



STUDIJŲ KOKYBĖS VERTINIMO CENTRAS

MYKOLO ROMERIO UNIVERSITETO

VEIKLOS VERTINIMO IŠVADOS

INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW REPORT OF

MYKOLAS ROMERIS UNIVERSITY

Grupės vadovas:	Prof. dr. Jürgen Kohler
Team leader:	
Grupės nariai:	Prof. dr. Julio Pedrosa de Jesus
Team members:	Prof. dr. Kari-Jouko Rähä
	Dr. Attila Pausits
	Dr. Aleksandras Abišala
	Mikus Dubickis
Vertinimo sekretorius:	Dr. Anca Greere
Review secretary:	

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I. INTRODUCTION

1. The institutional Review of Mykolas Romeris University (hereafter “MRU” or “the University”) was conducted by an international expert team (hereafter “the team”). The site visit took place from March 25 – 27, 2014. The Institutional Review was organized by the Lithuanian Centre for Quality Assessment in Higher Education (SKVC), an Authorized Agency founded by the Ministry of Education and Science of the Republic of Lithuania. The evaluation was carried out according to the “Methodology for Conducting an Institutional Review in Higher Education” (thereafter “Methodology”) determined by the Procedure for the External Review in Higher Education approved by the Resolution No 1317 of the Government of the Republic of Lithuania of September 22, 2010.
2. The Centre for Quality Assessment in Higher Education, Lithuania appointed the external peer review team composed of Prof. dr. Jürgen Kohler (Germany) (chair), Prof. dr. Julio Pedrosa de Jesus (Portugal), Prof. dr. Kari-Jouko Rähkä (Finland), Dr. Attila Pausits (Austria), Dr. Aleksandras Abišala (employer representative) (Lithuania), Mikus Dubickis (Latvia) (student representative), and Dr. Anca Greere (United Kingdom) (review secretary).
3. The purpose of the institutional review was “to ensure prerequisites for the improvement of the performance and the promotion of the culture of quality, also to offer recommendations for the development of the activities of higher education institutions”. By evaluating the institution’s capacity to improve performance, the team’s main direction is towards further development of this forward-looking University, in response to external challenges. The team is aware that many of the challenges facing MRU are not all unique and that these are shared more commonly worldwide. Therefore, by bringing the team members’ very wide experience of reviewing institutions in many countries and by sharing views and observations, team members hope that their comments and recommendations will be relevant to the University.
4. The team considered a wide range of documentation submitted by MRU including a Self-Evaluation Report (SER) with multiple Annexes, and further documentation that was provided on request of the review team. The team appreciated the thoughtful structuring of the self-evaluation report and its comprehensiveness while concentrating on the essential and the efforts to present highly informative content in clear language, balanced with corresponding evaluative statements. During the site visit, a series of meetings was conducted with the university senior management team, representatives of governing bodies,

staff members who participated in the preparation of the self-evaluation report, teaching staff, researchers, students, graduates, employers and other external stakeholders including representatives of local and national government. The team particularly appreciated the input provided by the external stakeholders who were extremely positive about their engagement with MRU for many facets of University life (as detailed further in the specific area findings). The site visit concluded with an oral presentation by the chair of the preliminary findings of the expert group to the senior officers of the University together with representatives of staff and students.

5. In line with SKVC methodology, the findings of the team focus on four main areas in the University's activities: strategic management, academic studies and life-long learning, research and (or) art activities, and impact on regional and national development. The recommendations and decisions of the review team follow a set of criteria as set out in the Methodology.

II. BACKGROUND INFORMATION ABOUT THE INSTITUTION

6. Having been established in 2004, Mykolas Romeris University (MRU) is a relatively young State University with a dynamic approach, an entrepreneurial orientation and an ambitious mission, which strives to place MRU more prominently within the European Higher Education Area, not just in the Lithuanian context. As noted in the SER, the University's mission is to educate society, to accumulate and cherish intellectual potential, to educate leaders capable of creating and introducing innovations that determine diverse scientific, cultural and technological progress. MRU aims at educating a personality which is mature, entrepreneurial, i.e. an independent leader of the future, and a citizen fostering Lithuanian identity.
7. During the nine years of its activity the University has developed rapidly, extending its higher education spectrum. It currently offers study programmes in social sciences, digital technologies, and humanities and is the second largest university in Lithuania in terms of enrolment. The University currently hosts approximately 17000 students on its study programmes, i.e. approx. one sixth of the entire student population of Lithuania, of which 140 are foreign nationals, with the latter figure growing. The University employs about 800 teaching and research staff, 665 of which are teaching staff (2012/13), and 390 staff in administration and other support areas. The numbers of employees have been reduced in

recent years, e.g. as regards teaching posts by 36 between 2010/11 and 2012/13, following the reduction of student enrolment which has taken place throughout Lithuania.

8. The focus now is on creating new attractive national and joint study programmes developed in collaboration with foreign universities, fostering lifelong learning and electronic studies, and research activity. The SER classifies these as key strategic areas and staff confirmed their involvement and efforts into producing valuable outcomes from activities correlated with these areas.
9. MRU has taken on board guidelines from the Bologna Process and has aligned its provision accordingly, including the introduction of learning outcomes, ECTS and ECTS-based assessment as means of comparability and compatibility with European Higher Education institutions.
10. MRU takes on a flexible approach to higher education, within the boundaries of the Lithuanian legislative framework, and responds to market and societal needs as regards education for existing professions and developing professional profiles. MRU embraces constant adaptation of management/institutional structures to enable it to respond appropriately and in a timely manner to the demands of the industry and society, in more generic terms, and also more directly to those of external stakeholders which the University has very strong ties with.
11. In 2012, Middlesex University London took part in establishing the University's new Faculty of Social Technologies. As the result, a joint MRU-MU Business and Media School (*Mykolas Romeris University – Middlesex University Business and Media School, BMS*) started its activity in September 2013 and is delivering study programmes in the fields of economics, informatics, management and communication. Students shall be awarded two diplomas by MU and MRU.
12. MRU is committed to ensuring that it operates in comparable terms to other higher education institutions internationally. To this purpose, each academic year over 10 MRU study programmes undergo international evaluation. Additionally, international external evaluations of the University have also been carried out in the past years. In 2011, MRU was evaluated by Internationalization Strategies Advisory Service (ISAS) programme of the International Association of Universities (IAU), in 2006 and 2013 MRU was evaluated by

