



STUDIJŲ KOKYBĖS VERTINIMO CENTRAS
CENTRE FOR QUALITY ASSESSMENT IN HIGHER EDUCATION

COMMUNICATION FIELD OF STUDY

Vytautas Magnus University

EXTERNAL EVALUATION REPORT

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Report prepared in 2024
Report language: English

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I. INTRODUCTION

1.1. OUTLINE OF THE EVALUATION PROCESS

The field of study evaluations in Lithuanian higher education institutions (HEIs) are based on the following:

- Procedure for the External Evaluation and Accreditation of Studies, Evaluation Areas and Indicators, approved by the Minister of Education, Science, and Sport;
- Methodology of External Evaluation of Study Fields approved by the Director of the Centre for Quality Assessment in Higher Education (SKVC);
- Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area (ESG).

The evaluation is intended to support HEIs in continuous enhancement of their study process and to inform the public about the quality of programmes within the field of study.

The object of the evaluation is all programmes within a specific field of study. A separate assessment is given for each study cycle.

The evaluation process consists of the following main steps: 1) Self-evaluation and production of a self-evaluation report (SER) prepared by an HEI; 2) A site visit by the review panel to the HEI; 3) The external evaluation report (EER) production by the review panel; 4) EER review by the HEI; 5) EER review by the Study Evaluation Committee; 6) Accreditation decision taken by SKVC; 7) Appeal procedure (if initiated by the HEI); 8) Follow-up activities, which include the production of a Progress Report on Recommendations Implementation by the HEI.

The main outcome of the evaluation process is the EER prepared by the review panel. The HEI is forwarded the draft EER for feedback on any factual mistakes. The draft report is then subject to approval by the external Study Evaluation Committee, operating under SKVC. Once approved, the EER serves as the basis for an accreditation decision. If an HEI disagrees with the outcome of the evaluation, it can file an appeal. On the basis of the approved EER, SKVC takes one of the following accreditation decisions:

- **Accreditation granted for 7 years** if all evaluation areas are evaluated as exceptional (5 points), very good (4 points), or good (3 points).
- **Accreditation granted for 3 years** if at least one evaluation area is evaluated as satisfactory (2 points).
- **Not accredited** if at least one evaluation area is evaluated as unsatisfactory (1 point).

If the field of study and cycle were **previously accredited for 3 years**, the re-evaluation of the field of study and cycle is initiated no earlier than after 2 years. After the re-evaluation of the field of study and cycle, SKVC takes one of the following decisions regarding the accreditation of the field of study and cycle:

- To be accredited for the remaining term until the next evaluation of the field of study and cycle, but no longer than 4 years, if all evaluation areas are evaluated as exceptional (5 points), very good (4 points) or good (3 points).
- To not be accredited, if at least one evaluation area is evaluated as satisfactory (2 points) or unsatisfactory (1 point).

1.2. REVIEW PANEL

The review panel was appointed in accordance with the Reviewer Selection Procedure as approved by the Director of SKVC.

The composition of the review panel was as follows:

1. Panel chair: Assoc. Prof. Heidi Ashton (United Kingdom), Director of Education and Deputy Head of School for Creative Arts, Performance and Visual Cultures, University of Warwick;
2. Academic member: Assoc. Prof. Dorte Madsen (Denmark), Associate Professor at Department of Management, Society and Communication, Copenhagen Business School;
3. Academic member: Prof. Christian Christensen (Sweden), Professor at Department of Media Studies, Stockholm University;
4. Social partner: Ms Raminta Stanaitytė-Česnuliienė, social partner representative, Co-Founder and Partner at Insynergy4 Ltd., a Management Consulting Company; independent strategic communication consultant; former Chief Adviser to the President of the Republic of Lithuania and Head of Communication Group;
5. Student representative: Ms Kateryna Shalimova (Ukraine), student representative, Bachelor student of Arabic Language and Literature, Taras Shevchenko National University of Kyiv; member of ESU Quality Assurance Student Experts Pool.

1.3. SITE VISIT

The site visit was organised on 9 May 2024 onsite.

Meetings with the following members of the staff and stakeholders took place during the site visit:

- Senior management and administrative staff of the faculty(ies)
- The team responsible for the preparation of the SER
- Teaching staff
- Students
- Alumni and social stakeholders including employers.

There was no need for translation and the meetings were conducted in English.

1.4. BACKGROUND OF THE REVIEW

Overview of the HEI

Vytautas Magnus University (VMU), originally founded in 1922 and re-established in 1989, offers degree programmes across three academic cycles: Bachelor's, Master's, and PhD. These programmes encompass a wide range of fields, including humanities, social sciences, arts, fundamental sciences, environmental sciences, and biotechnologies.

VMU comprises 14 academic divisions: Faculty of Arts, Faculty of Catholic Theology, Faculty of Economics and Management, Faculty of Humanities, Faculty of Informatics, Faculty of Law, Faculty of Natural Sciences, Faculty of Political Science and Diplomacy, Faculty of Social Sciences, Agriculture Academy, Education Academy, Music Academy, Institute of Foreign Languages, and Botanical Garden.

