



CENTRE FOR QUALITY ASSESSMENT IN HIGHER EDUCATION

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**EVALUATION REPORT**

**STUDY FIELD of LAW**

at Vytautas Magnus University

**Expert panel:**

1. Prof. dr. Achim Albrecht (panel chairperson), *academic*;
2. Prof. dr. Petra Foubert, *academic*;
3. Dr. Konstantinos Dimarellis, *academic*;
4. Ms Kristina Cipkuvienė, *representative of social partners*.

**Evaluation coordinator – Ms Miglė Palujanskaitė**

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## Study Field Data

Title of the study programme	<b><i>Law and Finance</i></b>	<b><i>Law</i></b>	<b><i>Criminal and Business Law</i></b>	<b><i>International Business and Technology Law</i></b>
State code	6121KX001	6011KX003	6211KX020	6211KX004
Type of studies	University studies	University studies	University studies	University studies
Cycle of studies	First cycle	Integrated studies	Second cycle	Second cycle
Mode of study and duration (in years)	Full-time, 4 years	Full-time, 5 years	Full-time, 1,5 years	Full-time, 1,5 years
Credit volume	240	300	90	90
Qualification degree and (or) professional qualification	Bachelor of Law	Master of Law	Master of Law	Master of Law
Language of instruction	Lithuanian	Lithuanian	Lithuanian	English
Minimum education required	Secondary education	Secondary education	Bachelor's degree	Bachelor's degree
Registration date of the study programme	2014-04-15	2004-10-13	2017-05-08	2013-08-26

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## I. INTRODUCTION

### 1.1. BACKGROUND OF THE EVALUATION PROCESS

The evaluations of study fields in Lithuanian Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) are based on the Procedure for the External Evaluation and Accreditation of Studies, Evaluation Areas and Indicators, approved by the Minister of Education, Science and Sport on 17 July 2019, Order No. V-835, and are carried out according to the procedure outlined in the Methodology of External Evaluation of Study Fields approved by the Director of the Centre for Quality Assessment in Higher Education (hereafter – SKVC) on 31 December 2019, Order [No. V-149](#).

The evaluation is intended to help higher education institutions to constantly improve their study process and to inform the public about the quality of studies.

The evaluation process consists of the main following stages: 1) *self-evaluation and self-evaluation report (SER) prepared by HEI*; 2) *site visit of the expert panel to the HEI*; 3) *production of the external evaluation report (EER) by the expert panel and its publication*; 4) *follow-up activities*.

On the basis of this external evaluation report of the study field SKVC takes a decision to accredit study field either for 7 years or for 3 years. If the field evaluation is negative then the study field is not accredited.

The study field and cycle are **accredited for 7 years** if all evaluation areas are evaluated as exceptional (5 points), very good (4 points) or good (3 points).

The study field and cycle are **accredited for 3 years** if one of the evaluation areas is evaluated as satisfactory (2 points).

The study field and cycle are **not accredited** if at least one of evaluation areas is evaluated as unsatisfactory (1 point).

### 1.2. EXPERT PANEL

The expert panel was assigned according to the Experts Selection Procedure as approved by the Director of SKVC on 31 December 2019, [Order No. V-149](#). The site visit to the HEI was conducted by the expert panel on *18th October, 2023*.

**Prof. dr. Achim Albrecht (panel chairperson)**, *Professor of European and International Business Law, University of Westphalia, Germany;*

**Prof. dr. Petra Foubert**, *Dean, Faculty of Law, Hasselt University, Belgium;*

**Dr. Konstantinos Dimarellis**, *Assistant Professor, Department of Law, Nicosia University School of Law, Cyprus;*

**Ms Kristina Cipkuvienė**, *Managing Associate at UAB “Teisės riba”, Lithuania.*

### 1.3. GENERAL INFORMATION

The documentation submitted by the HEI follows the outline recommended by SKVC. Along with the SER and annexes, the following additional documents have been provided by the HEI before, during and/or after the site visit:

No.	Name of the document
1.	Strategic Plan of the Faculty of Law of Vytautas Magnus University for 2021 - 2027

### 1.4. BACKGROUND OF LAW FIELD STUDIES AT VYTAUTAS MAGNUS UNIVERSITY

Vytautas Magnus University was established in 1922 and re-established in 1989. The University provides degree studies of all three cycles – bachelor, master and PhD studies. It has a total of 8.218 students, amongst them 1.835 foreign students, 54 first cycle study programmes, 71 second cycle study programmes and 24 third cycle study programmes.

VMU works with many Universities and scholars worldwide, implementing projects, promoting student and staff mobilities and constantly improving the study and research system. VMU is international and multilingual oriented, joining international networks and participates in international scientific, academic and social projects. Together with numerous partners, VMU is part of the T4EU initiative, endeavouring to jointly create a common European Higher Education area.

VMU offers four interdisciplinary law study programmes: the first cycle study programme Law and Finance, the second cycle study programme Business and Technology Law, and the second cycle study Programme Criminal and Business Law. VMU also offers the integrated study Programme Law.

The programme ‘Law and Finance, BA’ had its last external evaluation on 5.7.2017. The integrated study programme ‘Law (MA degree)’ was last externally evaluated 17.7.2014. ‘International Business and Technology Law (MA)’ had its last external evaluation on 30.9.2016. ‘Criminal and Business Law (MA)’ was yet not externally evaluated.

## II. GENERAL ASSESSMENT

The *first cycle* of the *Law* study field at Vytautas Magnus University is given a **positive** evaluation.

*Study field and cycle assessment in points by evaluation areas*

No.	Evaluation Area	Evaluation of an Area in points*
1.	Intended and achieved learning outcomes and curriculum	4
2.	Links between science (art) and studies	4
3.	Student admission and support	4
4.	Teaching and learning, student performance and graduate employment	4
5.	Teaching staff	4
6.	Learning facilities and resources	4
7.	Study quality management and public information	4
	<b>Total:</b>	28

\*1 (unsatisfactory) - the area does not meet the minimum requirements, there are fundamental shortcomings that prevent the implementation of the field studies.

2 (satisfactory) - the area meets the minimum requirements, and there are fundamental shortcomings that need to be eliminated.

3 (good) - the area is being developed systematically, without any fundamental shortcomings.

4 (very good) - the area is evaluated very well in the national context and internationally, without any shortcomings;

5 (excellent) - the area is evaluated exceptionally well in the national context and internationally.

The *integrated studies* of the Law study field at Vytautas Magnus University is given a **positive** evaluation.

*Study field and cycle assessment in points by evaluation areas*

<b>No.</b>	<b>Evaluation Area</b>	<b>Evaluation of an Area in points*</b>
1.	Intended and achieved learning outcomes and curriculum	4
2.	Links between science (art) and studies	4
3.	Student admission and support	4
4.	Teaching and learning, student performance and graduate employment	4
5.	Teaching staff	4
6.	Learning facilities and resources	4
7.	Study quality management and public information	4
	<b>Total:</b>	28

\*1 (unsatisfactory) - the area does not meet the minimum requirements, there are fundamental shortcomings that prevent the implementation of the field studies.

2 (satisfactory) - the area meets the minimum requirements, and there are fundamental shortcomings that need to be eliminated.

3 (good) - the area is being developed systematically, without any fundamental shortcomings.

4 (very good) - the area is evaluated very well in the national context and internationally, without any shortcomings;

5 (excellent) - the area is evaluated exceptionally well in the national context and internationally.

The *second cycle* of the *Law* study field at Vytautas Magnus University is given a **positive** evaluation.

*Study field and cycle assessment in points by evaluation areas*

<b>No.</b>	<b>Evaluation Area</b>	<b>Evaluation of an Area in points*</b>
1.	Intended and achieved learning outcomes and curriculum	4
2.	Links between science (art) and studies	4
3.	Student admission and support	4
4.	Teaching and learning, student performance and graduate employment	4
5.	Teaching staff	4
6.	Learning facilities and resources	4
7.	Study quality management and public information	4
	<b>Total:</b>	28

\*1 (unsatisfactory) - the area does not meet the minimum requirements, there are fundamental shortcomings that prevent the implementation of the field studies.

2 (satisfactory) - the area meets the minimum requirements, and there are fundamental shortcomings that need to be eliminated.

3 (good) - the area is being developed systematically, without any fundamental shortcomings.

4 (very good) - the area is evaluated very well in the national context and internationally, without any shortcomings;

5 (excellent) - the area is evaluated exceptionally well in the national context and internationally.

### III. STUDY FIELD ANALYSIS

#### 3.1. INTENDED AND ACHIEVED LEARNING OUTCOMES AND CURRICULUM

*Study aims, outcomes and content shall be assessed in accordance with the following indicators:*

*3.1.1. Evaluation of the conformity of the aims and outcomes of the field and cycle study programmes to the needs of the society and/or the labour market (not applicable to HEIs operating in exile conditions)*

*Factual situation*

The main aims of the four law study programmes at VMU are listed in the SER (table at p. 10-11).

Those aims reportedly match the needs of the Lithuanian society as described in a number of strategic documents, including: the Lithuania Progress Strategy 2023, which focuses on a smart society, economy, and governance, and aims to create a Lithuanian society that is open to global change, whose members are educated, interested in science and innovation, can easily understand and use new technologies, speak foreign languages, and foster lifelong learning principles; the Programme of the 18<sup>th</sup> Government, which focuses on multiculturalism and respect for human rights, technological progress and, at the same time, resilience to information and technological threats, openness and efficiency of the judiciary, quality state legal aid, and a human-centred and technologically advanced (more modern) and accessible public sector.

All law studies at VMU are characterised by a focus on internationalisation, globalisation and knowledge of other languages (including English), the Western legal tradition and human rights, artes liberales (see Annex 1.6 of the SER), interdisciplinarity, innovative teaching and the impact of new technologies on the legal profession.

The assumption is that all four VMU programmes match a demand on the labour market, contrary to what has long been believed in Lithuania, i.e. that too many lawyers were being educated for the needs of the Lithuanian labour market. Lithuania has fewer lawyers per 100,000 inhabitants than the European average for this. The expectation is that, given the pace of Lithuania's economic development, the need for lawyers in Lithuania should only grow. However, representatives of key legal professions report declining numbers of applicants. As a consequence, VMU graduates have good career perspectives, as illustrated in the SER (table 1.2. at p. 12-13). VMU consults with representatives of the legal profession within the framework of formal cooperation agreements (e.g. for internships), yet also via the latter's membership in bodies that develop and manage the study programmes (study programme committees).

*Expert judgement/analysis*

During the several meetings with the stakeholders it has been confirmed that the VMU law programmes are truly geared towards the societal needs that are laid out in the Lithuania

Progress Strategy 2023 and in the Programme of the 18<sup>th</sup> Government. Repeated references were made, by all of the groups spoken with, to the focus on artes liberales, the knowledge of foreign languages, critical legal thinking (not just learning by heart), internationalisation, interdisciplinarity, the Socratic method, etc. The fact that diverse terminology was used by the discussion partners to talk about the above characteristics of the law programmes, as well as the observation that all discussion partners spoke very good English, make the expert panel believe that the aims of the VMU law study programmes and their societal relevance are shared by the entire VMU community.

The SER (tables 3.4., 3.6., 3.8. and 3.10., at p. 59-62) shows that the number of students in the four law programmes is quite modest, with a particular highlight for the relatively low numbers in the second cycle specialised master programmes. This is somewhat surprising, given the assumption that the need for lawyers will only grow. The SER shows, however, that VMU programme management is well aware of this challenge and has started looking for an explanation (SER p. 63). The expert panel recommends to keep monitoring this paradox of reported high demand for lawyers on the one hand and low intake of students on the other. It is encouraging to see in the SER (table 4.1. p. 83) that graduates of the integrated law programme seem to find their way to highly-skilled jobs within 12 months after graduation, assuming that those who report being non-employed are indeed professionally active as self-employed legal specialists. This shows, as stressed in the SER and during the meetings with stakeholders, that there is a need in the labour market for such profiles. Attention should be paid, however, to the fact that there is no info available regarding the graduates of the second cycle programmes and that 33% of the first cycle graduates are employed in low-skilled jobs. With respect to the latter, more detailed info might be relevant, as these graduates might combine second cycle studies with a low-skilled job.

