4 (a)). The plan does not identify what steps might be taken to achieve this objective. The SER also refers to wishing to lower the university’s dependency on donors by increasing revenue from other sources: tuition fees, services, EU project and research funding, private funding, fundraising. At the same time, it claims that it wishes to work with SIDA to diversify its donor base (SER, para.51). To avoid instability the university wishes to move away from its reliance on donor funding and yet at the same time it wishes to diversify donor funding sources. Meetings with university governance and management confirmed that it is this second objective, diversifying donor funding, that is the only current and intended goal of the university and it is this representation that the Team believes to be valid in the context of the evidence gathered in its engagement with the governance and management of the university, and in its review of the strategy and planning documentation provided by EHU.
25. The template for the Action Plans of EHU (2016-2017 and 2017-2018 (SER, annex 2)) requires information on objectives, outcomes, actions, responsible persons, key participants, timeframe, budget requirements and progress. The fact that the two years are not disaggregated in the document means that progress against plans is not available from the first year to the second. The Team did not explicitly review the detail of these action plans with management and staff during its meetings. However, as the university’s plans address core issues, the Team has commented on some of the actions as part of this review and as noted in the paragraph above. For instance, the enrolment target set by EHU in its Action Plan was 330 by the autumn of 2017 (strategic goal 1 (b) *action* column), whereas actual enrolment figures provided for this year are 251. The university wished to focus on and improve its dropout rates (strategic goal 1, (c) *action* column); the Team has commented on the ongoing issue of dropout (paras.47-48) which remains a problem for the university. The university also identifies the need to define research priorities and objectives in accordance with its strategic plan (strategic goal 2, (e) *action* column), but the Team was unable to locate a research strategy for the university (para. 110). In other supporting areas, the university has made progress, for instance in terms of redeveloping its website, and it appears also to have advanced work on curriculum and assessment. Without analysing the levels of success of the university against each of its planned actions, these examples

illustrate continuity between the Strategic Plan 2016-2021 and the annual Action Plans, but also that progress has not been made, or not been possible, in certain key areas that the university itself had prioritised for action. Equally, it does not appear that its strategic plan has been reviewed to reflect progress in its implementation.

26. High-residence enrolment figures between 2014-2016 have reduced by 30%, low-residence by 39% and post-graduate numbers by 28% (SER, annex 26). The figures provided for 2017 show a small increase in undergraduate high-residence programmes but figures for low-residence and postgraduate programmes appear to be continuing to decline. In meetings with the Team, the university expressed the view that it is not yet attractive enough as a high-quality university to significantly increase its enrolment numbers, diversify its student profile, or increase its tuition fees; disadvantageous demographic trends are also a factor in this context.
27. References were made in some meetings to pursuing the Ukrainian and Russian student markets, but in others, the conflict that would arise in the context of its Belarusian-focused mission was identified. As a result, the difficulties that EHU has accurately self-identified, arising from its reliance on donor funding, are continuing, and there is no indication that this will change. It is here that the differences between being a political project and a university become crystallised. Short-term funding is more conducive to a political project. A university that is within a higher education system that is anticipating that teaching and learning, research activities, and quality systems can be developed, maintained and thrive, will be challenged in this environment. The sustainability of any university in these circumstances is called into question, simply because it is unpredictable and unknowable. EHU has identified this, and the Team considers that the sustainability of the university is thus in question.
28. The strategic plan of EHU refers to its wish to integrate study programmes with research (p.7) and to financially support faculty-student research (p.16). It also identifies research as a key subject of the SWOT analysis that informed its strategic plan (p.5). In discussions with academic staff there was enthusiasm for the concept of research with references made to activities undertaken in this area to date. This will be discussed further in Section V of this report. In terms of interoperability of strategy with the strategic plan, however, it is important to note at this point that **the university is without an identifiable research strategy and without a sufficient resource-base to support growth in its research activities**. It should also be noted, however, that the Team was impressed with the academic staff that it met, and with their evident interest in pursuing and integrating teaching and research opportunities.
29. As the Team has stated, it was not clear on the mission of EHU and so it cannot establish if the strategic plan is aligned with the university's mission.
30. **Recommendation:** It is critical that the university formulates and affirms a clear and consistent mission and aligns this mission with its strategic plan.
31. The MOSTA (Research and Higher Education Monitoring and Analysis Centre) report that was based on an evaluation of EHU against minimal expectations for study conditions and quality organisations of higher education studies, is a further important reference for this review. The evaluation focussed on the years 2014 to 2016. Key areas in which EHU fell below expected averages included on matters regarding premises (total area and renovation),

library physical workplaces, average funds allocated per student, and student retention (MOSTA, 2017, pp.4-5).

32. During discussions with the university, it was clear that initial meetings in the Rector's office had taken place to review these results, and that written communication had been submitted to MOSTA in response to the results. However, it was not evident to the Team how the university was going to be able to improve its standing with regards some of these indicators. Taking just one of these, *total area of premises per student*: the university has been promised a building by the Lithuanian State, which it hopes to commence plans for transfer to in the very near future. The layout of this building has not yet been fully determined but the Team was briefed on plans for the number of classrooms, computer labs, library, social areas etc. The building will bring the university's academic and administrative functions under one roof.
33. The building that EHU hopes to occupy is evidently quite beautiful and the university conveyed extremely positive perspectives on the importance of moving to a stable location and the benefits it expects this will bring for students, staff and the institution. However, in discussions with staff, and in considering the square footage of the building, it appears that these new premises will not in fact improve the status of EHU with regards to the area of premises per student anticipated by MOSTA and applied to all higher education institutions; it may in fact disimprove its current circumstances. Equally, and as it confirmed during meetings with the Team, the university doesn't currently have independent resources for it to pursue other options for premises. **There is thus a mismatch between the capabilities and control of the university over its environment, and the demands of external expectations and standards.**
34. A recommendation of the 2014 review of EHU was that the university should use qualitative and quantitative indicators in its new strategic plan and that it would increase detail on implementation and timeframes (2014, p.10). EHU placed notable attention to this recommendation in its development of the Strategic Plan 2016-2021. It conducted SWOT and PEST analyses to inform the strategic plan, it also included a series of goals and an implementation schedule for addressing these goals. The implementation schedule assigns the responsible person for the action, other participants, timeframes and costs. However, whilst these are positive developments, the actions identified appear to be largely without strategic direction in the same document. For instance, an individual is charged with the development of a 'Comprehensive Marketing Plan' for the university (SP, p.16) but it is difficult to identify the strategic decisions articulated in the Strategic Plan that are directing how this would be done.
35. A further recommendation arising in 2014 was the establishment of procedures for the development and monitoring of strategic plans (2014, p.10). The Team was provided with a procedure that addresses the development and review of strategic plans (SER, annex 6). The procedure indicates a staged process of initial drafting and consultation, consideration by the governance system, and final approval by the Governing Board. The Rector is then responsible for assessing the implementation of the strategic plan on an annual basis. Where revisions are required these are submitted to the Senate and then to the University Council for consideration. It isn't evident from the procedure where approval of modifications is granted and whether the Governing Board is informed of significant changes to the original plan. It appears that the procedure reflects the manner in which the Strategic Plan 2016-2021 was developed. It doesn't appear that revisions have since been made to the document, as noted above in paragraph 25. However, it was communicated to the Team that senior management routinely monitor progress against action plans

36. **Recommendation:** It is recommended that the procedure for the development and monitoring of strategic plans is modified to identify what level of changes to the strategic plan can be approved without the consent of the Governing Board, and where approval of lesser changes is granted; if such permission exists outside of the Governing Board.
37. **Recommendation:** It is recommended that in addition to actively monitoring progress against annual Action Plans, the university also formally conducts a mid-term review of its overall strategy and amends the strategy if required.
38. The university has a web page dedicated to the publication of its strategic plan and detailed annual reports are available from 2011 to 2016.
39. The Team was made aware by Vytautas Magnus University (VMU), during its meetings with stakeholders, that VMU had approached EHU with a merger proposal. The Team was informed by EHU that it had met with VMU some time ago to discuss this potential plan and that some elements of cooperation and interdisciplinary collaboration had emerged. It did not appear that this potential for merger had progressed beyond a proposal and there is no evidence that this path is being actively considered by EHU. It is not the place of the Team to express a view on the suitability of this proposed merger to the requirements of EHU, or indeed VMU. However, in the light of the challenges that EHU is facing and which are highlighted above, it may be a path that the university wishes to strategically investigate further.
40. **Recommendation:** It is recommended that EHU strategically considers how the current challenges it is facing could be alleviated through collaboration with other institutions.

EFFECTIVENESS OF MANAGEMENT

41. The university has obviously committed time and resources to the development of additional quality assurance regulations since its review in 2014. Faculty and administrative staff met by the Team seemed knowledgeable about, and comfortable with, the regulations that have been put in place. The committee structure reporting to the Senate appears to be working well as a means of formally considering regulations prior to their recommendation to the Senate for approval. The Team was provided with examples of where regulations were drafted and consulted upon by those closest to the process to be regulated; and then brought through and justified by those individuals through the governance system.
42. Programme development has also become more systematic and use of learning outcomes increasingly embedded in the university. The university explained its intention to introduce Study Programme Committees that will include social partners in its membership, to increase the relevance of its programmes. The Team commends the concept of these committees, but as they have not yet been implemented the university could not provide it with evidence of their effectiveness. A Curriculum Committee which acts as a sub-committee of the Senate is operational. The SER describes the function of the Committee as examining, discussing and improving, the learning outcomes of programmes and teaching methods (SER, para.91). The Curriculum Committee was referred to during several meetings

with academics as providing support and making valuable recommendations in the fulfilment of its remit.