the IEP programme of the European University Association (EUA). The team saw evidence that MRU were in the process of implementing recommendations formulated by these fora.

III. STRATEGIC MANAGEMENT

13. The team was presented with a comprehensive methodology of developing the strategic plan as part of a project implemented at the institution. Evidence was presented that the larger educational community (administrative staff, teaching staff and students), and external stakeholders had been consulted in the SWOT analysis that was meant to identify key areas of action for the future. The drafting of the SER for the SKVC evaluation provided additional opportunity to reflect on the impact factor and to incorporate those reflections in the strategic planning exercise. Challenges identified (e.g. demographic) were responded to with realistic aims focussing on internationalisation, interdisciplinarity and society-driven responsiveness.
14. The international activity would be backed up by consortia, joint programmes, enhanced academic and pastoral support for international students and further development of e-learning tools and e-technology support.
15. In spite of Lithuanian system, which keep disciplines and subject-areas distinctive for teaching/academic delivery purposes, MRU has invested resources and staff development support for interdisciplinary research which could eventually inform the design and implementation of interdisciplinary study programmes, to be based within larger international consortia.
16. MRU has also provided ample proof of its engagement with the social and professional sectors, with testimonies being heard by the team regarding involvement of external stakeholders from local and national businesses, governmental bodies and social organisations. These connections with the sectors for which students are being prepared allow MRU to be malleable by constantly readjusting on the basis of input/feedback from such stakeholders.
17. The team largely appreciated the vision and mission of the University and found its **dedication to support the development of the society at large as commendable**, also

having had proof of contributions by MRU staff in various facets of Lithuanian policy and governmental procedural setting.

18. In spite of the strong overarching vision, which various participants to meetings concurred, the strategic plan and its operationalization proves more difficult, as action lines are very many, with varying degrees of relevance and/or focus, and with no prioritisation being conducted on an annual/regular basis. Action lines were indicated without a clear set of operationalization criteria or measurable outcomes (who does what, by when, with what impact, reporting to whom etc.) and this then impacts on the way the community relates to the action points and the strategic plan and how it identifies itself with these elements. **The team recommends that MRU revisit its action lines as derived from the strategic plan and the SWOT analysis and devise ways in which these may be effectively and efficiently operationalised.** In the main, this requires MRU to ensure, firstly, that the action plan indicates priorities, secondly, that the numerous measures and indicators in the strategic activity plan are grouped into action lines, and thirdly, that action lines are outlined by reference to measurable outcomes, thus fully indicating the existence of due process in a comprehensive manner (“SMART-ness”). MRU also needs to inform the community and stakeholders of their responsibilities vis-à-vis the action lines.
19. The SER presents only the strengths and threats sections of the SWOT analysis. In the future it is advisable to provide a full SWOT matrix to make also the opportunities more explicit, even if the actions are focused on the advantages instead of the weaknesses.
20. The team appreciated the organisational flexibility of MRU and acknowledged its commitment to maintaining the “form-follows-function” policy, as a broad approach, recognisable by all members of the community.
21. In line with Lithuanian law, there are three governing structures: Council, Senate and Rector. The Rector, as Head of the university is considered “a single-person management body”. This means that the Rector has the responsibility of implementing the university strategic action plan, which sets the main direction in institutional development. The Senate, among other functions, sets normative standards mainly in academic matters, approves the internal quality assurance system, and provides consultative input to budget planning. The Council has external and internal members, among these academic staff and students; its role includes approving budgetary matters, maintaining of general oversight and suggesting broad

developmental directions, in cooperation with the Senate. University members can influence institutional policies and practices sufficiently through representation in the University bodies both at central and decentral levels.

22. **The team commends MRU on the professionalism and effectiveness of the Rector's team, especially as regards competence, clarity of analysis, determination and forward-looking approach.** However, the right balance between the Senate and the Council roles was yet to be obtained as MRU further matures and enters a new phase of educational progress. The entrepreneurial spirit, the change-responsive organisational structure, the involvement of students at all levels of quality management, as well as the engagement with stakeholders and potential educational/business partners, both nationally and internationally, would clearly assist MRU in entering this new phase.
23. **The team commends MRU for the way it has developed the organisational culture to embrace change, to build on an environment of flexibility and openness for collegiate discussions and consultations, including students and stakeholders.**
24. The team acknowledges, and MRU confirms, that this high degree of flexibility is coupled with devolution of responsibility at Faculty/Department level. The balance between centralisation and decentralisation, or an appropriate level of centralisation and decentralisation is still sought after. MRU understands the risk it is running and is in the process of further exploring methods of reducing the risk and ensuring maximum operational effectiveness.
25. **The team recommends that MRU should strive to mitigate the institutional risk which arises from decentralisation to ensure better oversight as a systemic approach.** MRU should reconsider the value of central direction-setting and monitoring of institutional strategy implementation for particular areas, especially relating to research and third mission development, quality assurance policies, norms, and practices. Central strategic governance, norm-setting and monitoring of decentralised areas could result in collection of quantitative and qualitative data to inform institution-wide developments, and would more easily create the contexts for sharing of good practice and innovation across Faculties/Departments. Currently, staff in meetings gave to understand that institutional strategy was not fully comprehended at faculty level and this in turn could lead to faculty initiatives not being fully aligned with institutional aims. At the same time, suggesting the centralisation as indicated

above is not to be understood as a proposal for centralising the way quality surveys are practically conducted in the various fields of activity, especially in study programmes, nor does the aforesaid proposal indicate that the evaluation team does not recognize the fact that MRU has already standardized most quality assurance devices throughout the institution.