Overview of the field of study

The university offers five study programmes in the field of Communication: two Bachelor's programmes – Public Communication (since 2010) and Creative Industries (since 2013), two Master's programmes – Integrated Communication (since 2006) and Creative Industries (since 2011), and one PhD programme in Communication (since 2021, jointly with VILNIUS TECH).

These communication programmes are managed by the Faculty of Arts (BA Creative Industries, MA Creative Industries) and the Department of Public Communications at the Faculty of Political Science and Diplomacy (BA Public Communication, MA Integrated Communication, PhD in Communication).

Previous external evaluations

The self-evaluation report (SER) focuses on four study programmes. Three of these programmes – BA Public Communication, MA Integrated Communication, and MA Creative Industries – have been positively evaluated and accredited for six years by international experts between 2012 and 2014.

The BA programme in Public Communication received high scores and a 6-year accreditation in 2012. It has since been updated based on international experts' recommendations, industry changes, labour market demands, and stakeholder feedback. Key updates focused on enhancing professional ethics, practical skills training, programme implementation, management, student support, and involvement in research and academic activities.

Since its 2013 accreditation, the BA programme in Creative Industries has undergone minor changes primarily driven by feedback from students, alumni, and social partners, along with continuous quality evaluation.

The MA programme in Integrated Communication received high scores and a 6-year accreditation in 2012. Improvements were made based on expert recommendations, stakeholder insights, and market needs. Key adjustments included enhancing the competence framework, curriculum design, and programme management, with increased stakeholder integration.

The MA programme in Creative Industries was highly rated by international experts in 2014 for its interdisciplinary and innovative approach. In 2021, it underwent significant updates to align with labour market needs and stakeholder feedback, shifting to a blended learning mode with about two-thirds of the programme delivered remotely.

Documents and information used in the review

The following documents and/or information have been requested/provided by the HEI before or during the site visit:

- *Self-evaluation report and its annexes;*
- *Module descriptors;*
- *Examples of final theses;*
- *Information on financial stability and sustainability of the Faculty of Arts and the Faculty of Political Science and Diplomacy.*

Additional sources of information used by the review panel:

- *Institutional website.*

II. STUDY PROGRAMMES IN THE FIELD

First cycle/LTQF 6

Title of the study programme	Public Communication	Creative Industries
State code	6121JX044	6121JX036
Type of study (college/university)	University studies	University studies
Mode of study (full time/part time) and nominal duration (in years)	Full-time (4 years)	Full-time (4 years)
Workload in ECTS	240	240
Award (degree and/or professional qualification)	Bachelor of Social Sciences	Bachelor of Social Sciences
Language of instruction	Lithuanian	Lithuanian
Admission requirements	Secondary Education	Secondary Education
First registration date	18 March 2010	21 March 2013
Comments (including remarks on joint or interdisciplinary nature of the programme, mode of provision)	-	-

Second cycle/LTQF 7

Title of the study programme	Integrated Communication	Creative Industries
State code	6211JX050	6211JX051
Type of study (college/university)	University studies	University studies
Mode of study (full time/part time) and nominal duration (in years)	Full-time (1.5 years)	Full-time (2 years)
Workload in ECTS	90	120
Award (degree and/or professional qualification)	Master of Social Sciences	Master of Social Sciences
Language of instruction	Lithuanian	Lithuanian
Admission requirements	Bachelor's Degree	Bachelor's Degree
First registration date	6 March 2006	8 April 2011
Comments (including remarks on joint or interdisciplinary nature of the programme, mode of provision)	-	-

III. ASSESSMENT IN POINTS BY CYCLE AND EVALUATION AREAS

The **first cycle** of the Communication field of study is given a **positive** evaluation.

No.	Evaluation Area	Evaluation points [*]
1.	Study aims, learning outcomes and curriculum	4
2.	Links between scientific (or artistic) research and higher education	3
3.	Student admission and support	4
4.	Teaching and learning, student assessment, and graduate employment	4
5.	Teaching staff	4
6.	Learning facilities and resources	5
7.	Quality assurance and public information	4
Total:		28

The **second cycle** of the Communication field of study is given a **positive** evaluation.

No.	Evaluation Area	Evaluation points [*]
1.	Study aims, learning outcomes and curriculum	4
2.	Links between scientific (or artistic) research and higher education	4
3.	Student admission and support	4
4.	Teaching and learning, student assessment, and graduate employment	4
5.	Teaching staff	4
6.	Learning facilities and resources	5
7.	Quality assurance and public information	4
Total:		29

1

1 (unsatisfactory) - the area does not meet the minimum requirements, there are substantial shortcomings that hinder the implementation of the programmes in the field.