43. In terms of student admission, the Team notes that EHU is not in compliance with the Law on Higher Education and Research (2016) – art. 52, point 11 for the diplomas of applicants to be approved prior to their admission to the university. This recognition function is fulfilled by the Lithuanian ENIC-NARIC. There are two difficulties with this. The first is that failing to do so is contrary to the law of Lithuania. The second is that it is putting students in the unnecessary situation of having to present their documentation late to the Lithuanian authorities. It is understood that EHU has consulted with ENIC-NARIC on the process to have authority to self-approve student diplomas itself, in recognition of the largely single country origins of its students. The Team understands that the university will have to apply to the Ministry to obtain a permit to do so.
44. **Recommendation:** Until and unless EHU has been granted self-approval of student applicant diplomas, it must comply with its legal obligations and ensure applicant diplomas are submitted to ENIC-NARIC for approval in advance of students being admitted to EHU.
45. EHU has developed admissions procedures as part of its developing internal quality assurance regulations and its SER states that it has a process to recognise informal learning. It does not appear to yet have implemented its process for the recognition of informal and non-formal learning, but it informed the Team that it does encourage more experienced learners to share their experiences for the benefit of other students and staff.
46. **Recommendation:** It is recommended that EHU considers how it can implement the recognition of informal and non-formal learning as part of its admissions procedures.
47. Progression of admitted students is a significant issue for EHU, as noted in the reference to the MOSTA evaluation above. EHU's affiliate office in Propilei in Minsk is providing preparatory courses for students to assist them in making the transition to EHU. The challenges facing students participating in EHU appear to be beyond what most higher education universities are required to support. The school-leaving age in Belarus is 17 and students are therefore quite young entering higher education; they have also participated in a very different mode of learning than they will experience in EHU, or in any higher education institution. Student grants are not available to students in Belarus or in Lithuania and so students are self-funding or funded by their families. Low-residence students are faced with similar issues but without a community of peers with whom they can learn to adapt to these new and challenging circumstances. All of these factors can lead to learners not completing their programmes, and are laid on top of more universal reasons for drop-out, such as learners realising that they have chosen the wrong discipline to pursue.
48. Despite the concern expressed by the university for the high percentage of students that are not successful in completing its programmes, the **Team does not consider that EHU is fully utilising internal quality assurance to seek to improve this matter.** Staff confirmed that follow-up with students who are not attending or engaging with distance learning is a department rather than a central responsibility. As a result, there does not appear to be a systematic means of pursuing these issues. This arrangement also places further responsibility on academic staff who are covering administrative and pastoral support duties in addition to their core academic functions.

49. **Recommendation:** It is recommended that EHU review its internal quality assurance procedures for monitoring and addressing low attendance rates for high-residence students and reduced engagement by low-residence students with a view to increasing student retention. It is also recommended that EHU captures the confirmed causes of drop-out where they occur so that it is better able to target possible remedial actions.
50. Management Information Systems (MIS) feed internal quality assurance systems with the information required to make informed decisions. In its SER, EHU recognises that “statistical information on admission, grades, mobility, suspensions, termination, renewal and completion of studies ... can be used for the monitoring of the quality of studies” (SER, para. 24). EHU is currently analysing this information manually. The Team notes that MIS could also assist the university in more systematically tracking and keeping connected with its graduates. The Team was informed that a specific grant has been ring-fenced to EHU by SIDA to focus on the development of its MIS. The Team is also aware that **EHU has not yet registered its 2017 students on the national Student Register which is a legal requirement of universities in Lithuania** (this is returned to below in para 60). It understands that its current MIS may be a contributory factor to this lack of compliance (SER, para. 27).
51. **Recommendation:** The Team recommends the prioritisation by the EHU of the investment of available resources into developing its MIS, as both a means of contributing to internal quality assurance and of complying with its legal obligations.
52. Significant changes in governance and organisational structures have taken place in the university since 2014. Some of these have arisen from unexplained events leading to the departure of the Rector that served prior to the current Interim Rector. The EHU institutional response to this management crisis has resulted in changes to its governance and organisational structure and staffing which may prove to be very beneficial to the university. However, it must also be acknowledged that this management crisis, and apparent failure of governance, took place during the period covered by this review.
53. At a governance level the membership of GAPO has reduced, and its role has been amended in the Statutes of the university. The Governing Board was dismissed in 2016 and the GAPO has ceded some of its authority to the reconstituted Governing Board; including the approval of budget allocations. The GAPO has retained other powers, such as the appointment of the Rector of the university. The members of the Governing Board met by the Team emphasised their commitment to EHU; evidenced, amongst other things, by their attendance at three meetings of the Governing Board in a nine-month period.
54. At the next level, the Senate, three committees have been established that report directly to Senate and make recommendations regarding Research and Development, Academic Planning and Quality Assurance, and Curriculum. This appeared to the Team to be an appropriate division of functions and governance attention. The Team met with the Heads of Committee and spoke with other staff interacting with this structure. The committees appear to be well-understood and to be adding value to the organisation. As explained earlier (para. 42) EHU also indicated its intention to develop Study Programme Committees which will include social partners when they become operational.

55. The Team was also informed in the SER and in meetings with the EHU that the five academic units it had previously, have now been reduced to two evenly sized departments. This and other rationalisations have led to corresponding reductions in both academic and administrative staff; the university has 31% less faculty staff and 40% less administrative staff than in 2014 (SER, annex 9). The student/staff ratio remains within the requirements of MOSTA.
56. Senior management and academic staff voiced the advantages that are beginning to reveal themselves from these combined changes. Increased inter-disciplinary collaboration is one such benefit; an emergence that can benefit teaching and learning as well as research activities. Feedback from the students met by the Team suggests that this is a positive direction as it could lead to a better balance of theory and practice within individual programmes. Another benefit stated to the Team is the opportunity to bring academic and administrative staff more closely together to strengthen communication, understanding and cooperation.
57. Whilst EHU has managed very significant change in governance, management, and staffing, most of this has been initiated within the past six to eighteen months, and some of it is still at a planning stage. At this point, **the university is not able to provide evidence to the Team of the effectiveness of these changes.** The Team also notes that whilst research is represented in a sub-committee of the Senate, and this indicates a positive development in terms of organisational structure, there is a need to improve the steering of research activities as elaborated upon in Section V.
58. **Recommendation:** The Team encourages the university to consider and more clearly articulate the indicators of effectiveness of the governance and management changes that it has instigated.
59. In terms of process management, the revised governance structure of EHU appears to have increased transparency around decision-making, and those aspects of the governance structure that are in operation seem well-understood across faculty and administrative staff. It has also encouraged a higher level of participation in governance from external parties than would have been the case in 2014. Students are members of Senate committees, and students and social partners are intended to work with academic and administrative staff as part of the Study Programme Committees that are to be established. The university has also passed a regulation on the involvement of stakeholders, in order to systematise their involvement.
60. Processes with regards to the obligations of EHU within the Lithuanian higher education environment are overdue. As noted in paras. 42-43, **the university is not ensuring that applicant diplomas are approved by the Lithuanian ENIC-NARIC prior to its admission of students to its programmes.** As noted in para. 50, **EHU student details for 2017 are not yet included in the Lithuanian Student Register,** which is contrary to article 20 of the Regulations of the Register approved by the Minister of Science and Higher Education (16 June, 2009). Under the same Regulation (item no 14.11.4) data regarding the recognition of qualifications acquired abroad has to be entered to the Student Register. Relevant data on students admitted in 2017 have not been entered to the Student Register by EHU. There is a further Lithuanian legislative requirement that all institutions operating in the country shall keep records, accounting, reports, financial and technical documents in the

Lithuanian language (the Republic of Lithuania Law on The State Language, 1995, Article 4). Of the documentation requested by or available to the Team, it is aware that the appendices to the Strategic Plan 2016-2021; these documentation; the Regulations on the Procedure for the Preparation, Protection and Storage of the final Bachelor and Master Works in the EHU; and the Status of Editorial-Publishing Activities in the EHU, were not available in Lithuanian. EHU must immediately and completely comply with all relevant laws and legal requirements of Lithuania.