26. The team found that many of the initiatives proposed were based on available funding opportunities and there was a continuous shift to follow such opportunities. In brief, developmental practices tend to be opportunity-seeking, which has its merits in particular in an environment which is fast growing and where solutions to imminent risks need to be found. However, there was little evidence that MRU was engaging with these opportunities on the basis/within the framework of their larger strategic aims. Therefore, **the team recommends that MRU should balance its practices to seek opportunities as they arise with a more pro-active, strategy-based approach to identifying its key activities as they should be envisaged in a mid- to long-term perspective.** This is essential to align institutional strategies, funding and staff policies, since these need more than short-term reactive measures. **The team recommends that MRU translate institutional strategies into staff and infrastructure resourcing through coherent medium/long-term planning, rather than allow for short-term external funding opportunities to impact too strongly on the global direction of the institution.** Clearly, external funding could not be ignored in terms of importance; however, the team considered it vital for the development and maturing of the institution to decide some flagship areas for which seed money could be allocated. This would also have to be sustained by setting human resources policies and developing staffing plans to support the flagship areas. **The team recommends that MRU take a strategic approach in establishing flagship areas (for education, research and third mission) and integrate them within strategic action lines and sustain their development with appropriate budgeting and resourcing plans.**
27. As regards monitoring the implementation of the strategic plan and adjusting it in view of emerging developments, the University has introduced a complex information system and runs relevant data bases, which the University utilizes fully to both address accomplishment of its strategic objectives as well as to respond to changes in the environment which are relevant for the University's future positioning. This is, for instance, illustrated by the way in which the University is proactive and timely in reacting to changes in student demand and in research opportunities both in terms of programme changes and readdressing research foci as well as aligning staff composition and numbers (cf. paragraph 7 above). The University's

processes and decision-making practices, which are not only based on collecting of robust data but also by regular thematic discussions at various levels of the university – namely the rectorate, but also deans, chancellor, and administrative units – can therefore be considered to be operational and effective, not only as regards educational and research content but also as regards wider institutional policy, namely staffing practices.

28. MOSTA indicators were all met by the University. The team visited the facilities and were introduced to the IT and library resources. **The team commends MRU for the arrangements in place to accommodate students with disabilities, including deaf and hard-of-hearing students.**

29. Quality assurance is not fully institutionalised, and the closing of the quality cycle is not evident for a number of actions being implemented. The team found that the quality concept oscillates between compliance-driven, marketability/employability-driven, fitness-for-purpose, or a benchmarking exercise. It is not clear how overall institutional quality, including all elements of the University's understanding of its mission, is being measured, with what tools and to what purpose. The study programme questionnaires cover student satisfaction aspects, mainly with a view to teacher performance, while they could also present a more holistic approach, potentially indicative of the fact that quality is viewed in a broader sense; however, the team judges from the interviews during the site visit that de facto the aspects of student satisfaction with teacher performance attracted most attention. There are mechanisms, e.g. programme committees, in place which allow for quality discussions and adjustments based on quality observations; however, these do not seem to be exploited to their full potential. **The team recommends a better integration of quality assurance mechanisms into a coherent quality assurance and quality enhancement concept to support educational and research aims, in general, but also more specifically to support the internationalisation agenda of MRU.** Quality mechanisms/measures need to become more supportive of development, enabling staff who have responsibilities for quality to play an advisory role, rather than a post-event monitoring role. Achieving this, both proactively in a supportive mode as well as ex post in monitoring and quality enhancement, is likely to require permanent staff at central level who, due to systematic acquisition of professional competence in the field, is fully familiar with the complexities which constitute fully-fledged internal and external quality assurance nowadays.

30. Developing and enhancing staff competence, especially in teaching but also in other areas, is incentivized by means of a remuneration system which takes performance criteria into

consideration. On a more proactive count, the University supports the enhancement of teaching competence by means of opportunities to gather relevant experience through international mobility of teachers, both in-bound and out-bound. Moreover, the University has recently taken part in relevant programmes such as ‘Innovative Researcher’ and ‘Innovative Teaching’. The Team commends the University for these approaches to enhancement of staff qualification. However, there is scope for more proactive and holistic measures to secure and advance teaching competence. For instance, when compared to the University’s current practice, staff development could be more systematically addressed to younger staff and to staff where certain shortcomings have shown in quality assurance processes; it could be more comprehensive, i.e. ensure coverage of the entire staff including external part-time staff in particular; it may need to be more sustainable than can be achieved by means of participation in specific quality enhancement programmes. **The Team would therefore recommend to consider the development of a more proactive, more systematic and more comprehensive system of teaching quality formation, which should be sustainable over time.** However, this recommendation is not to be understood as meaning that the Team sees any indication that, generally speaking, staff performance in teaching and learning or in any other aspect of the University’s operations raises any concern.