### *3.1.2. Evaluation of the conformity of the field and cycle study programme aims and outcomes with the mission, objectives of activities and strategy of the HEI*

#### *Factual situation*

On its website (<https://www.vdu.lt/en/about-vmu/about/mission-and-vision/>), VMU presents its mission and vision as follows: VMU is oriented towards humanist culture. Broadly themed subjects ensure that the studies offered are not narrow or restricted to specialty subjects. The university strives to remain the hotbed for intellectual sophistication and civil consciousness, rigidly adhere to its set of values and actively participate in the life of universities around the world.

VMU's Strategy for 2021-2027 (SER p. 15) sets 5 groups of objectives: 1. Community in harmony and consolidation; 2. International research University; 3. "Studies 360"; 4. Integrity of self-governance and responsibility; 5. University impact on societal development.

The objectives of groups 3 and 5 are reportedly those that are most relevant to the law study programmes' aims and learning outcomes.

The key objective of Group 3 is allegedly to “increase the innovativeness, flexibility, and accessibility of studies addressing the needs of today’s society and building the society of the future”, which is linked to such strategic tasks as “to strengthen the application of the principles of Artes Liberales in the study process by restructuring the study programmes into interdisciplinary and flexible ones, enabling the student to choose the most appropriate path of study, developing study programmes leading to the degree of Artes Liberales”; “develop online and open studies by increasing the range of modern online studies and improving the environment for online studies applying the latest smart technologies”; “increase the internationality of studies by implementing interdisciplinary international studies, increasing the number of foreign students and international mobility of students and teaching staff”; “establish a framework for the recognition of previous learning experiences and competences”.

The SER highlights (p. 15) that all the law programmes are inscribed in the tradition of the artes liberales, which is illustrated in particular by the high degree of individualisation of studies that is offered (see also below, under 1.6.), the possibility to have previously acquired competences recognised (see also below, under 3.2.) and the programmes’ interdisciplinarity (see also below, under 1.4.) and internationalisation (see also below, under 1.6.).

The objectives assigned to group 5 “University impact of societal development” include: “to establish the identity of the University” and “to maintain and strengthen the reputation of the University, foster public confidence in the University”. These objectives are aligned with such strategic tasks as “to form a learning society of the future, make technological and social progress by using good Lithuanian and international practices”; “to develop the reputation of the University as an independent, impartial, critical knowledge and expert institution”; and “to consolidate the image of the University with a comprehensive, global and liberal approach to education”.

The SER highlights (p. 15-16) that all the law programmes focus on the development of special, social and personal competences and that the learning outcomes of each of the four law study programmes correlate with the above-mentioned objectives and tasks of VMU, as also illustrated in Annex 1.2.

#### *Expert judgement/analysis*

The aims and learning outcomes of the four law study programmes under consideration clearly comply with VMU’s artes liberales study model. In the SER it is carefully explained (p. 36) why the amount of credits for general subjects/artes liberales courses has not been reduced, as suggested by the previous external review panel. As already highlighted above, under 1.1., the expert panel could experience first-hand during the meetings with the different stakeholders that artes liberales, internationalisation, interdisciplinarity, critical thinking, interest in technological progress and foreign languages are no mere buzz words at VMU law. It is a unique selling point of the programmes at VMU.

#### *3.1.3. Evaluation of the compliance of the field and cycle study programme with legal requirements*

### *Factual situation*

VMU offers four different law study programmes: the Integrated Law programme, the Bachelor programme Law and Finance, the International Business and Technology Law Master and the Criminal and Business Law Master.

All these law programmes are in line with the Law on Higher Education and Research (30 April 2009) and their scope in ECTS is within the ranges required by the Minister's Order of 30 December 2016 (V-1168), arts. 9 and 21, and of 13 October 2020 (V-1557), Arts. 7 and 8, as represented in the tables further below. At VMU 1 ECTS corresponds to 26,67 hours of student work (SER p. 21).

All courses that are required by the Constitutional Court of the Republic of Lithuania (case no. 19/5) in order to obtain a full-fledged higher university legal education are taught in the study programmes in the field of law at VMU: Legal Theory, Legal History, Constitutional Law, Administrative and Administrative Procedure Law, Financial Law, Criminal and Criminal Procedure Law, Civil and Civil Procedure Law, Labour Law, International Public Law, European Union Law. Also the courses that are required for persons who wish to become a judge are offered by the VMU programmes in law: Administrative Law and Administrative Procedure Law (at least 9 ECTS), Criminal Law (at least 15 ECTS), Criminal Procedure Law (at least 9 ECTS), Civil Law (at least 15 ECTS), Civil Procedure Law (at least 9 ECTS), Labour Law (at least 6 ECTS), Constitutional Law (at least 6 ECTS), Legal Theory (at least 6 ECTS), International Public Law (at least 4.5 ECTS), European Union law (at least 4.5 ECTS).

The first study cycle programme Law and Finance at VMU is a full-time programme of 240 credits. It has existed since 2014 and leads up to an (academic) bachelor's degree in law.

**Table No. 1** Study programme's *Law and finance* compliance to general requirements for *first cycle study programmes of University level (bachelor)*

<b>Criteria</b>	<b>General legal requirements</b>	<b>In the Programmes</b>
Scope of the programme in ECTS	180, 210 or 240 ECTS	240 ECTS
ECTS for the study field	No less than 120 ECTS	164 ECTS
ECTS for studies specified by College or optional studies	No more than 120 ECTS	60 ECTS (Finance subjects) 16 ECTS (artes liberales)
ECTS for internship	No less than 30 ECTS	15 ECTS
ECTS for final thesis (project)	No less than 9 ECTS	15 ECTS
Practical training and other practice placements	No less than one third of the programme	33,6%
Contact hours	No less than 20 % of learning	No info available

Individual learning/independent work	No less than 30 % of learning	66,4%
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The second study cycle programmes of Criminal and Business Law and International Business and Technology Law at VMU are both full-time programmes of 90 credits. The former has existed since 2013, the latter since 2017. They both lead up to a master's degree in law.

**Table No. 2** Study programme's *Criminal and Business Law* compliance to general requirements for *second cycle study programmes of University level (master)*

Criteria	General legal requirements	In the Programmes
Scope of the programme in ECTS	180, 210 or 240 ECTS	90 ECTS
ECTS for the study field	No less than 120 ECTS	90 ECTS
ECTS for studies specified by College or optional studies	No more than 120 ECTS	0 ECTS
ECTS for internship	No less than 30 ECTS	0 ECTS
ECTS for final thesis (project)	No less than 9 ECTS	30 ECTS
Practical training and other practice placements	No less than one third of the programme	25,5%
Contact hours	No less than 20 % of learning	No info available
Individual learning/independent work	No less than 30 % of learning	74,5%

**Table No. 3** Study programme's *International Business and Technology Law* compliance to general requirements for *second cycle study programmes of University level (master)*

Criteria	General legal requirements	In the Programmes
Scope of the programme in ECTS	180, 210 or 240 ECTS	90 ECTS
ECTS for the study field	No less than 120 ECTS	90 ECTS
ECTS for studies specified by College or optional studies	No more than 120 ECTS	0 ECTS
ECTS for internship	No less than 30 ECTS	0 ECTS
ECTS for final thesis (project)	No less than 9 ECTS	30 ECTS
Practical training and other practice placements	No less than one third of the programme	25,5%
Contact hours	No less than 20 % of learning	No info available

Individual learning/independent work	No less than 30 % of learning	74,5%
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The Integrated study programme in Law at VMU is a full-time programme of 300 credits. It has existed since 2004 and leads up to a master's degree in law.

**Table No. 4** Study programme's *Law* compliance to general requirements for *integrated studies programmes of University level (master)*

Criteria	General legal requirements	In the Programmes
Scope of the programme in ECTS	180, 210 or 240 ECTS	300 ECTS
ECTS for the study field	No less than 120 ECTS	240 ECTS
ECTS for studies specified by College or optional studies	No more than 120 ECTS	60/56 ECTS (depending on competence development area) 56 ECTS (artes liberales)
ECTS for internship	No less than 30 ECTS	16 ECTS
ECTS for final thesis (project)	No less than 9 ECTS	30 ECTS
Practical training and other practice placements	No less than one third of the programme	210 ECTS
Contact hours	No less than 20 % of learning	37,3%/ 23,3%
Individual learning/independent work	No less than 30 % of learning	No info available

#### *Expert judgement/indicator analysis*

The four law programmes at VMU are compliant with the relevant Lithuanian legal requirements for first cycle, second cycle and integrated programmes in law at university level. The SER and its annexes provide excellent tables that allowed cross-checking. It is clear that VMU has taken into consideration the advice of the previous external evaluation (SER p. 34) of its law programmes.

In accordance with VMU's focus on artes liberales (see the VMU Study Regulations, available in English at <https://www.vdu.lt/lt/20600-85/>) both the Integrated programme and the first cycle programme in Law and Finance heavily invest in general subjects during the first semesters. In the Integrated programme these subjects amount to 56 ECTS. In the Law and Finance programme the general subjects comprise only 16 ECTS, yet the 60 ECTS finance subjects are also counted towards the general subjects quota. This implies that between 20 and

30% of the first phase of VMU's law programmes is focused on artes liberales which has been highlighted as a plus by all the stakeholders the expert panel could speak with.

As far as the specialised master's programmes (second cycle) are concerned, Criminal and Business Law subjects and International Business and Technology Law subjects make up 100% of the curriculum.

In the Integrated programme 60 ECTS are reserved (in the second phase) for field courses (specialisations) in the competence development areas of Law and Business, Modern Criminal Law and Pre-Trial Process in Criminal Justice. In the competence development area of Law and Technology field courses make out 56 ECTS of the programme.

### *3.1.4. Evaluation of compatibility of aims, learning outcomes, teaching/learning and assessment methods of the field and cycle study programmes*

#### *Factual situation*

Annex 1.2. (SER) shows the alignment of the learning outcomes of the four VMU law programmes with the learning outcomes of the different study cycles, as laid down, in general terms, in the Minister's Order of 16 November 2016 (V-1012), and as translated to the field of law by the Minister's Order of 13 October 2020 (V-1557) (descriptor of the law study field). The programmes' learning outcomes involve, as legally required, (1) knowledge and its application, (2) research skills, (3) special abilities, (4) social abilities and (5) personal abilities.

Building on the above, Annex 1.3. (SER) shows how those learning outcomes are linked with the courses of the different programmes. There are no further details in Annex 1.3. as to how the different learning outcomes are reached by the different courses. This is reportedly set out in the course descriptions (on Moodle). The SER provides a good example (SER p. 22-23, Table 1.10.).

Study Programme Committees and faculty administration are reportedly in a constant dialectic relationship with students, representatives of the profession and the social partners, in order to make sure that the totality of the study courses in each programme (the aims/learning outcomes of the study courses) realises the full range of the aims and learning outcomes of the programme (SER p. 22).

Teaching/learning methods to reach the learning objectives of the four programmes are very diverse (SER p. 24-25). Article 12 of VMU's Study Regulations (available online at <https://www.vdu.lt/lt/20600-85/>) refers to lectures, seminars, laboratory work, practical work, consultations and practices (internships). Course descriptions (on Moodle) carefully mention the methods that are used (see example SER p. 22-23). Special reference is made in the SER to the Socratic method, which, together with the artes liberales approach, is a unique selling point of the law programmes at VMU. As the Socratic method is not very appropriate for large groups, the seminar format has recently been introduced in a number of courses.