61. As part of its aim to develop a core and stable staffing base that is situated physically in Lithuania, EHU introduced longer-term contracts of five-years for faculty staff that were available through open competition, and shorter duration two-year contracts that were assigned as part of an internal selection process (SER, para. 35). This stability is evidently welcomed by staff. 95% of faculty and 60% of administrative staff are from Belarus (SER, para. 34). The Team was informed that academic contracts indicate a requirement for teaching, administration, and research. The anticipated time to be spent on research is not indicated. However, the view was articulated to the Team by academic staff that moving to longer-term contracts is likely to encourage staff to research and to publish as a secure member of EHU.
62. **Recommendation:** If research activity is to be increasingly prioritised by EHU, it is recommended that the portion of workload that is intended to be dedicated to research by Faculty should be stipulated.
63. A performance management system is in place for administrative staff (SER, para. 38) and the associated process appeared to be clear to staff. At a faculty level the performance system is based on the allocation of points. Whilst the university has introduced a systematic training needs analysis based on annual performance review outcomes, and a budget has been allocated to professional development (SER, para. 36), it appears that more feedback could be provided to faculty staff on their performance. The impression of the Team was that performance is largely of consequence only when contracts are being renewed or promotion opportunities are available.
64. **Recommendation:** It is recommended that EHU should engage further with faculty staff on the purpose and outcomes of the points system of performance at appropriate and pre-determined intervals.
65. EHU indicates in its SER (para. 36) that a budget is in place for the professional development of staff. Annex 25 of its SER identifies specific professional development opportunities that were made available from October 2014 to June 2017. Staff relayed to the Team that a learning outcomes approach to teaching, learning and assessment had been emphasised in the training provided to support the core curriculum offering (as part of the university's Teacher Competence Improvement System, SER, para. 22) and this is supported by the professional development information provided. It was also informed that lecturers arriving from Belarus to teach in EHU are given particular attention with regard to induction and professional development opportunities.
66. As noted in para. 52. the EHU has instigated very significant changes, particularly since the summer of 2016. These have impacted the structure, membership and responsibilities of its governance system, its organisational structure, and its staff. As noted in a meeting with the

Governing Board, the organisation appears to have coped well in these circumstances. In several meetings it was conveyed to the Team that these changes have led the way for a time of renewal and opportunity for the university; the Team has no reason to question the sincerity of this interpretation and is satisfied that a large number of staff have adopted this attitude.

67. Notwithstanding the ability of the university to cope with these changes, however, it is incumbent upon this process to also seek to comment on the level of change required. Without understanding the circumstances that led to the dismissal of the Governing Board by the GAPO, it was evidently felt by the GAPO that this course of action was required. In any institution this would be considered a drastic action. The Team was not provided with information by the executive of EHU on this matter and can only conclude that this was a failure in the governance of the university. It was also a failure that had to be addressed by the GAPO; essentially the parties through whose support the university is continuing to operate. At an operational level, the changes brought in by the Interim Rector to the structure and operations of EHU are to be commended and appear to be eminently sensible; a foundation has thus been laid for a new Rector to join EHU. The Team is of the view that the quality and profile of this appointment is critical if the advances that have been made in governance and management are to be sustained.
68. Despite these developments, regardless of their impetus, a key risk for EHU remains its funding base. The university is well aware of this. In its SER it describes the process of conducting a risk assessment this year (SER, para.44) in which it identified funding as the most serious issue facing the university. Approximately 80% of the funding of the university comes from donors and 20% from tuition fees. As noted previously (para. 24) and acknowledged by the university in its SER and in its strategic plan, without diversifying its resource base, the university has limited control over its finances. As a result, it has no contingency if donor funding decreases and, as pointed out by the university in its strategic plan and in meetings with senior management, it is not in control of the 'geopolitical realities' that may influence its receipt of funds (SP, p.20). The concern conveyed in the documentation of EHU regarding its financial situation sits beside an ongoing discussion between and amongst the governance and management of EHU on how this should be addressed, which has not enabled a satisfactory resolution of this crucial matter.
69. **Recommendation:** It is recommended that the university enters discussions with GAPO and with the Governing Board regarding its financial issues and how these can be addressed without jeopardising the funding of which it is currently in receipt. It is further recommended that the university consider having an external party facilitate this discussion to determine where agreement and disagreement resides.
70. The Team also notes that the university has focused upon its online resources as the primary mode of teaching and learning for its low-residence students and as a support to its high-residence students; it has made 250 courses available through its Moodle platform. The Team was informed by staff that this is an area in which the university has published, and by stakeholders that this is something for which the university has been called on to provide its expertise. The EHU's SER also conveys its intention to redesign its courses in order to compete with modern online international education projects (para. 10). Opportunities for the expansion of online learning were not raised with the Team as a means of diversifying income and reducing risk.

71. **Recommendation:** The Team recommends that the university consider its areas of strength, such as online learning, and how these could be strategically developed to control the risk assessment it has placed on its funding status.
72. The financial circumstances of EHU have also impacted upon its infrastructure, learning resources and average funds allocated per student (cf. para.78). The MOSTA evaluation referenced in paras. 31-33 highlights how the university is currently not meeting expected levels in terms of its premises and library facilities. Its planned move to the remodeled Boksto facility in the Old Town of Vilnius will lead to staff from three buildings coming together. Inhabiting this new building is no doubt both practically advantageous and symbolically important, but there is no evidence that it will improve the performance of EHU in a subsequent MOSTA assessment.
73. In terms of library facilities, there is a physical library which is reasonably well-stocked but shelf-space and physical space is limited. EHU explained to the Team that due to the percentage of its students being low-residence with limited presence on-campus, this doesn't present a significant issue for learners in real terms. The Team noted that the library closes quite early. Access to online library databases is available but feedback from learners suggests that these are not always sufficient. The reliance of some learners on Russian text places some limitations on what the university can make available and what the learner can access. The Team is aware that the university has been in contact with other higher education institutions to discuss potential for sharing library resources.
74. **Recommendations:** The Team recommends that EHU consider extending its library access hours and explores all opportunities available to it to extend its online database facilities and to make increased workspaces available to students.
75. The financial circumstances and restrictions placed on the university by its funding have been discussed in some detail (paras. 24, 68, 69 and 72). In terms of planning and rational use of its available funds in the context of its goals, it is notable that the Strategic Plan 2016-2021 sought to identify the financial implications of its associated Implementation Schedule (SP, pp. 13-23). This practice of aligning budget with goals was a recommendation of the 2014 review. The Team was informed that budgets have not yet been developed to departmental level but that this is an area of further development identified by the university. The reorganisation of the structure of the organisation from five unequally sized departments to two more evenly weighted departments is a strong example of rational planning; arising from this reorganisation, some staff roles were made redundant.
76. Decision-making regarding budget allocation and financial accountability is clearly represented in the governance structure of EHU. The Governing Board approves the budget and receives financial reports at each of its meetings. Financial statements and the budget implementation report is audited by an external auditor who confirms that expenditure is in line with GAPO approval (SER, para.49).
77. An area that has not been accounted for sufficiently in its funding or organisational structure is research. Whilst the extent to which this is a core purpose of EHU is not entirely clear, it is in evidence in the SER, the strategic plan, and the Statutes of the university, as being an important characteristic of the EHU. However, this is not evident in its planning and funding. This suggests a mismatch between the university's ambitions in this area and its

ability to resource them. It is also, as a result, a divergence from an expectation that Lithuanian universities will distinguish themselves from colleges of education by offering studies that are based on research.

78. The MOSTA report indicated EHU has reduced quite substantially in the last three years its 'average funds allocated per student in a field of study' (MOSTA report, pp. 2-3) from 75% to 25% of the normative study price per semester; an alarming trend in the context of the learner-centred environment which the university is seeking to create. EHU informed the Team that there were some inconsistencies in the data provided due to EHU's technical error in submitting the data to MOSTA. EHU believes the current situation is that per student funding is relatively consistent. The Team is not in a position to judge which is the correct state of affairs.
79. The ability of the university to rationally plan in accordance with its goals is inherently limited by its funding model. The significant streamlining of the organisation by the Interim Rector would suggest that most efficiencies that can be gained by planning are achieved at this point. It was reported to the Team that approximately 20% cost efficiencies have been gained and have been informed by efficiency audits. However, **the university remains in an inherently vulnerable position in which it is not meeting national requirements in some areas, specifically with regards to MOSTA indicators**, and is without a contingency plan for any changes in financial circumstances that are currently outside of its control.
80. It is evident that the university has in good faith attempted to address the majority of the recommendations that were made in the 2014 review report. As a sample, EHU made its Strategic Plan much more detailed in the context of the Team's comments that it required a more comprehensive and analytical approach; it introduced a documented process for the development and review of strategic plans; it has tried to increase communication amongst staff and external parties about the projects it is participating in through its website and via newsletters (SER, para. 40, 139); it has also significantly increased the number of regulations it has developed and approved to support internal quality assurance, for instance in the area of programme approval, monitoring and review (SER, para. 52). This progression is in line with its plan for implementation of the recommendations arising from the 2014 report (SER, annex 5); however, much of this work on procedures appears from this plan not to have been scheduled and completed until 2016 and 2017. In the areas of staff performance and appraisal it has made some progress, and in governance, student representative numbers have increased on Senate and its committees; five representatives delegated by the Students' Union were elected in the last year (SER, para. 32). Students will also be included in Study Programme Committees when they are established. In the meantime, feedback from students, is reported by students and lecturers to be influencing programme development and improvement. The sub-committees of the Senate also appear to be working well. Some of these actions are becoming embedded whilst others are quite recent, and the university is limited in the evidence it can provide regarding the effectiveness of the more recent measures, particularly those implemented in 2017. EHU remains hampered by its Management Information System but the Team was informed that investment from SIDA has been ring-fenced to address this issue.
81. Despite this progress, however, fundamental and connected issues around mission, planning and funding that were discussed at length in 2014 remain. EHU has not been able to provide evidence that it has a consistent mission appropriate to a university, and that is

translated into a Strategic Plan that can be adequately funded. It is evident to the Team that the university has experienced a very significant level of change since 2014 and in particular within the last 18 months. It is possible that if the university had greater stability over this time it may have made greater progress on these areas; however, the Team has no evidence to confirm that this is the case and it suspects that it may not be, as these matters are so fundamentally existential for this university.