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

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

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

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

IV. STUDY FIELD ANALYSIS

AREA 1: STUDY AIMS, LEARNING OUTCOMES AND CURRICULUM

1.1. Programmes are aligned with the country's economic and societal needs and the strategy of the HEI

FACTUAL SITUATION

1.1.1. Programme aims and learning outcomes are aligned with the needs of the society and/or the labour market

The aims and learning outcomes of the programmes in the communication field of study have been designed following systematic reviews and consideration of a wide range of information regarding the need for programmes in the areas of creative industries as well as the broad field of communication, e.g., the strategy programmes initiated by the Government of Lithuania, *National Progress Strategy Lithuania (2030 and 2050)*, and the *Lithuanian Education Strategy 2013-2022* emphasising the need to foster creativity and innovation in the light of globalisation and digital technologies.

Development of programmes and their curricula carefully reference and align to the specifications set down in a host of *Qualifications Frameworks (EQF)* and other legal frameworks and reports that emphasise the importance of up-to-date professional training in communication in general and in the creative industries in particular as well as the need for innovative skills and development of strategic competences.

The main track BA and MA *Creative Industries* combines cultural studies and creative industries and aims to train professionals for the creative and cultural industries. The main track of *Public Communication* and *Integrated Communication* combines media studies, journalism and public relations (PR), and aims to train broad-profile communication professionals in the media and communication sectors. The MA specifically aims to develop strategic competences.

The SER underlines that the BA and MA programmes in communication at VMU aim to prepare highly skilled specialists in communication and creative industries. These programmes address global changes and national challenges, focusing on social conditions and labour markets in Lithuania and beyond. The rapid digitalisation and the intercultural skills demanded by a globalised market highlight the critical importance of communication skills and competencies.

It is stated in the report, that all four programmes equip students with the essential competencies needed in today's dynamic and technologically advanced digital communication environment. That is why, these programmes are designed to be flexible, allowing for updates based on new research, technological advancements, and changes in the communication landscape.

1.1.2. Programme aims and learning outcomes are aligned with the HEI's mission, goals, and strategy

The strategic goals and values of VMU are linked with the programmes in the field of communication and mapped onto the intended learning outcomes of the programmes (cf. Annex 2). The communication programmes show VMU's dedication to shaping students who are competent, creative, and ready to assume

leadership roles in the local and global academic and cultural landscapes, as well as its mission of holistic and innovative education.

During the visit the VMU's liberal arts approach was explored to demonstrate how it equips students with specialised and versatile skills for today's professional landscape, preparing high-potential professionals and active citizens. The communication programmes offer a range of study interests, interdisciplinary approaches, and individualised learning opportunities. They also promote participation in social and creative activities, and foster local and international partnerships, contributing to societal and cultural development.

ANALYSIS AND CONCLUSION (regarding 1.1.)

The aims and outcomes of these programmes comply with VMU's strategic objectives. Overall, the curricula reflect VMU's profile and goals, with the aim of fostering a dynamic academic community, promoting inclusive learning, and contributing significantly to societal and cultural development.

The programme aims and learning outcomes are well-aligned with the needs of the labour market demonstrating a clear understanding of the pulse of the sector, highlighting the increasing demand for communication professionals and the necessity to develop new competencies.

The National Association of Creative and Cultural Industries (NKKIA) offers monthly updates on labour market needs. Additionally, events like breakfast gatherings and the cultural forum on cultural entrepreneurship provide rapid insights, enabling curriculum adjustments within a semester.

Aligning programme outcomes with society and labour market demands relies heavily on feedback from social partners. They play a crucial role by participating in thesis defence committees, ensuring that theses meet industry standards, and providing feedback after internships regarding graduates' readiness and necessary skills. Their involvement extends to the Faculty Board, where they recommend programme changes.

These strategic engagements and adjustments ensure that VMU study programmes remain current and forward-looking, preparing students to be proactive contributors to the media, communication, and cultural sectors, thus reflecting a deep understanding of the labour market's evolving needs.

1.2. Programmes comply with legal requirements, while curriculum design, curriculum, teaching/learning and assessment methods enable students to achieve study aims and learning outcomes

FACTUAL SITUATION

1.2.1. Programmes comply with legal requirements

Both BA programmes are four-year programmes of 240 credits (ECTS). The MA programme *Integrated Communication* is allocated 90 credits (ECTS) (1,5 years), and the MA *Creative Industries* Programme is allocated 120 credits (ECTS) (2 years). The four communication programmes adhere to national and international regulations and frameworks (listed in SER p. 15-16). Table 1.2 shows the distribution of credits for the Bachelor level programmes between the study field, studies of other study fields specified by the University or optional studies, internship and BA final thesis and contact hours, respectively. Table 1.3 shows

the distribution of credits for the two Master level programmes of 90 and 120 ECTS respectively. The lay-out is consistent with legal requirements.

1.2.2. Programme aims, learning outcomes, teaching/learning and assessment methods are aligned

The SER together with annexes 1-3 give a commendable overview of linkages between the learning outcomes of communication study programmes and courses, learning, and assessment methods. The Study Plans (Annex 1) give an overview of courses in each semester of a programme, including a specification of ECTS, number of contact hours and the form of assessment of a course. In Annex 2, the learning objectives of the programme are mapped onto the intended learning outcomes of the specific programme and its courses. For the four programmes, the learning outcomes are divided into 1) Knowledge and its application; 2) Research Skills; 3) Special skills; 4) Social abilities; and 5) Personal Abilities (Annex 2).