As far as assessment methods are concerned, the approach remains quite traditional, with a focus on testing (SER p. 25). However, assessment methods have started to diversify, with, e.g.,

written homework assignments, debates, simulations of disputes, public speeches, which may also count towards the students' final grade for the relevant course. This is also illustrated by the example given in Table 1.10 of the SER.

#### *Expert judgement/analysis*

The learning outcomes of the four law study programmes (Annex 1.2.) are not a mere copy of the learning outcomes of the descriptor of the law study field, yet represent an interpretation/translation by the Study Programme Committee. This is the result of a very thorough and impressive exercise. A few samples have convinced the expert panel that all of the learning outcomes of the descriptor of the law study field have found their translation in Annex 1.2. It is recommended, however, to also make visible in a table that all legally required learning outcomes, for all of the four programmes, are covered by the relevant programme outcomes. This is an exercise that can help guarantee the efforts' sustainability in the years to come, when there will inevitably be replacements in the Study Programme Committees.

With regard to teaching/learning methods the expert panel noticed that the Socratic method is a characteristic of which all stakeholders are strongly aware. It is good that the Study Programme Committees know the limits of the method and look for alternative methods that may work better for larger groups.

With regard to assessment methods the expert panel has noticed an awareness of the need to further diversify assessment methods, so as to comply better with the intention to move away from traditional testing. This critical self-analysis is to be applauded.

#### *3.1.5. Evaluation of the totality of the field and cycle study programme subjects/modules, which ensures consistent development of competences of students*

##### *Factual situation*

VMU offers both the Integrated study programme in Law and the first and second cycle study programmes in Law. Whilst there is a certain connection between the two models/ways of lawyer training, they reportedly still are sufficiently separate and unique. The SER clearly describes both of the models (p. 26-27). Both trajectories lead to a fully-fledged lawyer who can work in the typical legal functions (attorney, judge, etc.). The main differences between both trajectories are (1) that the Integrated programme targets students who know from the start that they want to work as a lawyer, whilst the dual trajectory caters for students who want to keep multiple options; (2) that the Integrated programme is focused on law (notwithstanding the obvious artes liberales touch), whilst the dual trajectory has a more pronounced interdisciplinary approach.

Both trajectories are built up in a coherent way, so as to ensure consistent development of knowledge and competences, and feature the following characteristics:

-Given the artes liberales signature of the programmes, the first semesters of the Integrated and first cycle study programmes are characterised by several courses that focus on other

disciplines (in addition to courses that convey the basics of the legal studies). This is clearly illustrated in Annex 1.4.

-Each course lists the 'prerequisites' for entering the course.

-Although VMU does not apply a modular system of studies, de facto certain study courses (in their totality) can be considered modules.

-There is a consistent increase in complexity of expected learning outcomes of the field study programmes and courses. In this respect, reference can be made to Annex 1.3.

-Courses of the second phase are competence-deepening rather than competence-broadening.

-In all law programmes studying foreign languages is key. Special attention is given to English (aim of C1 for all students by the end of the second year). Students of the Integrated programme have a summer semester at the end of fourth year, with courses taught in English by professors from abroad.

-Development of writing skills through different courses in all of the law programmes

Also, the Socratic method (see above) is clearly linked to the development of social and personal abilities (SER p. 24).

### *Expert judgement/analysis*

The SER and the meetings with the different stakeholders have shown that the curricula are the result of careful thinking and consideration. Also, consistent development of knowledge and competences according to the characteristics mentioned above appeared not to be a mere 'story'. Stakeholders confirmed the relevance of the Socratic method in this respect. Additionally, by adding – carefully spread out over the several curricula – the compulsory courses on Legal Argumentation, Public Speaking, Preparation of a Research Paper in Law and Research Project, the Study Programme Committee has increased the number of methodological courses as per recommendation of the previous external evaluation panel. The expert panel is, however, not entirely convinced that the specialisations of the second cycle master programmes are sufficiently distinct from the competence development areas of the Integrated law programme.

Whilst Annex 1.3 is a very interesting and rich document, which also contains information on the competences that different courses work on, it does not fully illustrate the increasing intensity of competence development. This is a layer that still could be added to the otherwise excellent tables and annexes of the SER. It would offer management an even better view on the skills development that individual teachers are involved in.

The positioning of the internship, which is allegedly a first phase course, at the end of the Integrated programme is defensible, as it has a logical substantive connection with the chosen competence development area. 16 ECTS for the internship is very close to the legal minimum of 15 ECTS and is, as a consequence, sufficient (cfr. suggestion of previous external review panel, SER p. 36).

### *3.1.6. Evaluation of opportunities for students to personalise the structure of field study programmes according to their personal learning objectives and intended learning outcomes*

### *Factual situation*

There are a number of ways in which VMU law students can personalise, from the very start of their studies, their individual study programme (SER p. 30-32), including the following:

- students can choose between the Integrated programme and the programme in two cycles (see also above, under 1.5.);
- the interdisciplinary artes liberales approach (see above) allows students to select a number of elective courses (including languages) in the first phase of their studies;
- the Integrated programme offers four competence development areas to choose from in the second phase (see also above, under 1.3.);
- the second cycle programmes offer two specialisations (see also above);
- the Integrated programme has a summer semester at the end of the fourth year with a number of elective courses in English taught by guest professors, which also serve as electives for the second cycle programmes;
- the Erasmus + programme offers many opportunities to study abroad;
- students can choose their own internship place, which is given priority if it meets all requirements;
- students choose both the title and the supervisor of their final thesis.

### *Expert judgement/analysis*

Based on the above, the conclusion must be that the four law programmes at VMU can be filled in according to the students' own choice as follows:

Integrated programme:

- 102 or 106 ECTS (depending on competence development area) out of 300 ECTS: related to competence development area, internship and final thesis
- 56 ECTS for artes liberales

So, a total of 158 to 162 ECTS out of 300 ECTS are at the discretion of the students, within certain boundaries. That amounts to more than 50% of the entire curriculum.

First cycle programme on Law and Finance:

- 60 ECTS for Finance subjects
- 16 ECTS for artes liberales
- 15 ECTS for the internship
- 15 ECTS for the final thesis

As a consequence, a total of 106 ECTS out of 240 ECTS mirror the choice of the students, within certain boundaries. That amounts around 45% of the entire curriculum.

Second cycle programmes on Criminal and Business Law and on International Business and Technology Law:

-60 ECTS for Business and Technology subjects: 52 ECTS compulsory courses and 8 ECTS elective courses

-30 ECTS for the final thesis

As a consequence, a total of 38 ECTS out of 90 ECTS mirror the choice of the students, taken into account the fact that the second cycle programmes are specialised programmes, catering for students with a particular interest in criminal and business law and international business and technology law.

The expert panel concludes that the respective Study Programme Committees have made serious efforts to take into account the suggestion made by the previous external review panel (SER p. 34-39). Students have good opportunities to personalise their study plans, albeit within certain boundaries, which are – in the panel’s opinion – well-balanced and justifiable. The focus on artes liberales is an element that limits to a certain extent the students’ choice, yet the expert panel understood from the SER (+ Annexes) as well as from the meetings with the stakeholders that this focus is the reason why students want to come to VMU and why employers highly value VMU’s graduates.

Additionally; students have good opportunities to study abroad (a lot of info is available on the VMU website, <https://www.vdu.lt/en/international-cooperation/for-students/vmu-bilateral-exchange-studies/>) and the law programmes have been arranged in such a way that there exist de facto mobility windows (see SER p. 32, and the suggestion by the previous external evaluation panel). Programme management is aware of the challenges in this respect (SER p. 38). It is to be highlighted that the summer semester in the Integrated programme is an excellent example of internationalisation at home. It is to be expected that VMU’s membership in the European University ‘Transform4-Europe’ will create additional opportunities.

### *3.1.7. Evaluation of compliance of final theses with the field and cycle requirements*

#### *Factual situation*

At VMU, the aim is not only to meet all the formal requirements for final theses stipulated in legal acts (see also above, under 1.3., and its different tables) but also to ensure the compliance of final theses with the specificity of the field and each study cycle, as well as the highest possible quality of these works.

In both the Integrated and second cycle programmes, the final thesis comprises 30 ECTS. In the first cycle programme, the thesis comprises 15 ECTS. Learning outcomes are different for first cycle and second cycle/ integrated programme final theses. VMU’s General Order on the Preparation and Defence of the Final Thesis (available online at <https://www.vdu.lt/wp-content/uploads/2020/05/GENERAL-ORDER-ON-THE-PREPARATION-AND-DEFENCE-OF-THE-FINAL-THESES.pdf>) lists the requirements for final theses.

Several courses have been introduced in the relevant law programmes in order to make sure that students are prepared for writing their theses (Preparation of a Research Paper in Law;

Research Project). In the first cycle programme on Law and Finance, theses may be of an interdisciplinary nature, yet a part of the thesis should always be devoted to legal analysis.

Thesis evaluation committees are composed as required by law (see SER p. 33). Committees are usually made up of four members (including external members from other universities and legal practice) and organised on the basis of expertise. Annex 1.7. reflects the careful composition of the committees in the period 2019-2022.

As highlighted above, students can choose the topic for the thesis themselves. Annex 1.8. lists the topics, supervisors and grades for the final theses in all four law study programmes in the period from 2020 until 2022. Topics appear to be very diverse and grades vary between 5 and 10.

### *Expert judgement/analysis*

The expert panel has obtained a good view on how the final thesis is organised at VMU. The thesis clearly is the culmination of a competence/ skills development trajectory. In all of the tables that were included in the SER, the thesis takes a prominent place. It is also a way for the students to add an extra personal touch to their studies.

Programme management keeps close contact with all the involved stakeholders. Students highlighted that the course on Preparation of a Research Paper in Law has been introduced at their request. The SER highlights (p. 34) that, in the future, thesis topics will be commissioned by the social partners.

### ***Strengths and weaknesses of this evaluation area:***

#### ***(1) Strengths:***

1. The self-evaluation regarding this area (intended and achieved learning outcomes and curriculum) gives evidence of a level of self-criticism that guarantees constant improvement of the programmes.
2. VMU's unique selling points of artes liberales, the Socratic method and good knowledge of English are shared and valued by the entire VMU community.
3. The Study Programme Committees have an excellent view on the translation of legal requirements into the different law programmes. The tables provided are of a very good quality.
4. The learning outcomes of the descriptor of the law study field have been translated well into the learning outcomes of the four law programmes. This is the result of a very thorough and impressive exercise (Annex 1.2.).
5. The summer semester of the Integrated programme, inserted in line with a suggestion of the previous external review panel, is a very nice example of internationalisation at home.
6. A lot of information on the law study programmes is available online and in English.

## ***(2) Weaknesses:***

Weaknesses mentioned below do not have a significant impact on the evaluation of the area as very good.

1. The Socratic method has its limits when student groups are large.
2. The specialisations of the second cycle master programmes are insufficiently distinct from the competence development areas of the Integrated law programme.
3. Annex 1.3 does not fully illustrate the increasing intensity of competence development in the different law programmes.

## **3.2. LINKS BETWEEN SCIENCE (ART) AND STUDIES**

***Links between science (art) and study activities shall be assessed in accordance with the following indicators:***

*3.2.1. Evaluation of the sufficiency of the science (applied science, art) activities implemented by the HEI for the field of research (art) related to the field of study*

### *Factual situation*

In all these annual assessments, the field of law of VMU was given points per full-time equivalent of researchers in the field of the institution: in 2019 it received 12.09 points, 44.66 points in 2020 (Law studies were leading among Social Sciences at VMU) and 37,5 points in 2021. The evaluation points show that the scientific production of research is improving (SER p. 41)

In the report of the last external comparative assessment of R&D activities in 2018, the field of law was awarded the highest score of 5 for the development potential of VMU's R&D activities, i.e., that the human resources, strategy, organisation and infrastructure of the evaluated unit in the next 5 years will provide the conditions for the evaluated unit's excellent performance, taking into account the current results (SER p. 42).