82. EHU is currently considering the outcomes of the MOSTA report and is determining what actions it can take to address the deficiencies identified by MOSTA against the indicators it applies. As noted in paras. 31-33 and 72, the university does not currently appear to be able to improve its performance against at least some of these indicators.
83. EHU has published external evaluations of the university, and published its plan for implementation of the recommendations arising from the 2014 review. As noted above (para. 38) it has also published its strategic plans and annual reports for 2011 to 2016 in English
84. With regard to academic ethics, the university confirmed that its plagiarism policy is in place and that anti-plagiarism systems are being installed (SER, para. 48). The university's Code of Ethics was confirmed in 2015 and is available on the website of EHU. EHU's Commission of Academic Ethics addresses issues arising in the context of academic disputes and in accordance with the Code of Academic Ethics of the university. The university confirms it has provided training regarding conflict of interest to staff (SER: para. 36). In the period 2015-2017 the Commission dealt with two issues raised by staff (SER, para. 57). EHU also confirmed that it has a procedure for student appeals and an associated Appeals Commission (SER, para. 59). During the Team's meeting with students, the view conveyed was that the university is willing to listen to issues raised informally by students and to act on these if it considers appropriate.
85. **In summary**, following a review of its documentation, and participation in meetings with governance, management and staff, the Team was unclear as to the mission of EHU. As a result, it cannot confirm that its strategic plan is in line with its mission. The Team has recommended that EHU consider again this mission and review its strategic plan to assure itself that it is aligned with its agreed mission (para.30). The university has undertaken and coped with very significant changes since 2014 and in particular since 2016. Equally, a number of its quality assurance procedures have been introduced in 2017 (para.80). Whilst these changes in governance, executive leadership, organisational structure, staffing, and procedures, may prove very positive for EHU, the university is not yet in a position to provide the Team with substantial evidence of their effectiveness. EHU's reliance on donor funding is increasing as its student numbers are reducing and it has not been able to develop and agree plans for the diversification of its student numbers to reduce its reliance on funding and the consequent risks this brings (paras.24, 68, 69, 72). The financial constraints under which the university is operating are leading it to fail the MOSTA criteria that are reliant on universities being able to invest in premises, facilities, and students (para. 78). There are some legal obligations regarding the recognition of qualifications, the registering of students and the Lithuanian language (para. 60) that apply to EHU as a university within the Lithuanian higher education system and with which it is not currently in compliance.

Judgement on this area: Strategic Management is given a negative evaluation.

IV. ACADEMIC STUDIES AND LIFE-LONG LEARNING

86. The university articulated to the Team its wish to provide a combination of skills and critical thinking to its Belarusian students and in doing so, to meet labour market requirements: primarily those of Belarus (SER, para. 61). EHU is seeking to graduate qualified professionals who can work in independent democratic media and NGOs and act as specialists in the field of international and European law. Programmes in culture, gender, psychology, history and heritage are also being offered to provide fields of learning in which graduates would not have the opportunity to acquire similar competencies in Belarus. EHU stated that a joint doctoral programme in philosophy has been introduced in partnership with Vytautas Magnus University (VMU) and the Lithuanian Institute for Cultural Research. EHU has also undertaken reforms of its core curriculum with the assistance of Bard College (New York, U.S.) to introduce more interactive teaching methods to support the development of critical and creative thinking in students (SER, para. 66). The appropriateness of the core curriculum is monitored through ongoing surveying of alumni on required competencies (SER, para.75).
87. The Team was informed by SKVC that the programmes of EHU had been subject to external evaluation. The outcomes of that evaluation were that 5 programmes were accredited for 3 years and 3 programmes were accredited for 6 years. A 3-year accreditation renewal is given when one or more of six criteria is scored two out of four. The outcomes of this evaluation process show programmes in the field of Arts scoring, overall, lower than programmes in Humanities and Social Sciences. It is notable that there is quite a variation in scoring against the six criteria across the three fields. For instance, *programme aims and learning outcomes*, scores over 3 for Social Sciences but only 2 for Arts. *Study processes and student's performance assessment*, scores 2 for Arts but 4 for Humanities. *Teaching staff* are scored most consistently amongst the six criteria with Arts and Social Sciences scoring 3 and Humanities scoring between 2 and 3. The Team was not provided with a report to elaborate upon this scoring, but this variation in evaluation outcomes suggests a certain lack of systematic management of the learning environment on the part of the university.
88. The programmes offered by EHU are appropriate to its stated objectives. 62% of its high-residence students are returning to Belarus and 83% of those are reporting to EHU as having gained employment in a field relevant to their studies (SER, para. 193). This data coupled with the positive comments of the alumni met by the Team, supports the claim of the university to be meeting the economic requirements of that jurisdiction. It is also evident from alumni feedback that connections and networks are forming amongst graduates and between graduates and current students and staff, which is very positive. The lack of stated focus by the university on other economies may be limiting its attraction to non-Belarusian students. However, the university has established a joint BA programme with VMU in the field of political science which was registered in May 2013 and commenced this year; EHU states that this is part of a strategy for enhancing regional cooperation (SER, para. 189). Alumni suggested that greater support in internship opportunities would be useful and could lead to employment in Lithuania subsequent to their studies; this is perhaps an area that could be considered within the career guidance function of the university described by EHU (para.73).
89. **Recommendation:** The university is recommended to consult with students and alumni on how its current procedures and supports for internship could be improved.

90. The lifelong learning provision of the university is largely represented by its distance programmes. As noted previously (para. 70), this is an area EHU could usefully consider developing as a route to diversifying its funding. In the context of lifelong learning, it would also assist it in expanding the participation of non-degree participants in its programmes which would in turn diversify its student-base; this is also identified as a gap by EHU in its SER (para. 67).
91. The university reports that 1,984 students have graduated from EHU since it relocated to Vilnius and that a further 700 graduated from Minsk before 2004 (SER, para. 193). The university has a high degree of informal contact with graduates as reported to the Team in its meeting with alumni. Some formal engagement was also reported through the Alumni Society and this is a route of communication that the university may be able to develop. Beyond being graduates, EHU considers those who have left EHU and re-entered Belarus to be change agents (SER, para. 193). The university reports that it conducts regular all-alumni surveys and alumni homecoming meetings in Vilnius. Alumni are also asked to participate in a mentorship programme run by the university to support current students (SER, para. 193).
92. The Team was impressed with the interest and enthusiasm expressed by the external stakeholders it met as part of the review meeting. It appears that EHU is involved in a range of productive and interesting relationships with stakeholders in Belarus and Lithuania. These include Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung, the Human Rights Defense Centre in Belarus, the Human Rights House Foundation in Vilnius, BIPART, and the organisers of the Listapad film festival in Minsk. Stakeholders spoke of the influence they have been able to extend over EHU's programme development and curricular design. The intended inclusion of social partners in the Study Programme Committees should provide a means of solidifying and systematising this involvement and impact on the learner experience. Cooperation activities with Lithuanian academic partners include Vilnius Design College, Vilnius Academy of Arts, Vilnius College of Technology and Design, Vilnius University and VMU. In addition to contributing to the oversight of academic standards, such as participating in students' defence of theses, EHU also credits these universities in providing students with an opportunity to "present themselves in the public sphere outside the university walls" (SER, para. 80).
93. There is no evidence to suggest that the EHU is not in compliance with the provisions of the European Higher Education Area (EHEA) and EU documents related to higher education. Programme documentation is reported as being written in the context of learning outcomes and quality assurance regulations described by EHU are appropriate to the European Standards and Guidelines (ESG). Learning outcomes and quality assurance regulations apply to the university's lifelong learning provision as well as to its undergraduate and postgraduate programmes. As identified previously (para. 60), there are elements of Lithuanian law of which the university is not currently in compliance, specifically the recognition of applicant awards; the inclusion of student data in the Lithuanian student register; and the availability of specified documentation in the Lithuanian language.
94. EHU's Erasmus partner numbers have gone from 47 in 2013/2014 to 58 in 2015/2016. It also has other partners for academic exchange which increase its total from 74 in 2013/2014, to 86 in 2015/2016 (SER, annex 21). Both outgoing and incoming students for studies or placement under Erasmus and other exchange programmes show a decrease between 2012/2013 (25 outgoing and 19 incoming) and 2016/2017 (19 outgoing and 14 incoming); although increases were seen in the intervening years (SER, annex 22). The

university notes that the number of different receiving countries has increased (SER, para. 97). Under Erasmus+ the number of outgoing staff increased from 10 in 2014/2015 to 16 in 2015/2016 but incoming staff has declined from 8 in 2014/2015 to 5 in 2015/2016.