31. Students are very well represented in the various decision-making structures, as are also external stakeholders. **The team commends MRU on the way it engages with students and stakeholders, who are present in decision-making structures at programme level up to the Rectorate.** In preparing for the challenges identified for the growth of distance learning, blended learning, e-learning the University needs to address more closely the needs of students in these particular study situations. **The team recommends that MRU consider instituting representational roles in the various decision-making structures for part-time, distance-learning students to enable their voice to be captured formally and their requests to be actioned appropriately.**
32. Ensuring observation of academic ethics is cared for by means of relevant rules and regulations, which are laid down in the Code of Ethics. A set of regulations makes provisions for safeguarding academic integrity especially with regard to examinations and to avoiding plagiarism of various kinds. These normative elements are underpinned by organizational and procedural elements, such as a Supervisory Commission on Ethics, Faculty Ethics Commissions, an Academic Ethics Centre; there is also a system of ethics information, consultation and teaching. Both the regulatory and the procedural precautions appear to be fit for purpose. The University has underscored its commitment to maintaining ethics by

subscribing to the Academic Integrity Assessment Guide and has carried out a pilot study on academic integrity in 2011-13. In effect, the policies, normative precautions, and practices established and actively operated by the University appear to be robust and commendable. The Team found no indication that there were infringements on ethical standards by, or in, the University.

Overall, the team finds strategic management to be underpinned by a strong mission and a strategic plan designed and carried out through broadly effective governance bodies. These seek the engagement of various stakeholder groups, including through representation roles. Monitoring the implementation of strategic plan and effective reaction to the results of monitoring processes as well as timely adaptation to new developments is ensured, including the implementation of a fit-for-purpose staffing policy. Better focus and prioritisation of strategic lines is yet to be achieved, as is an appropriate balance between centralised and decentralised structures, including for quality assurance and lifelong learning activities.

Strategic Management is given a positive evaluation.

IV. ACADEMIC STUDIES AND LIFE-LONG LEARNING

33. In line with the approach detailed above regarding the responsiveness of MRU to external factors, study programmes are created or discontinued depending on the input from the market sector. There are procedures to consult widely on the development of a new programme, however business analyses tend to take precedence over academic, strategic aims. **The team recommends that MRU adopt a more strategic approach to developing and managing study programmes, and one which can also better align with research aims.** This would ensure that proper academic consideration is given to study programmes before they are being launched, that study programmes are in line with the strategic/flagship aims of the institution and that they are backed up by corresponding staffing and resourcing initiatives.

34. Study programmes are designed and implemented with employer contribution/participation, which enables programmes to be up-to-date and fully aligned with market trends so as to increase the employability of graduates. The programmes are supplemented by internships being offered by MRU. This in itself allows the students to take a broader understanding of the profession they are preparing for, however, in order to make internships fully relevant for

the student programme, **the team recommends that MRU should sharpen the planning and monitoring of internships and pay special attention to the role internships are given to comply/align with the learning outcomes of the study programme and to form an integral part of the study concept.**

35. The team acknowledged that Bologna guidelines had been taken into account. MRU use ECTS in combination to student workloads. Study programmes had been designed with indication of learning outcomes which inform the teaching/learning and assessment processes. **The team commends MRU for taking a student-centred approach with contact hours being organised in small student groups.** There is also the option of distance-learning and blended learning which students take benefit from.
36. In terms of identifying relevant learning outcomes, **the team recommends that MRU reconsider the completeness of its choice and focus of learning outcomes, both in view of its own declared mission and the set of educational objectives usually highlighted by the Council of Europe and in the Bologna Communiqués (London Communiqué 2007).** These embrace, apart from emphasizing employability, also personal development, creating a research mind-set, and fostering democratic citizenship. MRU's mission statement defines the University as a place where innovation, creativity, entrepreneurship, and societal responsibilities are nurtured. Both this statement and the aforementioned educational objectives shape the projection of the MRU graduate. Therefore, these aspirations need to be fully addressed in identifying adequate learning outcomes, underpinned by fit-for-purpose learning experience, subsequent assessment methods, and coverage by quality assurance. While MRU fully adopts employability as a reference point for its educational aims, MRU may address the appropriateness of a more holistic educational vision, covering the entire quality cycle, as mentioned above.
37. Assessment takes places in various ways, depending on the nature of the content/skills being assessed, i.e. continuous assessment and summative assessment, oral and written assessment, etc. Currently, there is no systematic approach or any internal policy stipulation as to the number of assessor for a course, and with regard to the provision of qualitative feedback. **The team recommends that each assessment, particularly in the case of oral assessment, be conducted by a panel to ensure fairness, consistency, transparency and evidence-base of results. The team also recommends that feedback from assessments be provided more systematically and in a more detailed manner, especially for written summative**

assessments. Final theses defence is evaluated by a panel which, in line with Lithuanian legislation, also has professionals/external stakeholders as members. The team considers this an important element which fosters employer engagement.

38. Modularisation is not fully exploited. The team considers it advisable for MRU to further analyse the potential for modularisation as a means of combining programmes into more diversified structures which allow for more options for students. The team acknowledges that there are legal restrictions preventing MRU from currently developing a more modular structure. It is hoped that the future would see some legal relaxation in this area. This would permit MRU and other higher education institutions in Lithuania to apply a flexibility principle within broader structures of (existing) programmes, rather than to create and close down smaller-scale structures to sustain their market-driven aims.
39. Quality assurance mechanisms for study programmes are not implemented to their full capacity. This is also due to some shortcomings as regards strategic oversight for quality assurance (see section 1). **The team recommends that MRU publish the procedures for quality assurance in relation to study programmes and raise awareness for staff and students in what regards their relevance.** The collaboration with Middlesex University London gave MRU the opportunity to experience quality assurance requirements as proposed by the UK partner, and the team appreciates that MRU was responsive in considering such QA mechanisms for its larger national and international study offering.
40. Student surveys are designed to elicit relevant qualitative data which could further inform development. These are discussed at the programme committee level. However, these are not discussed at institutional level and there is little knowledge within the academic community as to the consequences they produce (see section 1). **The team recommends that student surveys are analysed in-depth and discussed at all levels of the quality assurance structure, enabling a more strategic impact with appropriate consideration of consequences. The feedback loop needs to be closed coherently and sustainably.** This process needs to be documented internally and made available to the wider community, so as to ensure that there is awareness regarding how the information is used and what actions/results it determines. The students are more likely to engage with the survey if they can see the immediate reactions they may determine.