The quality of the R&D activities was awarded with 3 points, i.e., the highest rating given to law study institutions in Lithuania, indicating a rating of "Good" and that the evaluated unit is strong with limited international recognition. The research carried out is of a high standard and nationally recognised.

The strength of research in the field of Law at VMU is the synergy with other faculties and researchers at both national and international levels.

Researchers of the Unit are conscious of the fundamental shifts that have now taken over society & science with paradigms of netocracy and openness being at the forefront of the change. These tendencies affect both the research topics that they choose and methods/tools that they use to achieve their research results with particular focus to networking dimension. All this is correspondingly reflected in VMU Strategy for 2021–2027, which includes strategic objectives to "strengthen partnerships" (with special focus to internationality) and "take

advantage of the European University Alliance ‘Transform4Europe – T4E’ partnership by bringing the University’s strategic activities into the European dimension. Participation in projects: “T4ERI – Transform 4 European Research and Innovation” (T4ERI) contains work-package “Science4All”; the Erasmus+ Mundus curriculum development project “Introducing Modules on Law and Rights in Programmes of Teacher Training and Educational Sciences,” “Supporting and Implementing Plans for Gender Equality in Academia and Research” (SPEAR) project. All of this enables the teachers in the field of Law to adapt innovations in the courses they teach, to find the most effective ways and methods of presenting information to students and assessing their knowledge, and to integrate them into their studies.

Most of the researchers in law belong to the cluster of *Research on the Impact of Globalisation to Law*, which particularly develops research in the aforementioned relevant fields (*Law and Technologies, Education Law, Energy Law, EU Criminal Law*). A distinctive feature of VMU in the field of development of science and art activities is the activity of science and research clusters, where academic staff active in various scientific fields join their capacities.

Within this cluster, in cooperation with other faculties and foreign researchers, the following main interdisciplinary research areas stand out: **law and technologies, education law, energy law and EU criminal law.**

This field of expertise is one of the most developed in the Unit. It could be considered as a national and regional hub of expertise in this field, with already many conferences on the topic organised, solid publications (books, articles) published, projects accomplished, social initiatives implemented. The expert activities of the faculty's teachers (such as active participation in international academic networks or expert councils, collaboration with other research institutions at national and international level, participation in projects at national and international level, and in science dissemination activities (comments or interviews in the media and public lectures)) prove their high scientific competence and its recognition at the national and regional level, which allows them to convey relevant and up-to-date knowledge in the subjects they teach (SER p.45)

The **Centre for Constitutionalism** was established at the Faculty of Law in 2023.<sup>45</sup> Its mission – promote the core values of modern constitutionalism, such as a pluralistic democracy, human rights and the rule of law. The Centre will undertake and promote innovative legal and interdisciplinary research on all aspects of constitutional law in Lithuania and comparative constitutional law in Europe and worldwide. The activities of the Centre for Constitutionalism will have a direct impact on improving the quality of studies at the Faculty of Law as students would have an opportunity to participate in the research activities, to get the latest research data during lectures and seminars, to analyse actual scientific problems in their Master or Bachelor thesis (SER p. 46, 45).

#### *Expert judgement/analysis*

From SER we can see teachers' participation in scientific activities is dynamic, based on participation in international academic networks or expert councils, cooperation with other scientific institutions at the national and international level, participation in national and

international level projects, science dissemination activities (comments or interviews to the media, public lectures, publications, magazines, textbooks ).

The latest technological solutions are integrated in scientific research and experimentation.

Scientific research and experimental activities in the field of law are relevant and timely and promising. The Faculty of Law conducts research important to society and its well-being. Law professors apply research innovations in the subjects they teach, find the most effective ways and methods of presenting information to students and assessing their knowledge, and integrate the activities of research clusters, the results of which are used into studies. The aspect of internationality (mobility) is ensured in scientific research activities. The university is visited by professors from the USA and Western Europe who contribute to the integration of the latest scientific research into studies. Students are given the opportunity to participate in scientific research activities, to get acquainted with the latest research data during lectures and seminars, to analyse relevant scientific problems in a master's or bachelor's thesis. The Faculty of Law successfully implements the task set for itself – to create conditions for scientists to combine the teaching load and scientific activity. During the meeting, it was possible to get acquainted with the scientific publications and textbooks published by the teachers, which shows the high academic competence of the teachers.

Taking this into account, the level of applied science activity is assessed as sufficient in the field of science related to the field of study.

### *3.2.2. Evaluation of the link between the content of studies and the latest developments in science, art and technology*

#### *Factual situation*

The content of the ongoing study programs reflects the latest developments, achievements and results in the field of legal science research. The study programs pay a lot of attention not only to academic achievements, but also to the application of knowledge in practice, which helps students to later develop a career at the bar, in private practice or in legal work in the public or private sector.

The study programs are constantly changed, supplemented and updated according to market trends and are directly related to the scientific research carried out by the staff.

The latest technological achievements are successfully integrated into the studies conducted in the field of Law, enriching the study programs in technological aspects by introducing new study subjects, adjusting the content of existing subjects, literature, tasks, presentation of study materials and inviting relevant visiting lecturers.

Research groups conducted at the faculty are directly related to study programs.

#### *Expert judgement/analysis*

The scientific researches mentioned in the SER are integrated into the study programs carried out in the direction of Law by correcting, completing, changing the content of the taught

subjects, results, literature and proposing relevant topics for coursework, bachelor's and master's theses, presenting the results of their research at conferences and seminars to which students are also invited.

During the meeting, the experts panel got the impression from the conversation with the lecturers that the lecturers willingly get involved in scientific activities and successfully integrate them into the programs carried out by the Faculty of Law, including students in the activities of scientific research.

Research topics are characterised by timeliness and relevance, the latest scientific and technological achievements are used.

The latest technological achievements are successfully integrated into the studies conducted in the field of Law, enriching the study programs in technological aspects by introducing new study subjects, adjusting the content of existing subjects, literature, tasks, presentation of study materials and inviting relevant visiting lecturers.

The expert panel has obtained a good view on how research activities are integrated into the content of the Law study program.

### *3.2.3. Evaluation of conditions for students to get involved in scientific (applied science, art) activities consistent with their study cycle*

#### *Factual situation*

At the Faculty of Law, students have various opportunities to get involved in scientific activities depending on the cycle of studies (by joining scientific research initiated by teachers, participating in various competitions, contributing to events organised by the Faculty of Law and organising them themselves, etc.). At VMU Faculty of Law, students are given the opportunity to engage in scientific activities, organised by both the Faculty of Law and individual teachers (for example, to get involved in the activities of a scientific journal, in the activities of the cluster, and also on their own (read presentations at conferences, prepare scientific articles, submit various applications together with the teacher of the study course of interest) (SER p. 51) .

Authors of the best theses are given the opportunity to prepare a scientific article based on the thesis and publish it in an electronic free-access scientific journal of the Faculty of Law *Law Review*.

Since 2020, the "EU criminal law and policy" research cluster for students has been operating at the faculty.

Students can actively express themselves in scientific activities within the framework of the international organisation The European Law Students' Association (ELSA). Its branch in Kaunas, ELSA VMU, has been operating for 11 years (SER p. 52).

Students also present their research and results at conferences. Students participate in the publishing activities of the scientific journal "Law Review". Faculty teachers involve the most active students in the joint research.

For several years now, the Faculty of Law participates annually in the competition for the best Master's theses organised by the Supreme Court of Lithuania, where all three Lithuanian law schools submit up to five Master's theses defended that year, prepared on topics relevant to courts of general competence (SER p. 53).

Students who are active and interested in international law participate in Jessup activities every year under the guidance of teachers of the Faculty of Law.

Students develop scientific applied skills in the activities of the Law Clinic, which has been operating at the Faculty of Law since 2017.

#### *Expert judgement/analysis*

During the meeting, the experts panel got a good impression of the various opportunities provided by the faculty to engage in scientific activities both at the national and international level. The activities of the law clinic help students to develop scientific and applied skills. Cooperation agreements signed by the faculty with external partners, to whom written consultations are provided, help to develop students' practical and information-finding, selection, systematisation and proper formulation of thoughts skills. From the SER report and the conversation with the teachers, it is clear that excellent conditions have been created for students at the faculty to engage in various scientific activities, but there is a lack of greater student activity in participating in scientific activities.

#### ***Strengths and weaknesses of this evaluation area:***

##### ***(1) Strengths:***

1. The chosen research areas meet the needs of the Law program.
2. Students are guaranteed sufficient opportunities to participate in various scientific activities at the national and international level.
3. The faculty's cooperation with academic and non-academic institutions, organisations, and legal institutions provides students with excellent opportunities to develop practical skills. In this way, opportunities arise for all students to apply their knowledge in practice, students have the opportunity to connect scientific activities (by proposing topics) from actual practical problems.
4. Relevance of scientific research, effective application of research results in the study program, transfer of the most relevant scientific and technological knowledge to students.
5. Ensuring the financing of scientific research activities by looking for ever new sources of financing.

## ***(2) Weaknesses:***

Weakness mentioned below does not have a significant impact on the evaluation of the area as very good.

1. Although students are given various opportunities to participate in scientific activities, there is still a sluggish involvement of students in scientific research activities.

### **3.3. STUDENT ADMISSION AND SUPPORT**

***Student admission and support shall be evaluated according to the following indicators:***

#### ***3.3.1. Evaluation of the suitability and publicity of student selection and admission criteria and process***

##### ***Factual situation***

Admission to all Law study programmes at VMU is based on public competition. Admission to the first cycle study and the integrated studies in law is based on a national centralised system. Students who do not apply for state funded places and wish to pay for their studies themselves apply in accordance with VMU's procedure for the formation of a competitive ranking, which is the same as for those who wish to receive state funding. The competitive ranking is based on the candidate's admission score and his/her indicated study priorities (an applicant may indicate several study programmes in descending order of priority). Calculation of admission scores is, as well explained in the SER (p. 56-58), based on the applicant's grades for graduation exams or annual grades for four courses: (1) History; (2) Mathematics, or Information Technology, or Foreign Language; (3) any subject of the Maturity Certificate; (4) Lithuanian language. Additional points may be awarded for admission to both state-funded and non-state-funded places, e.g. for special achievements in Olympiads and competitions. The minimum compulsory qualification score for law studies at university level is 5.4. The tables in the SER show that the average admission scores for admission to both state-funded and non-state-funded first cycle and integrated study programmes have been decreasing over the previous years, while the second cycle programmes show an upward trend.

The number of applications for both state-funded and non-state-funded places is considerably higher than the number of contracts eventually concluded for first cycle and Integrated studies. Enrolment in the bachelor's programme is on the rise (especially state-funded places), whilst the Integrated programme shows a downward trend in the period under consideration, in particular because of a sharp decline in non-state-funded contracts.

Applications for admission to second cycle studies are accepted online, on VMU's website, and processed within the university. Admission is open to candidates who have a Bachelor's degree in Law or a Master's degree in Integrated law studies. Students who hold a professional Bachelor's degree in Law or a university Bachelor's degree in other fields of study must successfully pass the exams of a supplementary study programme (at least 60 ECTS) in the field of Law.

Admission scores to VMU's second cycle law study programmes are based on a formula that takes account of all the grades of all the study courses in the supplement to the Bachelor's diploma. For international students a comparable calculation is made. Their application should also include a motivation letter and the result of an English proficiency test. If necessary, a video interview is organised. The tables in the SER show that the average admission scores show an upward trend.