95. EHU informed the Team that it has introduced regulations to make decision-making regarding Erasmus+ exchanges more transparent (*EHU Regulations on the International Mobility of Students and Staff*). Applications are reported to have been increasing because of the clearer process introduced. The university has found attracting visiting staff and students to be difficult, and it is not sure why this is the case. Erasmus+ is administered centrally by the university while other mobility, such as attracting researchers and collaborators to the university, is initiated and managed at a department level. The university identified in its SER that it requires a more 'robust strategy to attract incoming teachers and researchers' (SER, para. 100). The Team concurs with this analysis and believes that **a managerial and financial plan is required to attract incoming researchers and collaborators.**
96. In its SER the university claims that the experiences gained through mobility are benefiting the wider university (SER, para. 99). However, in meeting with students and staff the Team considered that more formal opportunities could be provided for mobility participants to share their experiences. For instance, it wasn't evident to the Team that any new teaching methodologies had been considered in the light of mobility activities undertaken. Exposure to diverse teaching and learning environments may in turn assist the university in advancing its approach to developing a lifelong learning strategy.
97. **Recommendation:** The Team recommends that the university establishes a more coherent institutional approach and strategy to increasing student and staff mobility (in all its forms and in both directions) and to the sharing of mobility experiences.
98. EHU considers that it has been adopting an increasingly student-oriented approach to its programmes (SER, para. 101). The university explained to the Team the issues that students coming to the university from Belarus can experience and how these can result in higher than average drop-out rates (see para. 47); this has required the university to focus on providing support for students in choosing and following their path of learning. EHU's Propilei affiliate centre in Minsk is reported as playing an increasing role in preparing learners for their university studies (SER, para. 69). The supports provided by the Centre include introductory, short-term and long-term courses all targeted at prospective students at different levels of preparedness to join EHU and delivered in both distance and in-person mode. Preparatory courses have been developed by EHU staff and faculty together with teachers in the Propilei centre (SER, annex. 50). Language training support is also provided. Whilst these initiatives are to be commended, the Team noted in its meetings with staff that lack of preparation remains one of the reasons cited for high drop-out rates. However, the Team is also aware that the courses provided in Propilei are in a relatively early stage of development (figures were provided by EHU from 2014/2015 onwards).
99. A significant part of the strategy of EHU is to provide learners with critical thinking and other skills to advance them as individuals and in their future careers and lives. The feedback received by the Team when meeting with alumni of the university suggests that the university is being successful in this endeavour for those that remain with the university and graduate from their programmes. Students are increasingly being enabled to contribute to academic decision-making as members of Senate committees, as well as of Senate itself.

The Curriculum Committee is keeping programme learning outcomes and teaching methodologies under review in order to improve the teaching and learning experience for staff and students. In the context of dropout rates, how the university can provide additional student-centred support for low-residence students who are seeking to advance their skills in relative isolation from peers is a matter for further consideration by the university, as recommended previously (para. 49).

100. The MOSTA report indicated that EHU has reduced quite substantially in the last three years its 'average funds allocated per student in a field of study' (MOSTA report, pp. 2-3) from 75% to 25% of the normative study price per semester. As identified in para.78 above, this is a concerning downward trend in the context of a student-centred focus, and another issue arising from the constraints of the funding model of the university. When asked about this reduction, the EHU representatives connected it with a reduction in the general funding available to the university.
101. The university has admissions regulations and rules in place for both its undergraduate and postgraduate programmes (SER, para. 112). As identified previously, the university is not complying with the requirement of ensuring learners present their diplomas for approval by the Lithuanian ENIC-NARIC prior to admission to its programmes and this must be addressed. Student progress is an issue for the university; the Team has recommended (para. 49) that it establishes a systematic plan for identifying and monitoring indicators of drop-out in both high-residence and low-residence contexts, and seeks to address issues arising within the capabilities of the university to do so. The university issues the Diploma Supplement to its graduates.
102. The previous review of EHU made several recommendations relating to the programmes of the university. Amongst them, it encouraged the university to consult in more detail with social and business partners and to utilise its alumni more effectively to impact upon its programmes (2014, p.22). The Team's meetings with external stakeholders and with alumni would suggest that the university is increasing its engagement with these parties and that the programmes of the university are benefitting from this interaction. **The planned inclusion of external stakeholders in the Study Programme Committees should further systematise this engagement; however, as these are not yet in place, the university cannot provide evidence as to their effectiveness.**
103. The faculty staff met by the Team referred to workshops being provided to develop their skills in areas such as learning outcomes. The university also states that it undertakes a training needs analysis based on annual performance review results and links these with the university's strategic priorities (SER, para. 36). The Team has commended the use by the university of Moodle (para. 70). It is also clear from meeting with staff that planned and systematic supports are provided for lecturers to avail of this technology and to improve its use in supporting their teaching practice. The role of the Curriculum Committee is notable in this context and appears to be working effectively. Mobility is another means through which teachers can improve their teaching competencies. The university requires a strategic and funded approach to increasing inward and outward mobility, and to facilitating the sharing of experiences gained to impact upon its teaching and learning methodologies.
104. With regard to the recognition of foreign qualifications: 95% of the students of EHU originate in Belarus (SER, para. 34). EHU informed the Team that it supplements diploma

requirements with other admission criteria to test for the suitability of applicants. The university is currently remiss in not requiring students to submit their diplomas for recognition to the Lithuanian ENIC-NARIC in advance of their admission, and this is a matter for the university to address.

105. EHU has established a *Procedure for the Recognition of Learning Outcomes at EHU* which was adopted in April of this year. This should enable it to extend its recognition of prior certified and uncertified learning and in doing so, to extend opportunities for lifelong learning candidates. Lithuanian procedures agreed by the Minister of Education in December 2010 and reviewed in April 2017 anticipated the introduction of these procedures in all Lithuanian universities.
106. **Recommendation:** It is recommended that the university advance without delay with the implementation of its recently adopted procedures for the recognition of learning outcomes as a means of increasing lifelong learning opportunities.
107. **In summary**, EHU aims to provide its graduates with critical thinking and skills that will serve them well in the labour market. Its programmes have been designed to address gaps in provision in Belarus that are also attractive to employers (para. 86). The feedback from Alumni that have returned to Belarus and taken up employment in their fields of study is very positive and suggests that the approach of EHU is working in this regard. As in 2014, some attention is required to the management of internships (para. 88) Lifelong learning is not a substantial focus for EHU but its distance learning provision, which is commended by the Team, provides opportunities for adult learners, and could be extended (para. 90). External stakeholders, including academic institutions, social partners, and others, have reported collaboration with EHU and are increasingly influencing programme curricula and the research activities of the university (paras.92 and 102). Student and staff mobility and the attraction of inward researchers and collaborators is an area that the university needs to strategically manage and fund within its capabilities (para. 97).

Judgement on the area: Academic Studies and Lifelong Learning is given a positive evaluation.

V. RESEARCH AND ART

108. As discussed in Section III, the different articulations of mission by the university in documentation and during Team meetings with faculty and administration has led to the Team being unclear as to the mission of the university. The Team is aware that the Lithuanian government is currently considering extending oversight of research activity by universities (Law of Research and Studies, Article 10) through the introduction of benchmarking. It is also aware of the current expectations of all universities in Lithuania to be research-active, as evidenced by the inclusion of research evaluation criteria, and in the Government's *Resolution regarding approval of the national programme for the development of studies, scientific research and experimental (social and cultural) development for 2013-2020* (Vilnius, 2012).

109. The Team was provided with a document titled *EHU Strategy in Research and Art (RAA) – 8 Steps for Implementation* (SER, annex 48). The university has also identified 6 areas which it refers to as its strategic research and art priorities (SER, annex 29); this has replaced its previous priority areas that applied from 2009 to 2017 (SER, annex 30). In the Team's understanding, and based on raising this question during meetings with faculty and administration, these documents represent the research strategy of EHU. Meetings with faculty members suggest that the research areas and the agreed steps for their implementation were discussed and agreed through a collaborative and consultative process, which is a positive approach to have adopted. The Senate Committee on Research and Development also evidently provided governance for this development process. The university re-states that Belarus remains the object of its research and arts activities and that it intends to retain this focus whilst strengthening collaboration with European partner projects in Lithuania and within the EU (SER, para.127).
110. Whilst acknowledging this stated objective, and the documentation submitted by EHU, the Team does not consider that it was provided with an identifiable research strategy for EHU; rather it was provided with components of a strategy, a list of ambitions, without a clear plan for how it would be managed and financially supported. Equally, while the Strategic Plan for the organisation does feature research (it is the subject of goal d, p. 16), there is not great emphasis on this area within the document.
111. The university has been taking steps to put in place the infrastructure required to begin to undertake research more systematically. Its strategy of introducing long-term employment contracts which emphasise research activity is positive (SER, para.125). Faculty staff expressed a view to the Team that the security this has provided makes engagement in research more likely. A list of faculty publications was provided to the Team (annex 33), but it is not evident from this information if there is a direct correlation between the introduction of longer-term contracts and an increase in publication activity. Equally, it was understood from meetings with management and faculty that staff contracts do not specify what proportion of the individual's workload is intended/required to be dedicated to research (this is the subject of a Team recommendation, para. 62). In addition, as staff numbers have decreased because of streamlining the organisational structures of the university, EHU has 31% less faculty staff and 40% less administrative staff (annex 9) than in 2014. The view was expressed during the Team's meeting with existing students that faculty staff are increasingly taking on administrative duties. This is not necessarily a negative development, but it suggests that faculty do not have much time available to pursue research. More positively, the organisational changes that have led to two departments of similar size rather than five academic units of unequal size, were identified in several meetings with faculty as providing inter-disciplinary teaching and research opportunities. Students also expressed enthusiasm about staff engaging with research and the opportunities it can provide them to act as research apprentices (a goal of the university in its Strategic Plan, p.16). The increased connection between teaching and research, and the provision of opportunities for students to experience this environment, is the expectation of Lithuania for its universities, and is in the interests of students.
112. Twice-yearly research and art competitions have been introduced by EHU (SER, para.177), the regulations for which were approved by the University Council in April of this year. Based on the financial amount communicated to the Team as being ring-fenced internally to support funding for each Department, EHU is heavily reliant on external funding.