41. MRU collects drop-out/retention information and also has in place a system for tracking of graduates. **The team recommends that MRU focus more on the qualitative analysis of such data (without disregarding the quantitative component) and make use of the results to inform the development of study programmes and research directions.**
42. In terms of tracking graduates, there was evidence of MRU gathering quantitative data on employment of graduates within a certain period after graduation. The team commends MRU for that. However, **the team recommends that student tracking should also be accompanied by qualitative investigation carried out systematically among graduates as well as employers** as to the extent to which graduates meet expected job-related – both professional and personal – requirements, and how these have been acquired in the MRU learning process, and how the learning process could be improved in view of these findings.
43. The team noted that the approach to degree programmes was disciplinary, while the corresponding research took an interdisciplinary approach which combined team of researchers from various interjoining disciplines. The purpose is to investigate topics which could potentially create the rationale and human resources to redesign study programmes by consideration of interdisciplinarity. The team heard that this posed a challenge for MRU as the current policies for higher education in Lithuania only allowed disciplinary degree programmes¹, (at least at bachelor level) and this was impeding on the potential for MRU to respond to interdisciplinary social/market needs by engaging both in research and in programme delivery which could lie at the crossroads of more disciplines. MRU acknowledged that interdisciplinarity of study programmes could be the future and would allow them to increase their attractiveness for candidates and would enable them to enter into stronger international partnerships for design and delivery of such programmes. **The team commends MRU on the direction it has set for itself regarding interdisciplinarity** and encourages MRU to continue with this approach to research. Thus, research can create the platform for more interdisciplinary study programmes to be developed within international consortia or for when Lithuanian policies make room for such programmes to be developed and implemented at national level.

¹ The team learnt the law allows programmes to include a certain number of credits related to courses outside the study field of the study programme in question, while the team understands interdisciplinarity to also include the possibility to combine study elements from more than one study field which carry equal weight in terms of credits.

44. The team heard that internationalisation was one of the priorities which for MRU could serve multiple purposes, i.e. to tackle the demographic decrease at national level imminent for the near future, and to allow MRU to ascertain itself more strongly internationally as a higher education institution providing globally relevant education. For now, internationalisation is limited, with a number of programmes being offered jointly with/validated by foreign universities, and with few (as compared to the overall student body) incoming foreign students. Many of the foreign students who study at MRU are beneficiaries of the Erasmus programme, while some are degree-seeking students. MRU intends to position itself as a bridge between Asia and Europe and is now carefully targeting students from abroad to increase their Erasmus intake, but also, and more importantly, the number of foreign students enrolled on degree programmes at MRU. The foreign students the team met confirmed that MRU was committed to investing time, effort and resources for internationalisation, but that there still was a long way to go before foreign students could be made to feel integrated in the system and would benefit from a comparable student experience to their national counterparts. **The team commends MRU for its forward-looking approach to internationalisation and the vision it has regarding its potential positioning on the international education scene.**
45. Some support systems are in place, which cater specifically for international students, i.e. English language courses, social counselling, induction week, study skills support etc., but these need to be developed to become more attractive to international students. The team heard that the voice of international students was being listened to individually/informally and actioned in consequence. MRU acknowledges that more support is necessary for staff engaging in programmes with an international potential. **The team recommends that MRU should strengthen support mechanisms for internationalisation (both for students and staff), especially in view of the growth agenda MRU proposes on this front, and to ensure formal arrangements are in place for the representation of international students.**
46. Outgoing students benefit from the fact that MRU study programmes are compatible to the features of study programmes envisaged by the Bologna Process. In principle, the Erasmus programme requirements are met. In particular, the recognition of foreign credits when returning to MRU is not mentioned as a problem in the student survey on mobility issues, which indicates that the three-partite agreements are in place or that other procedural measures are in place to ensure recognition sufficiently. According to the aforesaid survey, the main problem is funding outgoing students, which MRU can most likely not remedy to

any major extent, and low confidence of students in their language competence, which appears to be an issue mainly for the school system not easy to compensate by MRU, notwithstanding the fact that, in view of this evidence, MRU should consider fostering language training even more strongly than at present. While lack of information provided by MRU on opportunities for studying abroad is indicated as an issue in the student survey, the return rate on the question on this specific issue is low, which makes it hard to establish whether or not provision of information is a major factor. In view of the very fact that MRU has carried out a comprehensive survey on mobility matters, the Team commends MRU for undertaking such a quality monitoring exercise and understands that MRU is taking up the aforementioned issues in order to improve what appears to be a reasonably effective system for outgoing students.