Enrolment in the (English language) second cycle programme International Business and Technology Law has been declining during the period under consideration, with low absolute numbers (under 10 contracts signed). There is very little interest from foreign students. Enrolment in the (Lithuanian language) second cycle programme Criminal and Business Law similarly features more stability, yet also combined with low absolute numbers (around 10 contracts signed).

#### *Expert judgement/analysis*

Admission to the law study programmes at VMU is organised in accordance with the relevant legal requirements and VMU rules, which are all available on the VMU website, partly in English, partly in Lithuanian (see links in the SER). Information about the admission requirements and procedures for all law study programmes is published on VMU's website (see links in the SER), as well as on various other websites, including foreign internet portals like [studyin.lt](http://studyin.lt). During the meetings with the stakeholders, the expert panel did not hear anything that contradicts the above.

The tables included in the SER show that VMU monitors its student intake in the different law programmes in a very good way and is aware of the fact that the most concerning aspects of the law study programmes are the relatively low number of enrolments, in particular in the second cycle programmes, as well as the decreasing admission scores in the integrated and first cycle programmes. The SER advances (p. 59 and following) several plausible explanations for the low number of enrolments including the reduction of state-funded places, the increase of tuition fees for second cycle studies, the demographic situation in the country, etc. As far as the low interest of international applicants is concerned, reference is made in the first place to the threat of war in the region, but also, e.g., to visa requirements. As far as the decreasing admission scores are concerned, reference is made to the restrictions imposed by the pandemic on the preparation of school graduates, the increasing trend towards studying abroad, and the negative changes in the number of graduates in the general education system.

The expert panel encourages the competent bodies at VMU to keep monitoring the situation with the same degree of scrutiny and to keep looking for alternative ways to make publicity for the law programmes, apart from those that are already used (e.g. social media).

#### *3.3.2. Evaluation of the procedure of recognition of foreign qualifications, partial studies and prior non-formal and informal learning and its application*

##### *Factual situation*

VMU's Description of Policy on Academic Recognition of Competences and Qualifications (available online, link in SER) sets out the procedure for recognition of (1) qualifications acquired abroad, (2) recognition of competences acquired in partial studies, (3) recognition of competences acquired through non-formal and informal learning.

Recognition of foreign qualifications is taken care of at the university's central level, by the International Cooperation Department. This department also conducts assessments of those persons with foreign qualifications (of Lithuanian and non-Lithuanian origin), who want to enter second cycle studies. In the period under consideration there were quite few applications under this procedure (between 2 and 15). Qualifications of all applicants were recognized, yet a few students decided not to attend VMU for financial reasons.

Recognition of competences acquired in partial studies is additionally regulated by the Description of the Procedure of the Validation of Learning Outcomes at VMU (also available online). This procedure is being taken care of at a decentralised level, by the Law Faculty. This includes students who participate in exchange programmes with a study plan agreed on before leaving, as well as students who come from another, Lithuanian or foreign, higher education institution, who apply for recognition of learning outcomes according to a non-pre-agreed plan. Very few students take part in exchange programmes, especially in comparison with the rest of the university. All credits brought back were recognized. Also the (low number of) applications for recognition of partial learning outcomes were granted.

Principles and processes of recognition of competences acquired in non-formal and informal way are regulated in a detailed way by VMU Study Regulations, VMU Description of the Procedure for Assessment and Recognition of Competences acquired through Non-Formal and Informal Education and VMU Description of Procedure for Organisation of Non-formal Education (Training Services). All documents are available online (link in the SER). In the period under consideration no such applications were received in the field of law.

#### *Expert judgement/analysis*

VMU follows clearly established procedures for recognition of foreign qualifications, partial studies and non-formal and informal learning. All procedures are clearly mentioned on the website. The only point of concern is the low number of credits brought back by students who take part in exchange programmes (see also below).

#### *3.3.3. Evaluation of conditions for ensuring academic mobility of students*

##### *Factual situation*

All VMU students can take part in Erasmus+ programmes, for studies during one semester or an academic year, for an internship from 2 to 12 months, or for short term study or practice mobility (5 to 30 days). VMU students can also take part in other academic exchange programmes, for studies, internships, short-term courses, summer/ winter schools. Scholarships are available for some of these programmes.

Mobility opportunities are communicated through a vast number of channels, including VMU website, social media, Erasmus days, special events, etc.

Students of the integrated study programme are the most frequent users of the Erasmus + exchange programme, most often in their fourth year (although such opportunity is also available in the 1st, 2nd and 5th years of the programme): one student in 2019, three students in 2020, one student in 2021 and one student in 2022. One student (only) took advantage of the mobility opportunity in the Bachelor's degree programme Law and Finance (in 2022). As far as the Master's programmes are concerned, two final year students of the second cycle study programme International Business and Technology Law went on the exchange programme to prepare their Master's thesis in 2019, and in 2021 a graduate of this programme went on an internship in a foreign organisation.

The SER contains info on incoming foreign students in the second cycle International Business and Technology Law programme, but not on incoming Erasmus students.

#### *Expert judgement/analysis*

Notwithstanding wide communication of mobility opportunities, it remains a challenge to convince VMU law students to take advantage of these opportunities. Very few students actually take part in these programmes, as illustrated by the numbers mentioned in the SER. It would be good to also gather information on incoming foreign exchange students.

The SER shows that the Law faculty is well aware of the low numbers of outgoing students, as also confirmed during the meetings that the expert panel had with teachers and senior management. A survey carried out in 2022 revealed that the main reasons for not taking part were work and lack of interest because of other priorities (SER p. 69). The expert panel saw this confirmed during the meeting it had with the students. Their English was excellent, but they indicated a preference for shorter exchange possibilities, like summer schools and the initiatives by Transform 4 Europe European University. In this respect the expert panel is very positive about the summer semester, introduced in line with a suggestion of the previous external review panel, which offers students of the Integrated programme a compulsory 'internationalisation at home' experience. It would be good if such opportunities could also be embedded in the three other law programmes.

#### *3.3.4. Assessment of the suitability, adequacy and effectiveness of the academic, financial, social, psychological and personal support provided to the students of the field*

##### *Factual situation*

VMU provides the following academic support:

- Information on the law studies and the university as well as all sorts of extracurricular activities

- Meeting of the faculty administration with student representatives; consultations by teachers and mentoring

VMU also provides financial support, as regulated by VMU Description of the Procedure for Granting Fee Reductions and Reimbursement and the Description of Procedure for Refund of the Paid Tuition Fee at VMU, both available online. Upon request, VMU may also postpone payment of tuition fees and/ or accommodation fees or grant tuition waivers. VMU may also reimburse expenses, e.g., for participation in scientific conferences, in accordance with VMU Description of the Procedure for Granting Fee Reductions and Reimbursement.

The following social support is available through VMU Student Affairs Department:

- Student accommodation in dormitories and accommodation fees
- Social and motivational scholarships
- Patronage scholarships to support student activities
- VMU honour scholarships, Rector's scholarships, etc.

VMU Student Representative Council represents the interests of the students and enhances their social and cultural activities.

As far as psychological support is concerned, the following is available:

- Free-of-charge counselling by a psychologist
- Academic Chaplaincy – spiritual support for diverse religions
- Disability coordinator, to assist disabled students
- VMU sports centre

Career planning support is offered by the Career Centre of VMU Student Affairs Department. The University and the Law Faculty have cooperation agreements with different social partners, including commitments to inform about job positions. A minor study programme offered by VMU Entrepreneurship Academy helps students to develop entrepreneurial skills and abilities.

#### *Expert judgement/analysis*

During their meeting with the expert panel students confirmed that support offered to them by the university and the law faculty was suitable, adequate and effective. They referred in particular to them being listened to by faculty staff when issues need to be discussed and highlighted that teachers are very easy to get hold of during consultation hours. They enjoy the recreational activities and opportunities that are offered to them, like the café, sports activities and the free gym. The expert panel could witness that the law students also have access, on campus, to nicely furnished rooms and cosy corners to work individually or in group, or just relax. During the meeting with social partners, they confirmed to have close ties with the law Faculty. They collaborate closely with regard to e.g. internships and career options for students.

Students referred to seven dormitories they can apply for, one of which is in a rather bad condition. However, not all students can secure a place in these dorms. The expert panel advises

to step up efforts to increase the number of places for law students in dormitories and to increase the quality of the accommodation offered.

### *3.3.5 Evaluation of the sufficiency of study information and student counselling*

#### *Factual situation*

Students receive information about their studies and related activities in the following ways and forms:

#### Physically:

- Week of Introduction to Studies for first-year students of the Integrated programme and the first cycle programme
- VMU Student Affairs Department
- Student Centre
- Monthly meetings between the administration of the Faculty of Law and the chairpersons of the study programmes and the course representatives of each programme
- Coordinators of the law faculty are available for advice and assistance during office hours
- Consultations with teachers

#### Virtually:

- E-mails sent via Outlook, and sometimes also personal e-mails
- Student portal <http://studentas.vdu.lt>
- Facebook account
- VMU website <http://vdu.lt>.
- Moodle platform

#### *Expert judgement/analysis*

Discussions with students confirmed overall satisfaction with the situation of study information and counselling.

As already highlighted above, students feel listened to and appreciate teachers being easy to get hold of during consultation hours.

### ***Strengths and weaknesses of this evaluation area:***

#### ***(1) Strengths:***

1. Student selection and admission is transparent and closely monitored by the competent VMU bodies.
2. The (compulsory) summer semester in the Integrated programme is a good example of internationalisation at home
3. All students have a good level of English, which gives them a headstart for participation in any exchange programme.
4. Students feel listened to and can easily get in touch with teachers during consultations.

5. Law students have access to nicely furnished rooms and cosy corners to work individually, or in group, or just relax.

## ***(2) Weaknesses:***

Weaknesses mentioned below do not have a significant impact on the evaluation of the area as very good.

1. The number of enrolments, in particular in the second cycle programmes, is quite low.
2. The number of students taking part in academic mobility programmes is low, in particular in the second cycle programmes.
3. Places in dormitories are (too) limited and the quality of one dorm is allegedly insufficient.

## **3.4. TEACHING AND LEARNING, STUDENT PERFORMANCE AND GRADUATE EMPLOYMENT**

***Studying, student performance and graduate employment shall be evaluated according to the following indicators:***

*3.4.1. Evaluation of the teaching and learning process that enables to take into account the needs of the students and enable them to achieve the intended learning outcomes*

### *Factual situation*

The study programmes use a wide variety of study methods to assure the quality of studies and encourage the active participation of students in the studies. Most commonly, the following forms of study courses are applied in the field programs: lecture, a seminar, practical work, a consultation, practice/internship.

There is a strong emphasis on students' individual work. By individual work, independent learning abilities of the students are developed (studying of learning resources during preparation for classes, doing of homework and other individual or group assignments, preparation for colloquiums, exams and other assessments, etc.) (SER p.77).

In each study programme in the field of Law, particular attention is paid to the development of research/analysis.

The most important individual work proving the qualification of a student is the final thesis, i.e., an analytic work based on independent scientific research. The Master's thesis is worth 30 ECTS. The Bachelor's thesis is worth 15 ECTS (SER p.77).

A variety of interactive, inclusive, active and technology-based study methods through traditional, distance and blended learning are applied at the Faculty of Law. Teaching and studying methods applied are regularly reviewed and developed in regard to state-of-the-art achievements of the study field science and practice, requirements of modern didactics and the changing labour market needs (SER p.77,78).

The teachers have a possibility to prepare online lectures (or upload the recordings of the lectures): normally, most of the classes are accredited as applying blended studies (distance and in-class sessions combined with self-study opportunities) and mixed-methods teaching (SER p.78). The University provides good opportunities for distance studies.