Annex 3 contains examples of course descriptions, supplemented by module descriptors for the four programmes in the field of study based on the same template. These module descriptors show how programme aims, learning outcomes, teaching/learning and assessment methods come together, at the same time as more detail is added, as well as the recommended and supplementary readings for a course.

The template for example includes the following headings to be filled in: 1) Links among study programme outcomes, course outcomes, content, study, and assessment methods; 2) Criteria of learning achievement evaluation; 3) Structure of cumulative score and value of its constituent parts. The evaluation panel finds that this approach is highly commendable.

1.2.3. Curriculum ensures consistent development of student competences

In line with the VMU's liberal arts model, subjects are divided into three groups in the communication Bachelor's programmes. Groups A and B are general university courses (56 ECTS), and Group C, which are study programme specific courses, are both compulsory and optional speciality courses (184 ECTS). Group A and B courses (approx 16 ECTS per semester) are found in the first and second years, supplemented by introductory courses from Group C (approx. 16 ECTS per semester). The volume of credits of speciality courses (Group C) increases, becoming the majority (approx. 30 ECTS per semester) during the second stage of studies (mainly during 3rd and 4th year). Group C also includes internships, term paper(s) and Final Thesis. The structure of the Bachelor's programmes enables students to receive a comprehensive set of competences in the first years of studies and to specialise according to their needs and interests in the later years of studies.

The Master's programmes in the field of communication are divided into two stages. In the first stage students are provided with compulsory and optional study-specific courses, while the second stage is dedicated to preparing a Master's Final Thesis and, in the case of the *Integrated Communication* study programme, completing an internship.

The MA programme *Integrated Communication* (a total of 90 ECTS) focuses on strategic competence in several related areas, e.g., public relations, marketing communications, corporate governance, risk and crisis management, cybersecurity, organisational research, and digital media design. The programme actively promotes cooperation with stakeholders and industries.

The MA programme *Creative Industries* (of 120 ECTS) is designed on the basis of three interlinked thematic areas: 1) leadership/entrepreneurship; 2) media technologies/communication; and 3) creativity/art/culture. One principle in this programme is that the compulsory subjects are of a general nature, as they aim to provide the knowledge and competences necessary for activities in any field of creative industries. The list of elective subjects provides students with the option to choose a specialised area, e.g., new media arts, tourism, film, performing arts, visual arts curatorship, popular culture. Besides the Master's Thesis in the 4th semester, both second and third semesters include *Research thesis and its defence* with *Research Work No 1: Theoretical Research of Creative Industries* in the second semester and *Research Work No. 2: Creative Industries Mapping* in the third.

The SER presents a detailed account of the composition and scaffolding of each of the four communication programmes (p. 19-22). Their curricula are well distributed and provide consistent development of students' competences. The programmes facilitate logical progression from one semester to another, and from the BA programmes to the dedicated MA programme.

1.2.4. Opportunities for students to personalise curriculum according to their personal learning goals and intended learning outcomes are ensured

Students in the study field of communication have ample opportunities to personalise their study experience. As noted in the SER (p. 6), VMU's liberal study policy lets students themselves plan their studies by choosing general study courses and part of the study field courses. For the BA programmes, the sequencing of study courses and credit composition makes it possible for students to tailor their studies to their individual needs. In both BA programmes, students have the opportunity to choose between A and B group courses, as well as within the C group of courses.

In the BA *Public Communication* students can tailor most of their communication coursework to their particular areas of interest, including journalism, public relations, or media technologies design, and the final thesis offers flexibility in that students may choose between a scientific research endeavour, applied research, or a creative project (SER p. 19). The BA in *Creative Industries* offers electives from all three *Creative Industries* fields which allow students to focus on their specific field of interest, including in their internships, the two research papers and the Final Thesis.

In the MA programmes students can propose and select topics for their assignments within different classes, and they can choose optional study courses. In the MA *Integrated Communication* internship placements are also chosen individually. In the MA in *Creative Industries*, the list of elective subjects allows students to choose a specialised area and in their research papers (*Research Paper 1* and *Research Paper 2*) students choose their topics individually. Likewise, the topics of the *Master Final Theses* in both MA programmes are coordinated with the Study Programme Committee (SPC), but students are free to choose the topics according to their personal learning aims.

Moreover, VMU provides students with the possibility to study according to an individual study schedule in order to meet specific learning needs. A schedule is designed on the basis of the implemented study programme and individual study plans. VMU has regulations (as listed in SER p. 22) in place to ensure the details of individual studies.

1.2.5. Final theses (applied projects) comply with the requirements for the field and cycle

The university has regulations in place for the *Preparation and Defence of Final Theses*, as well as *Methodological Guidelines for Preparation of Final Thesis in Creative Industries* and *Methodological Guidelines for Preparation of Final Thesis in Public Communications (BA)* and *Integrated Communication (MA)*.