47. Life-Long Learning (LLL) is also a declared key priority for MRU. If previously LLL was under the oversight of one central unit, MRU decided that a decentralised approach would benefit the University to increase their response rate and to diversify their activities in line with relevant discipline/field connected social and market developments. The responsibility for LLL now lies with individual Faculties and Departments which respond to external stakeholder input. Some programmes offered are on a contractual basis whereas others are proposed by MRU. Currently, the labelling of an activity as LLL is dependent on the maturity of the candidate/applicant rather than the form of study proposed. **The team recommends that MRU obtain more clarity in relation to the concept of LLL and increase consistency in applying this concept.**

48. The team heard many individual examples of successful LLL experiences from both staff and other stakeholders engaged in continuous professional development, however, these examples appeared as pockets of good practice which differed in what regards the level and focus of the services being offered. Many initiatives for such services were derived from individual connections between staff, graduates and other stakeholders. There is no central point of contact where enquiries could be logged and then allocated to the responsible structures. The overall picture is that of an opportunity-driven, individualized approach. While the team sees the benefit of this approach in terms of motivation and speedy reaction to demand, **the team recommends the consolidation of LLL activities into an approach that could be centrally steered, monitored and marketed, but which would maintain features of decentralisation for development and implementation of such activities.** This would allow for a more formal and more transparent message to be sent to the general public,

and for better management (including prioritisation) of LLL initiatives to be quality assured and developed in line with the University's overarching policies and procedures.

49. **The team commends MRU for having developed a procedure for recognition of prior learning to support LLL.** Valuable steps have been taken already in this direction.

50. Students undertaking LLL will have distinctive learning needs and will relate to the learning environment differently. **The team recommends that MRU ensure that the student experience is accommodated to the profile of the students and that it demonstrates sufficient flexibility in responding to LLL students' needs catered to the specific challenges that these students face.**

Overall, the conditions for academic studies and lifelong learning to be suitable, complying with provisions of the European Higher Education Area. Study programmes are designed, implemented, developed and reviewed with the participation of various stakeholders, including students and industry representatives. MRU is responsive to society needs and industry forecasts as it takes on board recommendations for development of degree study programmes and lifelong learning activities. MRU has set on an international route and is currently exploiting its potential for internationalisation. There are still improvements to be made (as detailed above), especially for the reassessment of study programme components to ensure full relevance for learning outcomes, the consolidation of LLL within MRU's mainstream activities and the further development of support structures for its international approaches.

Academic Studies and Life-long Learning is given a positive evaluation.

V. RESEARCH AND (OR) ART

51. Research at MRU covers many fields, and it frequently takes an interdisciplinary approach. Research is a strategic area for MRU and, currently, MRU invests in developing a wide range of research areas, shifting research aims according to financial opportunities. In spite of national constraints regarding interdisciplinarity, MRU decided to promote this approach to research as it faces the challenges of penetrating the international scene. The team confirms the University's rationale that this interdisciplinary approach would give the University an advantage internationally and may ensure a better positioning nationally. Research at MRU is meant to build capacity and to generate income. **The team recommends MRU take a more**

focussed approach to research and one that becomes fully aligned with institutional strategic aims, strengthening the institutional research capacities, e.g. by underpinning these by fitting staff and investment policies which necessarily require a mid- to long-term perspective. Institutional strategy should drive research activities, rather than a prevalent orientation towards current funding opportunities. MRU is now in a position to decide on which research foci it wants to strengthen to ensure that it builds up and/or consolidates national and international recognition in various flagship areas. The more reactive approach should be coupled with a proactive projectional approach which would contribute to establishing the distinctive research brand of the institution. It is important for the University to make relevant choices to meet strategic aims set which draw on research. In doing so, it will necessarily have to consider its institutional mission and vision, and it is obvious that this, for practical reasons of funding as well as public endorsement of the institution, will take national and European research and development objectives into consideration. But these rather general and basic reference points defined by MRU's mission and national or European agendas should not prevent MRU from setting specific priorities in select areas, forecasting more proactively in which areas it should play a strong role in the future.

52. A rewarding system is in place for recognising researcher activity e.g. in publishing on forums with high impact and participation in research projects. As an underpinning to such incentivizing, MRU monitors research performance. **The team commends MRU for establishing such a transparent system that was appreciated and well received by the researchers.** However, such a system rewards achievements post hoc. If some amount of seed money could be budgeted for, promising young researchers would be supported based on reviewed research plans. This would also help to align research activities with the strategic goals of MRU.
53. MRU has strong traditions in research in social sciences, law in particular. Coverage of media technologies is fitting in this context. The SER mentions expansion of research activities into new areas, such as biomedical sciences. **The team recommends that MRU consider critically whether entering these new areas may overstretch capacities and may blur the strong research identity which it currently exhibits for established fields.** Identifying a meaningful niche which links such new fields to current MRU focus areas may help mitigate this risk. The interdisciplinary approach already adopted by MRU serves research needs well, allowing MRU to provide expertise on aspects that match its strengths and, simultaneously, to build expertise for complementary areas.

54. Innovations are at the heart of MRU strategy, with special emphasis on social innovations. This is well supported by the recently started programmes in social technologies. Research on social innovations, e.g. on eGovernance, can lead to products and procedures that have commercial value. MRU should consider supporting researchers in their activities to put such innovations in broad use.
55. MRU has responded to the EUA recommendation and has instituted a post of research manager responsible for identifying lines of financing and drawing the attention of various researchers and research teams to these. **The team commends the support given to researchers to enable them to draft proposals for research bids which comply with requirements of EU-funding.** This takes bureaucratic pressure off the individual researchers and research teams in what regards formal elements and allows them to focus on field-specific content input. Additionally, it ensures a strong filter at MRU and increases the chances of success in obtaining the funding.
56. Internationalization supports MRU research activities in several aspects. Research events, e.g. conferences and seminars, with international partners provide space both for research input and for research dissemination. Doctoral programmes, two of which are joint programmes, and doctoral networks are operated in international formats, thus underpinning the development of high-class young researchers who benefit from experience and expertise at international level. In addition to relatively high numbers of incoming and outgoing teachers and researchers, it is specifically these factors which provide ample scope for MRU to profit from internationalization in research matters in a systemic, sustainable way. Participation in international research projects and in international research consortia or international research groups and successful competition in recent European research framework programmes indicate that MRU has established itself as a research institution at international level.
57. While the team noted the strong involvement of external stakeholders in design, development and implementation of study programmes, MRU does not demonstrate the same level of engagement in regards to research input. **The team recommends that MRU expand the relationship to social partners to incorporate research activities, alongside educational and third mission activities.** Connections already established could become more supportive of research at MRU. The Research Café is a positive step in this direction;

however, more engagement with stakeholders for research purposes could be achieved also through various scoping/development events.