#### *Expert judgement/analysis*

A variety of interactive, integrative, active and technology-based traditional, distance and blended learning methods are used taking into account the individual and different needs of students and enables them to achieve the intended learning outcomes. A strong emphasis on independent work and practice prepares students for modern professional life after graduation. The cumulative learning achievement evaluation system motivates students to study throughout the study period.

Intermediate work and final work assessments (examinations, midterm assessments) may be organised online. Teachers and students are provided with information (prepared user manuals), instructions and consultations on how to use the latest technological tools when organising remote lectures, and how to use the Moodle environment.

Internships are well integrated into the work plan and allow students to acquire the necessary professional practice and apply practical skills in real professional activities. Continuity of learning at all study levels is ensured for students.

#### *3.4.2. Evaluation of conditions ensuring access to study for socially vulnerable groups and students with special needs*

##### *Factual situation*

VMU follows the model of open and socially responsible university: the study process is organised according to individual needs of students, individual counselling is provided, when necessary, data on students with disabilities are integrated into database systems, thus facilitating the learning process for students with disabilities (SER p.79)

Socially vulnerable groups (orphans, people with disabilities, students from large families and low-income families) receive various discounts for tuition or dormitory fees; also, different schemes of study support/scholarships are provided for these students (SER p.79).

Following the needs of students with disabilities, the University's buildings are maintained and prepared to meet the requirements of people (students/teachers/personnel/visitors) with special needs: special parking places are reserved near the university buildings; access to all buildings is specifically taken care of; the necessary equipment is provided in libraries, and classrooms are set with suitable furniture; students can settle in specially adapted dormitory rooms, if necessary, with an accompanying person (SER 80).

During the analysed period, 2 students with special needs (visual impairments) studied in Law study programs.

#### *Expert judgement/analysis*

In the opinion of the expert panel, VMU justifies the status of a socially responsible university, ensures a culture of equality and non-discrimination at the university, creates suitable conditions for the accessibility of the study and work environment for persons with disabilities and other vulnerable social groups. For students with disabilities, the study process is organised according to the individual needs of students, individual consultations are provided if necessary, data about disabled students are included in database systems, thus facilitating the learning process of disabled students.

The well-adapted internal and external infrastructure of the university for students with disabilities increases the accessibility of the study environment and creates a competitive advantage when choosing to study at this particular university.

Students with disabilities are given opportunities (by financing their expenses) to participate in university activities not only at the national but also at the international level (Erasmus +). Students with disabilities are provided with accurate information about the tools, assistance, services and support provided at the University in order to ensure the accessibility of studies, also ensuring appropriate adaptation of study conditions. Groups for the socially vulnerable receive financial support.

The university and the faculty are flexible and adapt to the students' need to take a study break.

### *3.4.3. Evaluation of the systematic nature of the monitoring of student study progress and feedback to students to promote self-assessment and subsequent planning of study progress*

#### *Factual situation*

Monitoring of learning achievements and provision of assistance to students is carried out with the help of the analysis of the preparation for studies of those entering the first year, the assessment of the situation related to the enrolment of students in studies and study subjects, the analysis of the reasons for the non-participation of students in mid-term assessment tests and final exams, the assessment of student mid-term assessment tests and final exam grades, students' monitoring of achievements and evaluation of the quality of periodic teaching, correlation of results and trends in the university, analysis of survey data, monitoring of students' study progress, social integration and study experiences.

Monitoring of the study process and providing assistance to students at the University is carried out at three levels: individual, faculty, and university.

At the level of legal studies, the monitoring of study process and providing assistance to students is ensured by the Faculty, which is responsible for monitoring the Faculty students' registration to study courses, informing students for the purposes of the prevention of study termination, organising consultations provided by the University teachers, appointing and coordinating the activities of academic mentors, monitoring and analysis of the study process, improvement of study activities (SER p. 81).

The Study Programme Committee members supervise how the assessment system is handled. Students' academic achievement and assessments are discussed during the Committee

meetings at the end of each semester. During every semester, administrative staff and the Study Programme Committee members discuss with the students their timetable and elective study course preferences. Information is collected via informal discussions or in questionnaire format (SER p.82)

At the University level, the monitoring of study process and providing assistance to students are ensured by the University non-academic units according to the areas of responsibility: the Student Affairs Department and the Study Department.

Feedback for students is provided systematically – teachers provide feedback to students using tools in the *Moodle* environment, when the assignments are prepared during the lectures and seminars, the results are discussed and comments are given immediately, when the assignments are prepared at home, the feedback is given during the seminars, pointing out areas for improvement. In the Faculty, the feedback for students regarding their achievements and assessment results is given and main issues and relevant questions are discussed during the regular monthly meetings with students' representatives (SER p. 82).

#### *Expert judgement/analysis*

In the opinion of the expert panel, the monitoring of students' learning progress and achievements is effective and systematic. The applied monitoring methods and analysis help students achieve good study results, solve the problems of students who face difficulties, which reduces the number of student dropouts.

The student achievement monitoring bodies operating at the university level (the Student Affairs Department and the Study Department) allow providing feedback and assistance in solving students' main problems and topical issues, which encourages students to achieve better learning results and plan their study progress.

#### *3.4.4. Evaluation of employability of graduates and graduate career tracking in the study field*

##### *Factual situation*

The University cooperates with VDU alumni through alumni clubs and separate departments of the University. Graduates periodically receive newsletters with relevant information, they are advised by the alumni coordinator on issues of cultural and educational activities.

Every year, members of the Alumni club attend the University events organised to develop students' professional and employability skills as well as get acquainted with career opportunities. The Alumni Club members also organise club meetings, various events (lectures, discussions, informal meetings, field trips, excursions to various companies employing University alumni, etc.), actively participate as consultants and experts in study programme committees, study quality assessment groups. Each year, with the help of the University, the club organises VMU Alumni Day in order to bring VMU alumni together.

Graduates are invited to various events to share their experiences, insights and so on. From 2019, VMU has joined the career mentoring platform dialogue, where VMU graduates are invited to register and become career mentors (SER p. 82).

Each year VMU Career Centre performs an online survey for alumni, one year after their graduation. The focus of attention is their current work situation and satisfaction with the studies they have graduated.

Surveys carried out by the university (EXIT) show the employment of students and their compliance with the needs of the labour market. From the surveys presented, it can be assumed that more than half of the respondents do legal work, or use legal knowledge acquired during law studies in their work.

#### *Expert judgement/analysis*

From the results of the (EXIT) surveys presented by SER, it can be seen that students adapt well to the labour market both during and after their studies. More than half of the respondents who took part in the survey indicated that they work in legal work. Most of them found a job during their studies or within 1-3 months. after graduation.

Surveys conducted by the university show that the majority of graduates work in legal work or use the legal knowledge acquired during law studies in their work, although the number of respondents could be higher.

During the meeting with the students, a large part of the students confirmed that they are already doing legal work (in courts, law firms). Students appreciate the university's practical preparation for a professional career. During the meeting, the students communicated perfectly in English, which shows what implies the conclusion that the language barrier does not limit their mobility, in this aspect the university provides an opportunity to pursue a professional career both at the international and national level. Among the students who attended the meeting, several confirmed their participation in the Erasmus program and gave excellent feedback about their experience.

Students have confirmed that they have access to information (in the Moodle environment) about job vacancies and career opportunities.

During the meeting with employers and Alumni students, most of the employers confirmed that they had graduated from VMU University. The site visit meeting with employers confirmed that graduates are properly prepared for the practice of legal work – students from university have no difficulty doing legal work, and they perform excellent practical tasks with supervision. A few students stayed to work as lecturers at the university, which indicates good preparation and a high level of competence acquisition.

Expert panel had a good view of the employability of graduates and graduate career tracking in the study field.

#### *3.4.5. Evaluation of the implementation of policies to ensure academic integrity, tolerance and non-discrimination*

##### *Factual situation*

In the case of dishonest student behaviour, observed during the final examination or any other type of academic assessment, teachers discontinue the student's performance and inform about this the Dean of the Faculty and the Study Department in a written form. The final evaluation "0" (zero) is written in the Mark Registry. The Faculty starts the investigation regarding students' unfair behaviour.

VMU Provisions on Prevention of Plagiarism in Student Written Works identify types of plagiarism, methods of determining the plagiarism and consideration procedures, as well as recommendations for teachers and students on how to prevent plagiarism in written works. Both teachers and students have the right to appeal to the University's Ethics Commission, which makes final decisions on academic integrity.

All Bachelor's and Master's theses of the field are checked by the internationally recognised and university-recommended plagiarism check system Oxsico, which indicates the percentage of text overlap with other sources and marks overlapping places. In case the work inspected raises doubts or disputes, it is re-inspected by another plagiarism inspection system (SER p.85). Every year, after checking theses in the plagiarism system, there are on average 5–10 theses in which cases of possible plagiarism and citation inaccuracies are found.

Throughout the evaluated period, there were 8 cases of infringement of academic honesty at the Faculty of Law, all of them related to academic dishonesty during the examination.

#### *Expert judgement/analysis*

The applied procedures for identifying plagiarism and dishonest behaviour of students during exams perfectly correlate with the principles of academic honesty, tolerance, and non-discrimination.

According to the amount of plagiarism and identified unfair cases, it can be concluded that VMU takes all ethics and values issues seriously and reacts appropriately.

#### *3.4.6. Evaluation of the effectiveness of the application of procedures for the submission and examination of appeals and complaints regarding the study process within the field studies*

##### *Factual situation*

Appeals and complaints regarding the study process were regulated by VMU Regulations for Submission of Appeals Regarding Evaluation of Learning Outcomes and/or Assessment Procedure until 2023, and currently these issues are solved according to VMU Regulations of the Dispute Resolution Commissions; the mentioned issues have also been determined by VMU Provisions on Prevention of Plagiarism in Student Written Works; and VMU Study Regulations.

Students have the right to make appeals regarding the assessment of learning achievements or assessment procedures when they disagree with the teacher's assessment and/or identify the violation of assessment procedures (SER p.86).

During the analysed period, in the field of Law there were 20 appeals regarding the examinations, 7 of them were granted, mainly due to the mistake in the exam questions.

### *Expert judgement/analysis*

From the number of submitted appeals and the appeals that were granted, the expert panel got the impression that the problem is in the methodological material of the exams, but considering the number of law students and the number of submitted appeals, the number of appeals is insignificant from a problematic point of view.

### ***Strengths and weaknesses of this evaluation area:***

#### ***(1) Strengths:***

1. The methods of organising the study program are based on the cooperation of teachers and students, which creates feedback and student mentoring opportunities.
2. Successful integration of studying and graduated students into the labour market.
3. The applied monitoring of students' progress is effective and helps students achieve good study results, help students facing difficulties during their studies, thus reducing student dropout.
4. Suitable conditions for studying are ensured for socially vulnerable groups and students with special needs.
5. Adequate conditions for the implementation of the policy of academic honesty, tolerance and non-discrimination are ensured.
6. The cumulative score evaluation system ensures the implementation of the principle of transparency and motivates students to study throughout the semester.

#### ***(2) Weaknesses:***

Weaknesses mentioned below do not have a significant impact on the evaluation of the area as very good.

1. Expand cooperation and partnership with social partners, increasing student employment.
2. Increase survey volume by attracting more students, including social partners, to ongoing surveys in order to obtain employment results that reflect the realistic situation and ensure the effectiveness of surveys.

## **3.5. TEACHING STAFF**

***Study field teaching staff shall be evaluated in accordance with the following indicators:***

*3.5.1. Evaluation of the adequacy of the number, qualification and competence (scientific, didactic, professional) of teaching staff within a field study programme(s) at the HEI in order to achieve the learning outcomes*

### *Factual situation*

The teaching staff consists of 20 full time teachers, out of whom 19 are PhD holders and 1 is PhD student. Full time teachers teach the basic law courses, such as Civil Law and Procedure,

Criminal Law and Procedure, etc. All teachers have academic and professional (as practitioners) experience as well. During the last years the number of practitioners with PhDs has increased and the university states that their presence safeguards a dialogue between the university and the employers and offers new seats for internships. In fact, some of the students who have been awarded a PhD were recruited as teachers by the university, after having participated in an open call recruitment procedure. It is observed that the teaching staff complies with the requirements of the legislation as far as its qualifications (PhD, experience, etc.) are concerned.