The General Order on the Preparation and Defense of the Final Theses describes the procedures for the final thesis preparation and defence, both for BA and MA level students. The topics for the final theses can be provided by the teachers at the departments/faculties, social partners, or students and approved by the Faculty (departments or SPCs). Students are free to choose the topic and type of their final theses (theoretical, research-based or applied/creative project). The different types of theses, including the academic writing requirements and assessment criteria are presented in the methodological guidelines.

The works are reviewed by a Master Thesis Certification Commission which assesses whether all obligatory requirements for the structure, content, volume, and formatting have been fulfilled and indicates any drawbacks that need to be corrected. This Commission consists of three programme teachers. In order to organise and assess the final theses, a Defence Committee (Committee) is set up for each study programme. It usually consists of 5 members: 3 members of the Committee are appointed from the staff of VMU (teachers involved in the programme), 1 from the social partners, and 1 (usually tasked with chairing the Committee) is invited from another HEI.

The members of the Committee assess the project and its presentation. The student receives feedback from the supervisor, a review by the reviewer, and the student answers the questions of the reviewer and the members of the Committee. Each member of the Committee evaluates the theses independently and then engages in a collective discussion on a final evaluation.

The evaluation panel has reviewed the list of theses titles in Annex 4. The BA in *Public Communications*, BA in *Creative Industries* and MA in *Integrated Communication* from 2021-2023, and the MA in *Creative Industries* from 2020-2023. Based on the titles, the theses are varied and interesting and appear to be consistent with the cycle.

ANALYSIS AND CONCLUSION (regarding 1.2.)

Programme aims are clearly articulated and in alignment with society/labour needs and VMU's mission and strategy, and they are linked with the learning outcomes of the communication study programmes. The learning outcomes are consistently applied and defined for the specific courses of the relevant programme.

There is a commendable alignment between intended learning outcomes, subjects, readings, study methods and assessment methods. The module descriptors for the four programmes are based on the same template that specifies study programme outcomes, course outcomes, content, study methods, and assessment methods, as well as criteria for learning achievement evaluation.

The four study programmes in the communication field provide consistent development of competences of students in well-distributed curricula. The programmes facilitate logical progression from one semester to another, and from the BA programmes to the dedicated MA programmes. Students in the study field of communication have ample opportunities to personalise their study experience and tailor their studies to

their individual needs. Moreover, VMU provides students with the possibility to study according to an individual study schedule in order to meet specific learning needs

AREA 1: CONCLUSIONS

AREA 1	Negative - 1 Does not meet the requirements	Satisfactory - 2 Meets the requirements, but there are substantial shortcomings to be eliminated	Good - 3 Meets the requirements, but there are shortcomings to be eliminated	Very good - 4 Very well nationally and internationally without any shortcomings	Exceptional - 5 Exceptionally well nationally and internationally without any shortcomings
First cycle					
Second cycle					

COMMENDATIONS

1. Alignment between programme aims, learning outcomes, teaching/learning and assessment methods is carefully crafted and systematic.
2. The module descriptors for the four programmes are based on the same template which creates consistency and clarity.

RECOMMENDATIONS

To address shortcomings

No shortcomings were identified

For further improvement

No recommendations for further improvement were identified

AREA 2: LINKS BETWEEN SCIENTIFIC (OR ARTISTIC) RESEARCH AND HIGHER EDUCATION

- 2.1. Higher education integrates the latest developments in scientific (or artistic) research and technology and enables students to develop skills for scientific (or artistic) research

FACTUAL SITUATION

2.1.1. Research within the field of study is at a sufficient level

There is a productive and active research community among staff (SER, visit). This is evidenced by the many significant outputs including monographs, articles in international peer reviewed journals, research projects, engagement with international bodies as experts in the field, membership of professional media groups and practices and policy decision makers (SER, visit). This community is embedded within broader international communities of academics in this field. This provides opportunities for staff to stay at the forefront of theoretical and conceptual concerns in the field and compliments the strong practical elements of the courses. The research outputs of staff demonstrate that they are leading thinkers in the field and that this expertise is shared and used to tackle societal issues at the local and global level creating a strong and collegiate research community. This is set within a context in which funding for research is unpredictable and therefore challenging to sustain (SER).

There is ample access to software and physical resources that enable students to engage with the latest technologies whilst embedding these in a broader understanding of creativity and creative learning through access to analogue technologies alongside the newer digital facilities.

2.1.2. Curriculum is linked to the latest developments in science, art, and technology

For first-cycle students 'real world' tasks are developed in collaboration with social partners providing students with up-to-date examples of the practical work being done in this area. This is also an opportunity to experiment and develop practical and technical competencies. These practical examples can be found variously across the courses (SER). These align with the actions following recommendations from previous reports.

The SER clearly outlines the many ways in which the faculty is working to engage students in research projects. Some of these are not research as such but rather projects for organisations which do not require scientific knowledge and understanding. The panel found that first-cycle students were not familiar with the concepts of research and misunderstood the meaning of theory. This may be due to the low attendance for this cycle, particularly for 'theory' classes (visit). The embedding of the latest scientific developments is, therefore, less assured despite significant efforts on the part of staff. This element appears to rely on lectures updating materials and the attendance of students (visit).