58. For international co-operation in research it is important that MRU acknowledge its position in international standing. SER only provides a national comparison. **The team recommends that MRU consider carrying out a benchmarking exercise or research assessment exercise which would give an understanding of the current international status.**

Overall, the team finds that research activities are relevant and support teaching and learning activities, as well as enable MRU to more intensely interact with international institutions through various projects and consortia. MRU proposes to take on interdisciplinary research activities to support its diversification and to secure its attractiveness for prospective students. Research results should feed relevantly into the teaching and learning cycle. These also support a wide range of social and market-driven activities, including consultancy for local and governmental authorities. The planning for research activities is currently driven by funding opportunities, especially from EU sources, and MRU proves it has the flexibility to adjust the directions it sets for itself. However, the right balance is yet to be reached between setting long-term research goals and finding short-term funding opportunities.

Research and (or) Art is given a positive evaluation.

VI. IMPACT ON REGIONAL AND NATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

59. MRU implicitly endorses social impact as part of their mission, by fostering educational leadership, entrepreneurial approaches and Lithuanian identity. The strategic plan includes action lines which support third mission activities. The team met with a broad array of stakeholders who confirmed that MRU provides learning opportunities and partnerships with society and the media world, serving also as advisers/councillors to Ministries for legislative purposes. MRU responds to requests made from society by developing programmes to meet market and social needs and by contributing expertise and knowledge to the wider community, e.g. through teaching and research, but also through counselling ministries, other government or regional bodies, social partners, and businesses. Also MRU staff is often consulted by the media on a broad span of socio-political and economic or legal matters.

60. New programme design draws on expertise from external stakeholders. External stakeholders are involved in development, implementation, and monitoring of programmes. There is an internship scheme for all study programmes which has been confirmed to work well. Apart from its benefits to students, it serves national or regional development in that students serve with solving current issues which the institution may be facing at the time of the internship, and the internship experience will, from case to case, help to identify relevant topics for bachelor, master, or doctoral theses. However its monitoring needs to be sharpened especially for the purpose of checking its relevance in relation to the study programme learning outcomes (see recommendation above). A monitoring system would also assist the University as more students take up internships.
61. MRU addresses national priorities by encouraging staff to propose research projects which can be funded under national funding lines. A specific reward scheme is in place to recognise the involvement of staff in society. The same applies with regard to European priority areas, as defined in Horizon 2020 and/or the current European framework programme.
62. **The team commends the substantive engagement with external stakeholders at MRU.** This engagement results in actions which are relevant for society, for national and regional development and for an appropriate outreach towards various layers of society, i.e. school pupils and adult learners. The team encourages MRU to proceed along these lines. At the same time the team suggests to explore in more depths whether MRU could do more in supporting start-ups more strongly by offering a “buddy system” through twinning MRU expertise in business, law, finance, process management with those young businesses – in engineering, software development, consultancy, to name a few – which may need consultative support.
63. There are many examples of good practice to demonstrate how society is considered, and MRU understands its mission in relationship to its formative role on society. Such good practice is not only limited to professional activities of university members carried out ex officio, as is the case with legal, economic, political or administrative consultancy rendered to national or regional government, administration and courts, to business or to civil society organizations; it also pertains to appearance in the media and participation in non-governmental organizations. However, many initiatives were not institutionalised and/or formally recorded for the benefit of the larger academic community. This narrows the potential of responding strategically to the larger society and of dissemination of good

practice within the institution. **The team recommends that MRU develop a more holistic approach to the third mission by incorporating LLL, community outreach and systematising knowledge transfer to proactively extend to opportunities available.** This would entail making explicit third mission objectives as integrated in the University mission and developing structures to support public-facing communication around third mission, with transparent and standardised offers also being made available. MRU is yet to achieve a fuller blend between bottom-up demand and a strategic arrangement of governance to incorporate third mission. Formalising structures to engage with stakeholders could also strengthen outreach to society.

Overall, the team finds MRU's contribution and impact on the economic, cultural, social and environmental development effective and relevant. MRU consistently engages with social partners and industry partners as it seeks support from these entities in developing study programmes, research initiatives and life-long learning activities. MRU contributes knowledge and expertise to support local and governmental structures. There are still improvements to be made to lifelong learning arrangements and research collaborations with various sectors.

Impact on Regional and National Development is given a positive evaluation.