Three professors have extensive teaching experience abroad (USA, UK, Poland).

All the teachers have contributed at least 3 major works during the last 5 years, mainly referring to publishing of legal articles, papers, etc.

The average teachers' workload is 1584 hours per year, which includes teaching, research, administrative activities, competence development and cooperation with students. During our meetings it was clarified that this equates to approximately 15 teaching hours per week. Nonetheless, the teaching hours may be allocated in order that the teacher is able to focus on research.

The university puts effort in order to be a connection between the scientific experience of a teaching member and the course that he/she teaches.

The assessment of the teaching staff is dual. Each teacher at the end of the academic year reports on his/her own activity. Every five years the teaching staff's performance is thoroughly evaluated and attested.

During the years under evaluation no new recruitments of full-time teaching staff took place, but the number of the students has decreased and as a result the ratio between teachers and students has been improved.

#### *Expert judgement/analysis*

The university has a satisfactory number of full-time teachers, especially since the core subjects are taught by full-time teachers. In fact, it is satisfactory that almost everyone holds a PhD and has long experience, either as academics or as practitioners or both.

All full-time teachers have to demonstrate at least 3 scientific activities during the last 5 years, whether it is participation in conferences or publication of an article. The scientific presence and production is judged as satisfactory.

The clarification given to us that a teacher has an average of 15 hours of teaching per week is considered particularly important. This is a particularly heavy teaching workload, almost exhausting, and clearly should be reduced. Of course, there was the clarification that there may be a redefinition of the workload depending on the research that a teacher plans to conclude, but the reduction depends on the ad hoc approval of the university.

Also, there is no sabbatical leave option. Granting a sabbatical leave implies dedication to research and better research output.

Extensive evaluation every 5 years may be in accordance with the provisions of the law, however, it is judged to be particularly rare if the university wants to deal effectively with a problematic situation in time.

Also problematic is the fact that several faculty members reported using the socratic method in their courses, but what they described was more suited to group work and case analysis.

### *3.5.2. Evaluation of conditions for ensuring teaching staffs' academic mobility (not applicable to studies carried out by HEIs operating under the conditions of exile)*

#### *Factual situation*

The university predicts that every teacher should be qualified with at least B2 level in English. All teachers are able to attend foreign languages courses free of charge. The high level of knowledge of the English language by the faculty staff has been noticed during our meetings.

The university has established a lot of co-operations with foreign institutes and the teachers have the opportunity to apply for the Erasmus+ teaching or training program. More specifically, during the previous 3 academic years, teachers conducted 42 visits in order to give lectures to institutions abroad.

Teachers (19 teachers during the previous 3 years) from other institutes have visited the university to give lectures.

Nonetheless during our meetings some teachers stated that they are not able to participate in mobility programs because they work as practitioners.

#### *Expert judgement/analysis*

The majority of the teaching staff has a satisfactory level of knowledge of the English language, which was also noticed in the context of our meeting.

The university has developed several collaborations with institutions abroad and in fact there are several professors of the university who have visited universities abroad for teaching or training. Also, there were several professors from foreign universities who visited the university and gave lectures. However, there is always room for improvement in the context of mobility.

The clarification that many teachers do not participate in the mobility programs because of professional obligations cannot be considered satisfactory, because the mobility usually lasts only a few days. Besides, the university could set compensations in case of mobility, so that it becomes easier (e.g. financial bonus, exemption from teaching for the days of absence, etc.).

### *3.5.3. Evaluation of the conditions to improve the competences of the teaching staff*

### *Factual situation*

The university has established a system of professional development under 3 axes: general competences, professional competences and personal competences. Each teacher is required to spend at least 20 hours per year for professional development. In fact, it is obligatory for all teachers to sit a didactic course to improve their teaching skills. The professional development may take place either outside the university or inside university, through trainings which are held by the Institute of Innovative Studies (about 8 per month). The teachers may apply to the university in order to get financial support for professional development outside the university. Professional development also takes place by joint initiatives of the European University Alliance “Transform4Europe” and the university, which encourages innovative teaching and learning methods ideas.

During our meetings it was clarified that the amount of the salary depends on a motivational system, i.e. the salary may be increased if the teacher takes initiatives for his/her development.

### *Expert judgement/analysis*

The university has developed an extensive and satisfactory incentive framework for the professional and personal development of the teaching staff. This is evident from the fact that it has developed specific axes on which the aforementioned improvement can be achieved. In fact, the university itself organises training programs. However, the requirement for at least 20 hours of development per year is particularly low. Achieving improvement does not lead just to a moral reward, but the university has developed specific rewards for this purpose, consisting of salary increases, funding of development programs, etc.

### ***Strengths and weaknesses of this evaluation area:***

#### ***(1) Strengths:***

1. Adequate full-time staff specifically for core courses.
2. Satisfactory scientific presence and production.
3. Satisfactory network of collaborations with foreign universities.
4. Satisfactory framework for strengthening the professional and personal improvement of the teaching staff.
5. Connecting the professional and personal development of teachers with financial incentives.

#### ***(2) Weaknesses:***

1. Heavy teaching workload.
2. No prudence for sabbatical leave.
3. Infrequent extensive assessment of the teaching staff.

### 3.6. LEARNING FACILITIES AND RESOURCES

*Study field learning facilities and resources should be evaluated according to the following criteria:*

*3.6.1. Evaluation of the suitability and adequacy of the physical, informational and financial resources of the field studies to ensure an effective learning process*

*Factual situation*

The Faculty of Law is based on a totally renovated building. The building has several classrooms, fully equipped and of various capacities. There are also two computer rooms with 40 workstations and a conference hall that is used for various purposes. The university has a large sports complex. The university as of 2021 has created a fully renovated and functional building, but where no classes for the law school are held and furthermore it is not in close proximity to the main law school building.

The university offers many facilities for people with disabilities, as there are elevators, ramps, special parking spaces, etc., while the libraries are equipped with special systems that facilitate the study of people with hearing and vision impairments.

The university offers the virtual learning environment of moodle, where teaching materials and all useful information for students are posted. The administrative functions are carried out by the two portals for the teachers and the students.

The university has a total of 3 spaces used as libraries. In total there are more than 600 workplaces and almost 200 workplaces that allow the use of computers. The university offers training on the use of library facilities. The libraries are modernly equipped with a system of autonomous borrowing and return of books, access for students with disabilities, spaces for group work, etc. The university has started an effort to accumulate the written sources of the library in digital archives. Students have access to nearly 667,000 digital resources even when they are not on campus. In fact, it is possible to access numerous databases that are useful for law students. The task of searching the sources is carried out by the Research Management System.

The teachers have their own offices to conduct research and cope with other activities (e.g. collaboration with students) and there are also premises for part-time faculty staff.

Students have the possibility to choose the institution where they will do their internship and, if they do not manage to find an institution, they are helped by the internships coordinator.

Finally, we did not have the opportunity to visit the students' dormitories during our visit, but the students during our meeting expressed the opinion that the dormitories are not in very good condition.

*Expert judgement/analysis*

The classrooms are indeed fully equipped and spacious, while the university's common areas are sunny and pleasant. The computer rooms are also spacious and the number of workplaces is adequate.

The university has achieved a modern digital organisation of both educational activity (moodle) and administrative processes (portals).

The number of electronic resources offered by the library is indeed impressive and the search system very easy to use.

The subdivision's library is of high standard, but is not often used by law school students. The library located on the premises of the law school could have more workplaces, more rooms for group work and the appropriate decoration to make study in the reading room more pleasant. During our visit it was observed that several students were using the reading room, even if it was not exam period. Actually, that means that during the exam periods, when the number of students using the reading room traditionally increases, the reading room workplaces are probably not enough.

Students have many possibilities to spend their time in the sports complex, the canteen, the ELSA office, etc, which makes a pleasant environment for leisure time within the campus.

The system with internships implemented is judged as satisfactory, as priority is given to the initiative of the student, who is, however, helped by the internships coordinator if he/she does not manage to find an institution.

### *3.6.2. Evaluation of the planning and upgrading of resources needed to carry out the field studies*

#### *Factual situation*

The university has developed a system that ensures the regular renewal of teaching materials, hardware and software. Especially for law students, the university has made partnerships that make their internships agreements more efficient.

#### *Expert judgement/analysis*

The efforts made by the university to renew the resources that enable effective teaching work are judged to be satisfactory.

#### ***Strengths and weaknesses of this evaluation area:***

##### ***(1) Strengths:***

1. Completely renovated, functional and pleasant spaces.
2. Excellent care for students with disabilities.
3. Huge number of electronic resources in the library and effort to convert the printed resources into digital files.
4. Adequate spaces where students can spend their leisure time.

## ***(2) Weaknesses:***

1. Insufficient workplaces in the reading room.
2. Not enough classrooms for distance learning.

### **3.7. STUDY QUALITY MANAGEMENT AND PUBLIC INFORMATION**

***Study quality management and publicity shall be evaluated according to the following indicators:***

#### ***3.7.1. Evaluation of the effectiveness of the internal quality assurance system of the studies***

##### ***Factual situation***

Quality Assurance of the Study Field of Law at VMU comprises a detailed and effective mechanism of quality assurance measures on the basis of the Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area of 2015, accompanied and governed by the relevant legal acts and VMU internal legal provisions.

The main acting parties of the Quality Assurance provisions in their different roles and capacities are

- The Council of the Faculty
- The Dean of the Faculty
- The Vice-Dean of the Faculty
- The Vice-Dean for Science
- The Vice-Dean for International Relations and Marketing
- The Study Programme Committee
- The Chairperson of the Committee
- The Teachers
- The employers representatives
- The students representatives

Regular internal evaluations and surveys plus a yearly study improvement plan build the information upon which changes, adaptations and improvements are decided upon.

The respective roles and responsibilities of all parties involved in the Quality Assurance system are clearly defined and described.

##### ***Expert judgement/analysis***

The experts panel has in its discussions with management, staff and stakeholders of VMU verified the overall effectiveness of the Quality Assurance provisions.

All necessary provisions of a working Quality Assurance are in place and have in the past proved its worth for reacting in a quick and decisive way when it comes to modifications in programs, adding more practical features to studies or catering for immediate needs both from students

and staff. Examples given by the Faculty in the SER for the good working order of the Quality Assurance measures could be verified by the panel during discussions.

Altogether the different parts of the Quality Assurance system, coordinated by the chairperson of the Study Programme Committee as the central element, work seamlessly and effectively together.

Students, teachers and social partners gave examples of how they were involved and heard in the process which essentially is not only of administrative and theoretical use but works with a strong practical orientation.

However, some ideas that were brought up by students and some of the social partners have as yet not been reflected. Students have a strong preference for the Integrated Studies because the programme enables them to qualify for the regulated professions in the Law Field. The laudable 'Artes Liberales' provision of VMU that allows to freely take and avail of courses of the other programmes as an add on could lead – and that was a voice from the social partners group – to an unwillingly 'cannibalising' effect somewhat bleeding the Master programmes which then would not be taken as main studies but just 'visited'.

Another remark touched on the relatively plain and rather meaningless titles of the current Master Programmes hiding the wealth of new and attractive topics behind. Some interested prospective students might not even look into detailed course descriptions, having the wrong perception of the programmes. Looking for more attractive titles, mirroring the programmes better could be necessary.