Second-cycle students were more engaged in critical and theoretical elements of the courses despite experiencing similarly low attendance (SER, visit).

2.1.3. Opportunities for students to engage in research are consistent with the cycle

First-cycle students have opportunities to work together with students in other faculties to cross-apply their technical and practical knowledge in order to develop a new product or service and engage with other

practice based projects. These opportunities enable students to experiment, problem solve and collaborate, the links to research at the theoretical level are less apparent (visit). Second-cycle students engage with modules that are delivered cooperatively with social partners. This provides an exchange of expertise between the student and the social partner (SER, visit).

There are opportunities for first-cycle students to engage in activities relating to research, these are innovative and supplemented with financial incentives via excellence scholarships (SER). The focus is on developing methods specifically and with a practical approach. This is undoubtedly beneficial to students but would be enhanced through the incorporation of innovations in conceptual and theoretical approaches and advances. The panel found that staff associated theory with methodology, whilst this is an important element of a theoretical approach it is less effective in linking intellectual developments in the field that encourage critical thinking in research processes (visit, SER). The panel noted that staff are at the forefront of developments in critical approaches to the field and have significant expertise in this area which follows a wider tradition of intellectual excellence at the university.

Students are required to produce dissertations based on independent research that are suited to their cycle of study. From the titles some of these seem more practical or business/report based than theoretically embedded for the first cycle.

All students are provided with research training to develop academic research skills commensurate with their level of study.

ANALYSIS AND CONCLUSION (regarding 2.1.)

The partner initiatives are very good at preparing first-cycle students for the transition from university to work, providing students with valuable experience in the skills they need to develop themselves and their work-based competencies. The extent to which this incorporates critical thinking, theoretical and conceptual understanding and developments is unclear and this is an area that could be developed more explicitly to give students at all levels a deeper understanding of the relationship between theory and practice and the value of scientific research in developing the field at an intellectual and societal level.

It is clear that staff are engaged in current debates and issues in the sector at every level but the panel found that the idea of theory was assumed to mean methodology rather than the critical approach of taking a range of perspectives, asking deep, searching questions and engaging students to think about how their 'product and service development' might impact upon society, what it might say about society and how it might develop or improve our understanding in some way beyond a practical implication.

The SER states that VMU 'integrates communications practice, professionalism, impact and innovations', this focus could reinforce student perceptions that University degrees should primarily be vocationally oriented, this in turn is viewed by students in the narrowest sense of specific tasks for specific roles. It is acknowledged that processes are in place to encourage critical thinking and embed the significant conceptual research undertaken by staff but the perception of students is that this is 'theory' and does not relate to 'practice'. A shift in this narrative would encourage more critical engagement and foster greater depth in students' engagement with research at all levels.

Whilst considerable work has been done to engage students in research this has only been understood at a superficial level in which research is viewed as a process to complete a practical task or solve a practical

problem rather than an opportunity to engage in the latest intellectual developments and think about how the theoretical and critical perspectives in the field can inform and develop with and through rigorous research processes.

AREA 2: CONCLUSIONS

AREA 2	Negative - 1 Does not meet the requirements	Satisfactory - 2 Meets the requirements, but there are substantial shortcomings to be eliminated	Good - 3 Meets the requirements, but there are shortcomings to be eliminated	Very good - 4 Very well nationally and internationally without any shortcomings	Exceptional - 5 Exceptionally well nationally and internationally without any shortcomings
First cycle					
Second cycle					

COMMENDATIONS

1. The quality of research, particularly relating to theory and intellectual advances in the field.

RECOMMENDATIONS

To address shortcomings

1. Embed critical perspectives relevant to the field into practice-based projects and encourage student engagement and reflection on the relevance of theory in practice in the first cycle.
2. Evaluate current provision that seeks to link theory and practise for first cycle students.

For further improvement

1. Work with first-cycle students to create an attendance policy to ensure that they are fully benefiting from the research generated by staff and the innovative modules and pedagogies that they have access to.

AREA 3: STUDENT ADMISSION AND SUPPORT

3.1. Student selection and admission is in line with the learning outcomes

FACTUAL SITUATION

3.1.1. Student selection and admission criteria and procedures are adequate and transparent

All 4 study programmes in the communication field at VMU are taught in Lithuanian and foreign students are not accepted.

The application procedure for citizens of Lithuania applying for first cycle programmes is conducted through the LAMA BPO system, where the competitive score requirements are presented. For both first-cycle study programmes in the communication field the admission score consists of grades for 1) Lithuanian language and literature (weighting coefficient - 0,4); 2) Foreign language (0,2); 3) History/Geography/Mathematics/IT (0,2); any other subject (0,2).

Second-cycle *Creative Industries* applicants' competitive score includes Bachelor's diploma grades (weighting coefficient - 0,5), Bachelor's thesis mark grade (0,3) and the number of study courses related to Creative Industries (0,2). It was decided to include the thesis mark because it shows the level of the student's research skills and motivation in further academic self-development. Admission to the second-cycle programme *Creative Industries* can take place every second year. Second-cycle *Integrated Communication* applicants' competitive score includes Bachelor's diploma grades (0,5), Bachelor's thesis mark grade (0,2) and student's motivation, as well as self-description and portfolio of achievements are provided in the written form to demonstrate current competencies (0,3). Second cycle applications are processed by VMU.