113. The Team recognises and acknowledges that the university is involved in research and that there is evidence of research outputs; for instance, the Scopus database indicates 15 EHU entries from 2014 to 2016 of articles, reviews, books and book chapters. However, **the limited resources available to the university married with its lack of an identifiable and sustainable research strategy is a matter of concern** for the Team. The Team was also informed of how additional funding received by SIDA would be used, and research was a low priority on the list of areas requiring funding in the organisation. Taking these factors together, the Team does not believe that it has been provided with the evidence to endorse the university's self-evaluation that there has been a 'gradual transformation of strategic management of research and art activities' at the university (SER, para. 125).
114. **Recommendation:** It is recommended that the university further considers and documents a research strategy for EHU and aligns this with its available funding and resources
115. As noted previously, the research undertaken at EHU is focused upon Belarus but the university has collaborated with academic partners in Lithuania and in the EU (SER, para. 133-134). The Team is of the view that what is being done is appropriate to and informed by the economic, cultural and social development of that region. This is supported by meetings not only with faculty but also with alumni and external stakeholders. The research being undertaken is particularly relevant in the fields where political or social connections link Belarus and Lithuania. The Team notes that much of the research presence of EHU in Belarus is, at present, of necessity more reputational than practical, but the testimony of alumni and stakeholders suggests that EHU has a reputational research presence in Belarus. It was clear to the Team that social partners are engaged with EHU and interested in its teaching and research activities and their potential impact on Belarus, and in a Lithuanian context.
116. The European Research Area (ERA) identifies 6 priority areas for research. The research activities identified by EHU appear to be within the scope of those priorities. However, without a detailed research strategy, the connections with the ERA priorities need to be made from outside the university. The need for more identifiable alignment is recognised by the university in its self-evaluation (SER, para.159). At a national level, it is clear that Lithuania wishes to position itself more strongly in terms of the research outputs of its universities. Its *Resolution regarding approval of the national programme for the development of studies, scientific research and experimental (social and cultural) development for 2013-2020*, requires the equal attention of EHU. This document includes a series of actions that government wishes to fulfil nationally by 2020. These include higher mobility of students and staff; more national and international collaboration; increasing the number of doctoral students; and increasing the country's contribution to the most highly-cited research publications. As noted previously, EHU is engaging with mobility, it is collaborating with parties nationally and internationally, and it is publishing. Equally, however, it is only at the point of building the foundations of a research active university and is without a research strategy or accompanying resources to fund such a strategy. Its ability to contribute in any substantial way to this national strategy therefore is questioned by the Team, and evidence to support its contribution has not been convincingly provided by the university.
117. Putting these larger national ambitions to one side, EHU has provided examples of international research projects in which the university has engaged since 2014 and which have attracted funding (annex 34). Considering the size of EHU and its reduced human resources, the scope of engagement in international research and art projects is quite

significant. This supports the outwardly focused nature of the university and its expressed desire to engage not only with Belarus, but also in creating connections between Belarus, Lithuania and the wider European community (SER, para. 198).

118. As discussed in paras. 94-97, student and staff members of EHU are mobile, but not to the extent that the university wishes. There is notably less incoming mobility than outgoing and participation figures are declining. Whilst EHU has expressed a desire to increase incoming staff mobility to support teaching and research, and this would be welcomed by students, no formal plan for doing so was presented to the Team. Specific evidence of the impact of visiting staff on research, as distinct from the university's involvement in networks and research partnerships, was not evident to the Team in the documentation provided or in meetings with EHU. The Team has recommended that EHU develop a centrally planned and funded strategy for increasing mobility activity of all types. In doing so, it should identify as part of this, how incoming researchers can contribute to the research objectives of the university
119. The university has addressed some of the recommendations regarding research included in the 2014 report, including, for instance, increasing the extent to which information is shared on research activities (SER, para. 139) and broadening the influence of external stakeholders on its research activities; the university states that it has interacted with 36 social and 37 academic partners on short and long-term collaborations on research and business (SER, para.140). The issue of language barriers was raised in the last review report, specifically the inability of some researchers to apply for research grants due to a lack of Lithuanian and English language proficiency. These are not easy issues to address quickly and whilst the university does provide language supports, as recommended in 2014, this matter does not appear to have progressed substantially.
120. The most fundamental recommendation made in 2014 was for the university to develop a coherent research strategy with priorities and connections to the strategy of the organisation. It is clear from both documentation and meetings with faculty that thinking in this area has since advanced, and that structures are developing to provide foundations for research. However, progression of this thinking to an identifiable and funded research strategy, with associated indicators of desired impact, is not in evidence and in turn, the Team is not in a position to comment on the impact of research activities undertaken. It is the opinion of the Team, having discussed the funding issues of the university with its governance members and with management, that it will be difficult for the university to substantially improve its research performance in the context of its current funding model and associated constraints. The Team is also mindful of the requirements for research activity that are likely to be identified if a planned benchmarking process is introduced by the Lithuanian government.
121. **In summary**, EHU has evidently entered into collaborative discussions on its research goals and it has identified steps that need to be taken to put in place an appropriate infrastructure for a research-active university. The organisational and staff contract changes that have taken place in the university may increase opportunities for inter-disciplinary teaching and research. Whilst these developments are important, they do not constitute a research strategy that is planned and funded (para.110). Equally, the current strategic plan for the university does not suggest that research is a significant focus of EHU. The Team recognises that the university is involved in research projects and collaborations that are not insignificant in the context of its size and available resources (para.117). Research and art is

a further area in which the university is constrained by its current funding model and by a lack of coherent strategy (para.119).

Judgement on the area: Research and (or) Art is given a negative evaluation.

VI. IMPACT ON REGIONAL AND NATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

122. The origins and purpose of EHU are to serve Belarus by operating as a university in exile. This characterisation by the university of itself in 2014 remains valid in 2017 (SER, para. 127). In fulfilling this role, the university is seeking to address areas in Belarusian social and economic life are deficient. The views of external stakeholders and of alumni that were communicated to the Team suggest that the activities of EHU are having a positive impact. As noted previously, the university has been able to establish that 83% of alumni that have returned to Belarus, have been successful in attaining employment in a field related to their area of study. Alumni also reported examples of civic engagement that they have initiated or to which they have contributed. The university continues to organise *Artes Liberales*, an art and educational festival devoted to European values, which has been hosted every year since 2012 by the EHU and in cooperation with art, education, and media organisations (SER, para. 136). It is also a co-organiser of the Annual International Congress of Belarusian Studies since 2016 (SER, para. 190). EHU's intention is for its graduates to impact on Belarusian society by being change agents (SER, para. 193), and so these levels of activity and success are significant for the university. In other senses, what the university is trying to achieve in Belarus is intangible and unquantifiable; it wishes to develop critical thinkers and a Belarusian intelligentsia.
123. Whilst retaining its focus on Belarus, the university has created a narrative of building a bridge between Lithuanian and Belarusian civil society (SER, para. 186) and between Belarus and the EHEA (SER, para. 188) as a means of contributing to regional and national development. In discussions with the governance, staff, and external stakeholders of EHU the Team was provided with some, but not sufficiently comprehensive, examples of how this desired connection is manifested. However, meetings with external stakeholders from Belarus and Lithuania conveyed plenty of examples of very positive activity, collaboration and partnership that was described to the Team as having benefits in different contexts.
124. The impact of the EHU on Belarus is hard to fully ascertain but it seems reasonable based on the testimony of external stakeholders and alumni to conclude that it is relatively impactful. The impact of the university on Lithuania is more difficult to surmise upon because of the nature and purpose of the university. The university considers that it has achieved regional impact on the level of university governance through the Eastern Europe Study Center (EESC) joining the GAPO in the summer of 2016. Impacts were also identified by Lithuanian social partners in meetings with the Team, and the university has improved upon and become more consistent in the opportunities it has provided to social partners in Lithuania to influence its study programmes (SER, para. 183). It has also commenced a joint undergraduate programme with Vytautas Magnus University (VMU) in the field of political science, which commenced this year. From meetings with stakeholders and based on the SER of the university, it appears that EHU has also cooperated quite regularly with a large number of Lithuanian universities on liberal arts education.