### *3.7.2. Evaluation of the effectiveness of the involvement of stakeholders (students and other stakeholders) in internal quality assurance*

#### *Factual situation*

There are four main stakeholder groups strongly and regularly involved in the quality assurance processes:

Teachers are directly involved in modifying the course content and the effectiveness of the management process. Being represented in the Study Programme Committee and having a bridging function between the institution and its main stakeholders, the students, it is the teachers who will first hand hear of any ailments, shortcomings or new trends and needs, worthy to be implemented.

Students have a monthly meeting with the faculty administration and are represented by the Student Representative Council. All Students' needs are regularly and often on an informal basis heard by administration and Teaching staff and thus filtered to the relevant departments and decision makers, where they make an impact after being pondered upon.

Employers (social partners) have their place in the Study Programme Committee and some of them have additional teaching functions. In addition, career days, practical projects and regular surveys give employers a voice in the development of the law programmes.

The same is true for Alumnis, which have standing ties and representations at their Alma Mater, e.g. expressed by special Alumni events.

Electronically managed surveys of many kinds are conducted and analysed on a regular basis or when a special topic or need arises. The results of the surveys and the decisions taken accordingly are channelled back to the stakeholders as a feedback.

#### *Expert judgement/analysis*

The examples given by the institution in the SER as to which actions have been taken by the institution to the requests and suggestions of different stakeholder groups have been especially helpful in the assessment of the quality assurance measures and could be verified by the panel during discussions.

Administrative staff, teachers and students were overall very content with being heard and involved in the process. In depth questions on different aspects, e.g. to the course structure of the programs or the specialisation features and the employability after having graduated were readily answered with good and convincing arguments.

The only ones being rather quiet were the Alumni which were grateful for their excellent tuition but seemingly having lost touch with the institution after graduation. The same is true for some employers' representatives, some of which are extremely active and connected to the institution and its development, whereas others have more distant views and don't seem to be fully informed about the immediate ongoings in the faculty.

Overall, the very structured and fine tuned involvement of stakeholders is fine but tends to weaken from the immediate core circle of staff, teachers and students to the more distant circle of stakeholders, being the employers and the alumni.

#### *3.7.3. Evaluation of the collection, use and publication of information on studies, their evaluation and improvement processes and outcomes*

##### *Factual situation*

According to the SER, information on studies is collected, analysed and evaluated to ensure the systematic self-assessment and improvement processes and outcomes.

There is an annual analysis of the programmes to be able to react fast on immediate needs and changes.

Factors that are taken into account in collecting information and data are:

- The compliance of study programmes with upcoming trends in society which should be represented in new or modified coursework.
- Taking into account changing labour market needs
- An analysis of material resources and their replenishing
- Surveying the professionalism of teachers.
- Observing internationalisation efforts and the mobilities of teachers, administrative staff and students.

Surveys, committee meetings and the decisions made upon data collected lead to an ongoing development process in VMU and its Faculty of Law. The results are channelled back to the respective stakeholder groups.

#### *Expert judgement/analysis*

The panel is satisfied that the evaluation of the collection, analysis and use of information on the law study programmes leads to a continuous improvement process within the Study Field of Law at VMU.

For each and every step taken in the process, examples of the use, follow-up and resulting changes have been given by the Faculty. Information in the SER could be verified in the discussions with the relevant stakeholders. Thus, the law programmes and the measures of managing it, are meeting the immediate needs of students and the labour market. This ensures a modern approach towards an up to date law study field at any given time. The actions taken and the framework ensuring the close knit supervision of the ongoing studies allow for a flawless approach of future developments.

Other than that, VMU through Newsletters, Website, social media and a flurry of events and national and international networking is present within the interested public in Lithuania and its international partners.

Saying that, it could be a good idea to have a so far not taken into account stakeholder, namely peers of international partners, knowing the institution well enough, to shed a critical eye on recent developments and ailments, bringing in a new perspective from outside. It could enrich the Quality Assurance process and prove to be beneficial if institutionalised in some way.

#### *3.7.4. Evaluation of the opinion of the field students (collected in the ways and by the means chosen by the SKVC or the HEI) about the quality of the studies at the HEI*

##### *Factual situation*

Surveys reaching out to graduating students (EXIT) in the years 2019 - 2022 have brought the following results:

- The first cycle programme was overall rated 'very good' and is recommended to others by the graduating students
- The integrated study programme was overall rated 'good' and is recommended to others by graduating students
- both second cycle programmes are overall rated 'good' and are recommended to others by graduating students.

The survey 'Teaching and Learning Evaluation' showed that the coursework with its theoretical and practical aspects, the acquired research skills, critical thinking abilities and activating teaching methods are very well received, whereas language skills, mobilities and internships are thought to not add a very high value to qualifications.

As far as the interaction with teaching staff is concerned, graduates liked a clear communication strategy of teachers when it comes to what was expected from the students. Also much appreciated was any material and tasks put into Moodle courses or channelled by distance learning means.

Supervision and coaching within the process of writing the final thesis was also lauded by the students. Teachers were evaluated as being helpful and approachable at all times.

In general the graduating students described their experiences during law studies as good or very good.

### *Expert judgement/analysis*

The interviews taken by the panel with students were open, friendly, from the side of the students in partly excellent English, and not in any way coached by the institution beforehand to give a certain expression. Opinions on the programmes, the question of employability, the infrastructure of the institution and the means of recreational facilities, canteen, events and functions were openly discussed.

The students were of the impression that their voices were heard. They could and did name several actions initiated by students where the institution acted accordingly. Several of those examples can be found in the SER also.

The students feel well prepared for the labour market in different capacities, Most of the graduates striving for employment in the private sector. Internationalisation and Erasmus+ programmes and exchanges are seen as a bonus in students' experience. This goes for language skills as well but in Lithuania, being a small country on the fringe of Europe, internationalisation is in terms of preparing a future professional life helpful but not utterly important.

Generally the students cherish the taken studies and the way they are presented. Collaboration and feedback between teachers and students seem to be very good. The overall level of satisfaction is high.

### ***Strengths and weaknesses of this evaluation area:***

#### ***(1) Strengths:***

1. The refined and efficient Quality Assurance system
2. The collection of data of all kinds via electronic surveys, allowing for quick reactions and adaptations
3. Transparent and timely information on.

#### ***(2) Weaknesses:***

1. Not all stakeholder groups are included in the collaboration with the Faculty in the same fashion. Alumni, social partners and peers from international partners are not made use of in terms of experience and market knowledge or international benchmarks as would be possible.

## IV. RECOMMENDATIONS

Evaluation Area	Recommendations for the Evaluation Area (study cycle)
Intended and achieved learning outcomes and curriculum	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Monitor the paradox of reported high demand for lawyers on the one hand and low intake of students on the other.</li> <li>2. Gather more detailed info regarding employment outcomes of graduates from the second cycle programmes and first cycle graduates.</li> <li>3. Create a table that visualises, for all of the four programmes, how all the legally required learning outcomes are linked with the relevant programme outcomes.</li> <li>4. Look for alternative teaching/ learning methods that may work better for larger groups.</li> <li>5. Add a layer to Annex 1.3. to offer a better view on (progressive) skills development by individual teachers/course.</li> </ol>
Links between science (art) and studies	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. To increase the involvement of students in research conducted in the field of Law and various possible forms of involvement in scientific activities, by creating a strategy of incentive measures (e.g. incentive scholarships).</li> </ol>
Student admission and support	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Try to attract more students into the four law programmes and look for students who have the right capacities and interests. The SER (p. 75) provides a number of good ideas.</li> <li>2. Try to find ways to attract more students in academic mobility programmes, e.g., by offering more short-term opportunities. Consider the introduction of a (formal) mobility window in the second cycle programmes (cfr. the mobility windows in the first cycle and integrated programmes).</li> <li>3. Gather information on incoming exchange students</li> <li>4. Step up efforts to increase the number of places for law students in dormitories and increase the quality of the accommodation offered.</li> </ol>
Teaching and learning, student performance and graduate employment	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Expand partnership with social partners, ensuring feedback, sharing experience with teachers and students about student employment issues and labour market needs.</li> <li>2. To encourage students' participation in ongoing surveys, strengthening the aspect of graduate employment and career monitoring.</li> </ol>
Teaching staff	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Reduction of the weekly teaching workload.</li> <li>2. Provision of sabbatical leave in order to facilitate research and conduct research of better quality.</li> <li>3. More frequent extensive and comprehensive assessment of teaching staff.</li> <li>4. Further encouragement to increase teachers' participation in mobility.</li> </ol>

<p>Learning facilities and resources</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Increase of workplaces in the library reading room.</li> <li>2. Focus on distance learning: training teachers and creating suitable classrooms.</li> <li>3. Renovation of students' dormitories.</li> </ol>
<p>Study quality management and public information</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. It is recommended to find ways to shape the ties with Alumni, social partners and international peer experts even closer to avail better from their special knowledge of labour market developments, international benchmarks and the conditions of graduates, freshly entering the market and paving way for a career.</li> </ol>

## V. SUMMARY

The panel is taking the opportunity to thank Vytautas Magnus University, Study Field Law, for preparing an excellent and informative Self Evaluation Report and caring for the site visit in a friendly and cooperative atmosphere.

Generally speaking, the programmes in the Study Field of Law centre around the integrated study 'Law', allowing graduates to work after graduation in all regulated professions of the legal sector. It is the most popular study choice for law students. The integrated study approach has interdisciplinary features in mostly the same way as the also offered LL.B. and two LL.M. study programmes with special emphasis sectors.

Studies are well organised and embedded into a truly international teaching and learning atmosphere. VMU has a very active and resourceful Erasmus office. Both teaching staff and students have very good English language skills and live the internationalisation idea of VMU. All forms of Erasmus+ opportunities in mobilities for staff and students are readily and consistently taken. Especially laudable is the yearly repeated short summer period, dedicated to teaching and projects in a truly international environment, inviting lecturers from abroad. A great many foreign students are enrolled at VMU because of it being a well-known and advertised international campus.

All stakeholders, from the motivated teaching staff up to the large group of social partners of all kinds, gave the impression that they were part of all strategic operations, plannings, decisions and dissemination of changes to partners and the public. Administrative units, academics students and other stakeholders live an integrated approach at developing and modifying the Study Field of Law according to changing needs, to employment possibilities, cultural changes etc. Many examples have been given in the SER and verified in the discussions with different groups during the site visit, when occasions arose where the opinions of stakeholders were asked for and changes in infrastructure, coursework, internships etc. were initiated. All this led to the impression that VMU and its Study Field of Law is in the flow of a continuous improvement process.

The infrastructure of VMU with its modern and state of the art buildings, equipment, libraries, recreational facilities, cafeteria etc. leaves nothing to be desired. Students and teaching staff alike have voiced to be most satisfied with infrastructure and resources. The law library will need a bit of attention as far as printed books in quantity and most recent editions are concerned to prevent the inventory from becoming outdated in the future.

The linking of taught subjects with research and practice is laudable. Teachers and students alike are involved in research and suiting their groups in publishing, projects and conferences.

The teaching methods are innovative, using the socratic method in a critical dialogue and problem-based teaching and learning. Also exemplary are the different incentives implemented by the institution allowing for bonuses when teaching staff is taking steps towards enhancing their professional abilities.

The outcome is that employability of graduates is high but not always shown in the figures of the relevant surveys (employment rate and quality of employment).

The Quality Management of VMU is efficient, transparent and seamlessly working. The contact to the general public and dissemination of everything going on in and around VMU through many different means (media, events etc.) is very good.

One of the Master courses, consisting of International Business Law and Technology, meaning most recent developments like cryptocurrencies as a new phenomenon to give an example, is somewhat ailing. IT is the task of the immediate future to find out what measures can and should be taken to reach a change.

All in all, VMU runs an above average quality operation with the Study Field of Law.

As a result, the Study Field is accredited for 7 years with the marks shown in the Report.

Expert panel chairperson signature:

Prof. dr. Achim Albrecht