In addition to maturity exam(s) and other subject results, supplementary scores are also taken into account (information is available on the LAMA BPO and VMU websites).

Graduates of other study fields or universities of applied sciences may first be required to take supplementary studies in the study field of communication. The Admission Committee evaluates the applicant's former qualifications and professional experience to make a decision. There can be cases when taking additional module(s) is enough, but sometimes it is required to take an additional year to get credits in communication.

In practical terms, the number of BA *Public Communication* applicants has decreased since 2020 (441 students) however numbers have remained stable in 2021 (370), 2022 (379), 2023 (339). For the BA *Creative Industries*, the programme attracted more than 400 applications in 2022 and 2023, which is more than in 2021 (356). The number of MA *Integrated Communication* applicants differs from 31 to 48 students. Data shows that there is a significant increase in the number of MA *Creative Industries* applicants since 2021. It is worth mentioning that there was no admission for MA *Creative Industries* in 2021 because of the updates occurring in the programme.

3.1.2. Recognition of foreign qualifications, periods of study, and prior learning (established provisions and procedures)

Activities can be recognised for work activities, voluntary work, internships, courses, seminars, projects etc. 75% of the volume of the study programme to be studied or less may be recognised.

Descriptions created at VMU ensure that recognition of foreign qualifications, partial studies and non-formal/informal learning is adequate and transparent and follow *Description of Procedure for Assessment and Academic Recognition of the Qualification Acquired Abroad at VMU* (foreign qualification); *Description of the Procedure of the Validation of Learning Outcomes at VMU* (partial studies); *VMU Study regulations, VMU Description of Procedure for Assessment and Recognition of Competences Acquired through Non-Formal and Informal Education, Description of Procedure for Organisation of Non-Formal Education (Training Services) at VMU* (informal, non-formal studies). *Description of Policy on Academic Recognition of Competences and Qualifications at VMU* determines general policies of formal and informal qualification recognition. All the above-mentioned documents are publicly available on the *VMU Important Documents* webpage.

Students participating in exchange partial studies programmes should agree on the study plan before leaving and upon return, they should provide the university with an academic certificate (after each semester studied abroad).

Since 2020 there were 7 BA and 3 MA communication studies students being recognised for non-formal/informal education; 18 BA and 1 MA partial studies activities in Lithuania and 38 communication students' partial studies in foreign universities were recognised; 3 students with foreign Bachelor's degrees applied to MA programmes in the study field of communication and their qualifications were recognised.

The university aims to recognise the qualifications of all applicants, thus, there are no cases where student's previously acquired competences were not recognised.

ANALYSIS AND CONCLUSION (regarding 3.1.)

Admission criteria are adequate. MA competitive score includes a Bachelor's thesis mark which, as it was said during the meeting, helps to evaluate if the applicant has the required knowledge and competencies appropriate for an MA research degree.

VMU ensures comprehensive and transparent recognition processes for various forms of learning and prior qualifications. Directions provided for students clarify recognition procedures so that important information is perfectly arranged.

3.2. There is an effective student support system enabling students to maximise their learning progress

FACTUAL SITUATION

3.2.1. Opportunities for student academic mobility are ensured

Diverse academic mobility opportunities are provided at VMU: 1) Erasmus+ programmes (studies/internship/short-term study and practise mobility at partner organisations in the EU); 2) Short-term courses and summer/winter schools abroad; 3) Studies (semester or academic year)/internships (1-3 month-duration) at partner universities/companies outside the EU; 4) Internships (2-6 months) in Lithuanian companies.

Students are informed about international activities via many means: VMU website (which provides broad information regarding international cooperation opportunities for students, application details and deadlines), events (such as Erasmus days), emails, social media, and personal discussions in the groups.

Since 2020, 38 communication students have done partial studies abroad and there were 144 incoming students. 7 students were interning abroad (embassies, publishing houses, international companies in Poland, Czech Republic, Spain, France, Italy, Germany). The number of international students (EU/non-EU) conducting their studies at VMU is significantly high even though full-time programmes are taught in Lithuanian. Students do not only use Erasmus+ opportunities but also participate in various international training, projects and online courses (e.g., Coursera). However, more students could be encouraged to take part in exchange programmes.

3.2.2. Academic, financial, social, psychological, and personal support provided to students is relevant, adequate, and effective

VMU provides various academic support. Information is available online on the student portal, Moodle, social media, newsletter, VMU and faculty websites. Students are involved in face-to-face discussions with faculty management and the SPC which ensure that students' concerns and recommendations are taken into consideration. Teachers give private/group consultations on a regular basis that help students catch up with their studies, analyse assignments and clarify course topics.