VII. GOOD PRACTICE AND ENHANCEMENT RECOMMENDATIONS

Features of good practice at MRU

The team commends MRU for the following features of good practice identified during the review process:

- the dedication to support society at large, through its declared mission
- the professionalism and effectiveness of the Rector's team, especially as regards competence, clarity of analysis, determination and forward-looking approach
- the way it has developed the organisational culture to embrace change, to build on an environment of flexibility and openness for collegiate discussions and consultations, including students and stakeholders.
- the arrangements in place to accommodate students with disabilities, including deaf and hard-of-hearing students
- the way it engages with students and stakeholders, who are present in decision-making structures at programme level up to the Rectorate
- its student-centred approach with contact hours being organised in small student groups

- the direction it has set for itself regarding interdisciplinarity, and, more particularly, regarding research
- its forward-looking approach to internationalisation and the vision it has regarding its potential positioning on the international education scene
- development of the procedure for recognition of prior learning to support LLL
- recognition/reward system for researchers and teaching staff
- support given to researchers to enable them to draft proposals for research bids which comply with requirements of EU-funding
- the substantive engagement with external stakeholders at MRU

Recommendations for improvement for MRU

The team recommends MRU to:

- revisit its action lines as derived from the strategic plan and the SWOT analysis and devise ways in which these may be effectively and efficiently operationalised
- strive to mitigate the institutional risks which arises from decentralisation to ensure better oversight as a systemic approach
- balance its practices to seek opportunities as they arise with a more pro-active, strategy-based approach to identifying its key activities as they should be envisaged in a mid- to long-term perspective.
- translate institutional strategies into staff and infrastructure resourcing through coherent medium/long-term planning, rather than allow for short-term external funding opportunities to impact too strongly on the global direction of the institution.
- take a strategic approach in establishing flagship areas (for education, research and third mission) and integrate them within strategic action lines and sustain their development with appropriate budgeting and resourcing plans.
- better integrate quality assurance mechanisms into a coherent quality assurance and quality enhancement concept to support educational and research aims, in general, but also more specifically to support the internationalisation agenda of MRU
- consider the development of a more proactive, more systematic and more comprehensive system of teaching quality formation, which should be sustainable over time.
- consider instituting representational roles in the various decision-making structures for part-time, distance-learning students to enable their voice to be captured formally and their requests to be actioned appropriately.

- adopt a more strategic approach to developing and managing study programmes, and one which can also better align with research aims
- sharpen the planning and monitoring of internships and to pay special attention to the role internships are given to comply/align with the learning outcomes of the study programme, and to form an integral part of the study concept
- reconsider completeness of its choice and focus of learning outcomes, both in view of its own declared mission and the set of educational objectives usually highlighted by the Council of Europe and in the Bologna Communiqués (London Communiqué 2007).
- ensure that each assessment, particularly in the case of oral assessment, be conducted by a panel to ensure fairness, consistency, transparency and evidence-base of results
- provide feedback from assessments in a more systematic and detailed manner, especially for written summative assessments.
- publish the procedures for quality assurance in relation to study programmes and raise awareness for staff and students in what regards their relevance
- analyse student surveys in-depth and discuss the results at all levels of the quality assurance structure enabling a more strategic impact with appropriate consideration of consequences; close the feedback loop coherently and sustainably
- focus more on the qualitative analysis of such data (without disregarding the quantitative component) and make use of the results to inform the development of study programmes and research directions
- accompany student tracking by qualitative investigation carried out systematically among graduates as well as employers
- strengthen support mechanisms for internationalisation (both for students and staff), especially in view of the growth agenda MRU proposes on this front, and to ensure formal arrangements are in place for the representation of international students
- obtain more clarity in relation to the concept of LLL and increase consistency in applying this concept
- consolidate LLL activities into an approach that could be centrally steered, monitored and marketed, but which would maintain features of decentralisation for development and implementation of such activities
- ensure that the student experience is accommodated to the profile of the students and that it demonstrates sufficient flexibility in responding to LLL students' needs catered to the specific challenges that these students face

- take a more focussed approach to research and one that becomes fully aligned with institutional strategic aims, strengthening the institutional research capacities
- consider critically whether entering into new areas may overstretch capacities and may blur the strong research identity which it currently exhibits for established fields
- expand the relationship to social partners to incorporate research activities, alongside educational and third mission activities
- consider carrying out a benchmarking exercise or research assessment exercise which would give an understanding of the current international status
- develop a more holistic approach to the third mission by incorporating LLL, community outreach and systematising knowledge transfer to proactively extend to opportunities available

Recommendations for authorities

Having conducted the review at MRU and observed some national areas for improvement, the team recommends Lithuanian authorities to:

- consider the possibility of allowing higher education institutions to design and offer degree programmes by combining more than one discipline specialisation
- stimulate discussion about the role, importance and different dimensions of third mission, with a view to understanding third mission as a holistic concept which embraces LLL and regional development.

VIII. JUDGEMENT

Mykolas Romeris University is given a positive evaluation.

Grupės vadovas:	Prof. dr. Jürgen Kohler
Team leader:	
Grupės nariai:	Prof. dr. Julio Pedrosa de Jesus
Team members:	Prof. dr. Kari-Jouko Rähä
	Dr. Attila Pausits
	Dr. Aleksandras Abišala
	Mikus Dubickis
Vertinimo sekretorius:	Dr. Anca Greere
Review secretary:	

ANNEX. MYKOLAS ROMERIS UNIVERSITY RESPONSE TO REVIEW REPORT



MYKOLO ROMERIO UNIVERSITETAS MYKOLAS ROMERIS UNIVERSITY

Ateities st. 20 LT-08303 Vilnius Lithuania
Telephone +370 5 271 4625 Fax. +370 5 267 6000 E-mail roffice@mruni.eu www.mruni.eu

Centre for Quality Assessment in Higher
Education
Goštauto g. 12
LT-01108, Vilnius

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RESPONSE TO THE INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW REPORT

The academic community of Mykolas Romeris University extends its sincere gratitude to the International Expert Team and to the Centre for Quality Assessment in Higher Education for the complex and responsible work, valuable recommendations and wise advice that will help us to improve the Mykolas Romeris University's activities, apply the best international practice and to better connect the strategic Mykolas Romeris University's goals with the internationally recognized mission of higher education.

Rector

Prof. Dr. Alvydas Pumputis

Dr. Inga Juknytė-Petreikienė, tel. (8 5) 2714 719, el. p. ingajp@mruni.eu