125. On a more general level, the continued support that the university has received from donors and social partners in Belarus and Lithuania are positive indicators of progress and impact.
126. There is a significant focus on Belarus in the programmes followed by students and in their research. The university provided the Team with examples of these that were clearly seeking to advance enquiry and apply their learning to a Belarusian social and economic context. This further aligns with the wish of the university to develop, advance and apply critical thinking skills to Belarusian society and culture and in doing so, to advance the opportunities of students to contribute to the Belarusian economy. The university also identifies research projects that have focused upon Belarus but in doing so have extended their examination to take in cross-border and cross-cultural issues (SER, para. 204). The stated language difficulties of learners (and staff) in acquiring Lithuanian language skills is likely to inhibit students from engaging more overtly in Lithuanian national and regional issues; it is particularly identified as being a constraint for learners in the context of internships in Lithuania (SER, para. 205).
127. EHU provided the Team with a list of international associations of which its researchers are members (SER, annex 43); these include Belarusian, European and international associations. The university also joined the Lithuanian Association of Distance and eLearning in 2015 (SER, para. 199) and through the profile this provided, it has since developed close connections and is providing on-line training to two Ukrainian universities that have been similarly displaced because of the political environment in that country.
128. **In summary**, EHU is reported by alumni and stakeholders as having a positive impact on Belarus; the employment statistics of its graduates supports this claim (para.122). Whilst the university describes itself as a bridge between Belarus and Lithuania and between Belarus and the EHEA the Team was not convinced that there was sufficient evidence to support this description, especially in respect of the EHEA (para.123). Specifically, the Team accepts the assertion that EHU desires to help higher education institutions in Belarus to transition towards EHEA standards and compatibility, yet the Team has seen no evidence that Belarus would particularly invite or welcome EHU – collectively or individually – to assist in this effort. However, the Team noted the enthusiasm of stakeholders from Belarus and Lithuania regarding EHU and its activities, and several examples were provided of how it is currently contributing to regional and national development in each of these countries.

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

VII. GOOD PRACTICE AND ENHANCEMENT RECOMMENDATIONS

The Team identifies the following areas of good practice in EHU:

- Institutional agility, particularly in forming new committees, trying new ideas, and responding to challenges;
- Strong support from local and international stakeholders and social partners;
- Effective use of the Moodle platform;

- Committed Teaching and Administrative Staff with institutional loyalty;
- Evident collegiality and 'esprit de corps' amongst students;
- Evaluation and Complaint procedures seem to lead to effective modification or amelioration;
- Recent Contractual modifications were popular with staff.

The expert Team is aware that this second negative evaluation leads to the withdrawal from EHU of the license issued by the Ministry of Education and Science to conduct studies and engage in related activities a number of good practices and recommendations were identified for the University. Therefore, the recommendations as identified in the text should be used by the staff of EHU and its governing structures in the meantime when the decision on licensing is made, so that the interests of students to receive quality education are safeguarded at all times.

The Team's enhancement recommendations to EHU are:

- In a university with the complex origins and existence of EHU, the Team highlights the importance of confirming, documenting, and articulating a unified and consistent mission across the governance, management, staff and external stakeholders of EHU.
- It is critical that the university formulates and affirms a clear and consistent mission and aligns this mission with its strategic plan.
- It is recommended that the procedure for the development and monitoring of strategic plans is modified to identify what level of changes to the strategic plan can be approved without the consent of the Governing Board, and where approval of lesser changes is granted; if such permission exists outside of the Governing Board.
- It is recommended that in addition to actively monitoring progress against annual Action Plans, the university also formally conducts a mid-term review of its overall strategy and amends the strategy if required.
- It is recommended that EHU strategically considers how the current challenges it is facing could be alleviated through collaboration with other institutions.
- Until and unless EHU has been granted self-approval of student applicant diplomas, it must comply with its legal obligations and ensure applicant diplomas are submitted to ENIC-NARIC for approval in advance of students being admitted to EHU.
- It is recommended that EHU considers how it can implement the recognition of informal and non-formal learning as part of its admissions procedures.
- It is recommended that EHU review its internal quality assurance procedures for monitoring and addressing low attendance rates for high-residence students and reduced engagement by low-residence students, with a view to increasing student retention. It is also recommended that EHU captures the confirmed causes of drop-out where they occur so that it is better able to target possible remedial actions.

- It is recommended that EHU prioritises the investment of available resources into developing its MIS, as both a means of contributing to internal quality assurance and of complying with its legal obligations.
- It is recommended that the university consider and more clearly articulate the indicators of effectiveness of the governance and management changes that it has instigated.
- If research activity is to be increasingly prioritised by EHU, it is recommended that the portion of workload that is intended to be dedicated to research by Faculty should be stipulated.
- It is recommended that EHU should engage further with faculty staff on the purpose and outcomes of the points system of performance at appropriate and pre-determined intervals.
- It is recommended that the university enters discussions with GAPO and with the Governing Board regarding its financial issues and how these can be addressed without jeopardising the funding of which it is currently in receipt. It is further recommended that the university consider having an external party facilitate this discussion to determine where agreement and disagreement resides.
- It is recommended that the university consider its areas of strength, such as online learning, and how these could be strategically developed to control the risk assessment it has placed on its funding status.
- It is recommended that EHU consider extending its library access hours and explores all opportunities available to it to extend its online database facilities and to make increased workspaces available to students.
- It is recommended that EHU consult with students and alumni on how its current procedures and supports for internship could be improved.
- It is recommended that the university establishes a more coherent institutional approach and strategy to increasing student and staff mobility (in all its forms and in both directions) and to the sharing of mobility experiences.
- It is recommended that the university advance without delay with the implementation of its recently adopted procedures for the recognition of learning outcomes as a means of increasing lifelong learning opportunities.
- It is recommended that the university further considers and documents a research strategy for EHU and aligns this with its available funding and resources.

VIII. JUDGEMENT

European Humanities University is given negative evaluation.

Grupės vadovas:
Team leader:

Prof. Andrew Steven Goodspeed



Grupės nariai:
Team members:

Prof. Neil Cameron Sammells



Assoc. Prof. Dr. Turo Virtanen



Danguolė Kiznienė



Benas Gabrielis Urbonavičius



Vertinimo sekretorius:
Review secretary:

Dr. Trish O'Brien



ANNEX. EUROPEAN HUMANITIES UNIVERSITY RESPONSE TO REVIEW REPORT



To: Center for Quality Assessment in Higher Education
(Studijų kokybės vertinimo centras)
ivs@skvc.lt

2017-12-14, Nr. 118-9
In response to: 2017-12-04, Nr. S-4343

RESPONSE OF THE EUROPEAN HUMANITIES UNIVERSITY TO THE INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW REPORT

On behalf of the academic community of the European Humanities University (EHU) and me personally I would like to thank the International Team and its leader Prof. Andrew Steven Goodspeed, and the Center for Quality Assessment in Higher Education (SKVC) for the undertaken efforts and consideration in preparation of the institutional review report of EHU.

University community sincerely believes that extensive assessment would highly stipulate positive improvements of EHU activities and enhance its quality culture.

Following a brutal cease of EHU's operations in Minsk in 2004, EHU was able to relocate to Vilnius thanks to an invitation of the Lithuanian Government and Trans-Atlantic solidarity of donors. Re-establishment of EHU has made its functioning essentially different from any other Lithuanian University and any University in the world due to raison d'être of EHU - the University in Exile status.

Operating in exile is not a symbolic sentiment. *De facto* EHU is forced to operate under a double regulation of Lithuanian hospitality and Belarusian oppression. Numerous migration permissions and labor regulations, prohibition to advertise in a home country (Belarus) and double taxation - none of Lithuanian counterparts of EHU experiences a similar scope of these challenges. The status of the University in Exile is unique and determines the specificity and political essence of any daily or strategic matter of EHU's operations.

EHU acknowledges the rules of the accreditation process which allow the institution in question to draw to the attention of SKVC possible errors, discrepancies or misunderstandings in the draft report. Accordingly, after attentive analysis of the report we would like to provide a few points for corrections and revising of factual information.

Paragraph 9. It is stated "The substantial majority of instruction and internal communication of the University appears to be in the *Belarusian language*."

The reality is that the *Russian* language, not Belarusian, is the primary language of instruction in classes. All external communication with Lithuanian stakeholders is done in Lithuanian. Orders and minutes of decision-making bodies are held in Lithuanian, English, and Russian. Accordingly, we suggest the following wording of the sentence: "The substantial majority of instruction of the University appears to be in the *Russian language*."

Paragraph 11, 24. It is stated that "(...) *In place of the Trust fund, two grant agreements were signed with the Swedish International Development Agency (SIDA)*. The three donors to EHU are currently the European Commission, the Lithuanian Government (through the Eastern Europe Studies Center (EESC), and *SIDA*."

The statement is not correct because SIDA has taken full administration of funds, and the grant agreements should be considered only as a managerial action. The Eastern Europe Studies Center is a member of the General Assembly of Part-Owners, not the donor of EHU. The third donor is Sweden, not SIDA. Accordingly, we offer to exclude the above mentioned sentence from the text and leave the following:

"Since 2016, the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (SIDA) administers financial assistance on behalf of the European Union and other donors. The main donors of EHU currently are the European Commission, *the Lithuanian Government, and Sweden*."

Paragraphs 13, 55, 111. It is stated "At an organizational level the university has reduced from *five departments* to two."

Given that four academic departments and one academic unit had been involved in restructuring, the correct wording would be “At an organizational level the university has reduced from five *academic units* to two”.

Paragraph 16. It is stated: “The members of the working group included heads of departments and the president of the Students’ Union”.

Self-Evaluation Report (SER) working group has been composed by representatives of academic, administrative units, and Students’ Union.

Accordingly, we suggest the following wording of the sentence: “The members of the working group included heads of *academic departments*, *administrative units*, and the president of the Students’ Union”.

Paragraph 18. It is stated: “...the university’s mission was referenced in a range of different contexts, including as a reason for the lack of progress in diversifying the student body from its Belarusian core; and as the motivation for developing incentives for staff to carry out more research. External stakeholders referred to the wish of EHU to raise its profile in Belarus as part of its mission; it was also referred to as having a cultural mission”. The clause is also reflected across **Paragraphs 17, 19, 21, 23, 24, 27, 29, 30, 81, 85, 108.**

Promotion of humanities and social sciences, academic freedom, critical thinking, civic engagement and the integration of Belarus into the Western intellectual community were and remain central to the spirit and letter of EHU’s mission since opening in Minsk in 1992. The academic community of EHU has always been committed to constant actualization of the mission, given the nature of the University.

In AY 2015/16 the entire community of EHU was involved in the strategic planning process. A new overwhelming Strategic Plan 2016-2021 was prepared and adopted by Senate, at that time existing University Council, and Governing Board. The integral part of the Strategic Plan 2016-2021 is the Mission Statement of EHU (Strategic Plan, p. 7), encompassing the purpose and goals of EHU’s operations. Whilst mission’s clause, presented in the Statutes of EHU (Art. 2.1-2.2) concisely outlines the mission and aims of the University, it is consistent both to the values of the Mission Statement and to the mission reference of the SER, as well as to legacy of EHU’s 25 years of operations in Minsk and in exile in Vilnius.

EHU believes that the circumstances described above should be acknowledged in the draft report.

Paragraph 33. It is stated: “There is thus a mismatch between the capabilities and control of the university over its environment, and the demands of external expectations and standards”.

Due to a political nature of EHU’s appearance in Lithuania as a Belarusian University in Exile, the University and its donors rely on Lithuania’s role as a host country by provision of the in-kind premises for operations (currently located at Valakupių g. 5). However the regulations of facilities’ provision limit EHU’s ability in operating it. Namely, according to the existing state of affairs, EHU has no authority over any construction changes or renovation of facilities at Valakupių g. 5.

On October 31, 2017 the Government of Lithuania has finally decided to hand over EHU the new premises in the Old Town. However, instead of transferring the entire space area (2850,44 sq.m.) of the former Augustinian monastery, the Ministry of Education and Sciences reserved 136,51 sq.m. for its own purposes, thus leaving EHU with an additional deviation from the established norms of space allocations.

We believe that the circumstances described above should be acknowledged in the draft report leading to acknowledgement of EHU’s limitations in following the external parameters. The framework of University’s operations in Lithuania prohibits decision-making vis-à-vis fulfillment of the square meters norm, given the recipient character of EHU as a Lithuania’s hosted University-in-Exile.

Paragraph 39. It is stated “The Team was made aware by Vytautas Magnus University (VMU), during its meetings with stakeholders, that *VMU had approached EHU with a merger proposal.*-The Team was informed by EHU that it had met with VMU some time ago to discuss this potential plan and that some elements of

cooperation and interdisciplinary collaboration had emerged”. We would like to strongly highlight that no proposals on merger with VMU were ever considered.

Besides studies and research, provided for Belarusian students, EHU’s essential purpose of operations is to serve as an institution-building alternative to the Belarusian official higher education environment. Abolishment of the institutional independence contradicts EHU’s mission and does not correspond to the pledges of University donors.

Therefore, we offer to change the wording to: “*The Team was made aware that EHU had met with VMU some time ago to discuss some elements of cooperation and interdisciplinary collaboration*”.

Paragraph 45. It is stated “EHU has developed admissions procedures as part of its developing internal quality assurance regulations. *It does not appear to yet have a process in place to formally recognize informal and non-formal learning*, but it informed the Team that it does encourage more experienced learners to share their experiences for the benefit of other students and staff.”

We would like to draw attention to the SER Paragraph 25, which states that “*Recognition rules has been updated to include a process to recognize non-formal and informal learning outcomes*”. In addition, EHU Admission procedures recognize informal and non-formal learning of prospective students

Paragraph 68. It is stated “The concern conveyed in the documentation of EHU regarding its financial situation sits beside *an evident lack of consensus between and amongst the governance and management of EHU on how this should be addressed*, which has not enabled a satisfactory resolution of this crucial matter.”

Since establishment of the EHU Governing Board in 2007, every meeting’s agenda involved state of financial concerns and affairs — this is evident through existing minutes of the meetings. The proposed introduction of an external party (**Paragraph 69**) contradicts the subordination of decision-making. In addition, this suggestion (**Paragraph 69**) does not take in consideration that the administrator of the financial support — SIDA, is consistently involved in all aspects of decision-making within governance and management structures of the University.

Accordingly it is proposed to change **Paragraph 68** to: “The concern conveyed in the documentation of EHU regarding its financial situation sits beside *a discussion* between and amongst the governance and management of EHU on how this should be addressed.”

Paragraph 78. It states: “EHU has reduced quite substantially in the last three years its ‘average funds allocated per student in a field of study’ ... from 75% to 25% of the normative study price per semester”.

This statement does not correspond to the existing state of affairs. When analyzing the budget of the last three years (SER Annex 11) and comparing it with the student body numbers (SER Annex 27), it is evident that no decrease in funding-per-student allocations occurred at EHU. Namely, funds per student per semester in AY 2013-14 are 2103 Eur, in AY 2014-15 are 2540 Eur, in AY 2015-16 are 2039 Eur, in AY 2016-17 are 2087 Eur. The consistency of funding allocations per student is also evidenced by audited financial reports for the aforementioned periods. EHU acknowledges the potential reason for deviation in the MOSTA indicated data and EHU budget documents due to technical error in submission of primary data to MOSTA.

Accordingly it is proposed to change **Paragraph 78** into: “*According to MOSTA findings, EHU has reduced quite substantially in the last three years its ‘average funds allocated per student in a field of study’ from 75% to 25% of the normative study price per semester. However, the Team acknowledges the presence of the opposite evidence by analyzing the budgetary documents and the student number figures of EHU and thus presumes a presence of technical misinterpretation in MOSTA findings regarding the matter*”.

Paragraph 80. It states: “The university has undertaken and coped with very significant *changes since 2014 and in particular since 2016*. Equally, a number of its quality assurance procedures have been introduced *in 2017...* Whilst these changes in governance, executive leadership, organisational structure, staffing, and procedures, may prove very positive for EHU, *the university is not yet in a position to provide the Team with substantial evidence of their effectiveness*”.

The timeline of reforms, undertaken at EHU was substantially influenced by an external factor, namely, the decision of the Nordic Council of Ministers to close the mandate of the Trust Fund in May 2016, which respectively led to an arrangement of the new setting of the supervision of the donors support to EHU, supervised by SIDA. In its turn, SIDA guided a set of strategic reforms, given the competence and expertise of SIDA in maintaining development cooperation projects worldwide.

Effectiveness of the implemented reforms has been evidenced by SIDA’s continuous assessments and evaluations of EHU’s strategic management, conducted in collaboration with the Swedish Development Advisers. The potential of the implemented reforms is evidenced by the outcomes of the November 17, 2017 Donors Conference and the announced plan of SIDA to sign an additional 3-year funding agreement with EHU, hence further strengthening the financial basis of the University.

EHU believes that the circumstances described above should be acknowledged in the draft report.

New developments since the site visit

1. In regards to **Paragraphs 14, 72**. On October 31, 2017 the Government of Lithuania has adopted a decision No. 887 (effective since November 7, 2017) regarding in-kind transfer on new premises, located at Savičiaus g. 17, Vilnius for EHU’s needs. The re-location of EHU activities to the new premises is expected to take place in Q1 2018.
2. In regards to **Paragraph 80**. On November 17, 2017 for the first time EHU Donors Conference was hosted by SIDA. Ambassadors and Heads of diplomatic missions of more than a dozen donor governments indicated a strong appreciation of the outcomes of EHU’s led managerial and academic reforms, aiming at enhancement of University’s operations. Namely, informal consultations on re-engagement of some of prior donors were initiated. In addition, SIDA has announced its plans to sign a 3-year funding agreement with EHU, hence stabilizing the nature of University’s financing.
3. In regards to **Paragraphs 19, 67**. On December 4, 2017 the General Assembly of Part-Owners has taken a decision on appointing a new permanent Rector of EHU for a 5-year term, as a result of the International Search for the Rector’s position. The new Rector is expected to take office in February 2018.
4. In regards to **Paragraph 60, 85**. EHU acknowledges the interference of technical issues that caused a minor delay in submission of student data to the Student Register by the end of October 2017, hence some week after the opening of the AY 2017-18 that took place on October 2, 2017. The University management did impose strict measures on ensuring that all data in the Student Register is carefully inspected by EHU staff pursuing to adjust possible inaccuracies. In addition, the leadership of EHU has taken supervision of maintaining University’s policy in assuring compliance with recognition of qualifications of prospective students.

Acting Rector



Joergen Joergensen

Alina Juškienė, 8~5 205 3643, alina.juskieni@ehu.lt
Maksimas Milta, 8~5 263 9650, maksimas.milta@ehu.lt