Financial aid available for both cycles includes state scholarships, encouragement scholarships, one-time encouragement scholarships, social scholarships, rector's nominal scholarships, one-time nominal scholarships. Additionally, patronage scholarships (for students' research in a field) and mobility scholarships can be received. *Procedures, requirements, and other information are governed by the Description of VMU Scholarship Award Procedures.* Tuition fees can be reduced upon request and the procedure is regulated by the *Description of procedure for awarding study scholarships to cover the tuition fee at VMU* which is shared on VMU's website. Scholarship application is made online via the student portal.

VMU ensures that students are also supported mentally and socially. VMU Psychology Clinics offers free-of-charge counselling. Seminars on different topics are available for students in both cycles. VMU Student Affairs Department deals with accommodation issues (settlement, fees) and manages student scholarships. VMU Career Centre of the Student Affairs Department helps with students' career development: seminars and consultations are provided for current students, and other offline meetings are organised for graduates to share experiences.

BA communication students are involved in VMU Entrepreneurship Academy and Academia cum laude - these academies work towards developing students' entrepreneurial skills and deepening understanding of specific topics. This way connections are made between VMU students and worldwide known professionals from other institutions.

3.2.3. Higher education information and student counselling are sufficient

VMU students can access consultations throughout their studies at VMU. When entering university, newly enrolled students receive general information about the study process at VMU during the *Introduction to Studies* event. Introductory Week which takes place at the beginning of the semester includes presentations from the administration, centres, clubs and the Student Council that allow students to get to know about the

university structure, facilities, library resources etc. During meetings with the faculty management and SPC Chair students are introduced to the study programme aims, study process/assessment particularities, exchange opportunities, and learning outcomes. There are also mentor programmes for both local/international students launched in order to assist freshmen. Teachers also spread information on upcoming opportunities and important instructions during classes.

Students are also informed online via social media, personalised emails, and Moodle (study course descriptions are available there). VMU Student Affairs Department as well as study programme administrators and Vice-Deans can be reached daily to receive private consultations.

ANALYSIS AND CONCLUSION (regarding 3.2.)

VMU offers diverse academic mobility opportunities, including Erasmus+ programmes, short-term courses, internships, and international study options. Information about these opportunities is disseminated through the VMU website, events, emails, social media, and personal discussions. Since 2020, many students have participated in partial studies or internships abroad, and VMU hosts a significant number of international students.

VMU provides academic, financial, mental, and social support to students through online resources, face-to-face interactions, scholarships, accommodation assistance, and career development programmes.

Students are well-consulted via introductory events and mentor programmes. They receive regular updates from teachers and university staff. A high level of information-spreading is achieved with the help of personal communication and university resources.

AREA 3: CONCLUSIONS

AREA 3	Negative - 1 Does not meet the requirements	Satisfactory - 2 Meets the requirements, but there are substantial shortcomings to be eliminated	Good - 3 Meets the requirements, but there are shortcomings to be eliminated	Very good - 4 Very well nationally and internationally without any shortcomings	Exceptional - 5 Exceptionally well nationally and internationally without any shortcomings
First cycle					
Second cycle					

COMMENDATIONS

1. Detailed and structured descriptions of informal/non-formal/partial studies and foreign qualifications allow applicants to become acquainted with all important information: application requirements, recognition procedure, and assessment panel.
2. VMU attracts a considerable number of international exchange students despite full-time programmes being taught in Lithuanian.
3. Students not only use Erasmus+ opportunities but also engage in various international training, projects, and online courses, enriching their educational experience.

4. The availability of introductory events and continuous daily consultations from the Student Affairs Department, study programme administrators, and Vice-Deans ensures continuous support and guidance for students throughout their studies.

RECOMMENDATIONS

To address shortcomings

No shortcomings were identified

For further improvement

1. It is worth expanding the number of outgoing students for academic mobility.

AREA 4: TEACHING AND LEARNING, STUDENT ASSESSMENT, AND GRADUATE EMPLOYMENT

4.1. Students are prepared for independent professional activity

FACTUAL SITUATION

4.1.1. Teaching and learning address the needs of students and enable them to achieve intended learning outcomes

The evaluation of the teaching and learning process at VMU takes into account student needs and aims to achieve intended learning outcomes through various study forms and methods. The Bachelor's programmes are full-time, with distance learning options applied during the COVID-19 pandemic using tools like VMU Office 365 Teams and BigBlueButton. VMU's Innovative Studies Institute (ISI) provides support and methodological recommendations for both teachers and students to facilitate effective distance learning. This includes user guides for video conferencing tools and troubleshooting, ensuring smooth participation in online classes.

The Master's programmes offer a blended learning format, combining distance learning with scheduled in-person activities such as lectures, seminars, and practical assignments. These programmes also allow students to choose electives from related programmes and select supervisors from other communication programmes for their final thesis, fostering interdisciplinary cooperation.

Various teaching, studying, and assessment methods are employed to meet individual study objectives and programme outcomes. Common study methods include lectures, seminars, consultations, and practical training. Teaching methods in lectures involve presenting theoretical material, case studies, video and audio recordings, and discussions. Internships and practical training emphasise formulating practical assignments, analysing professional activities, and presenting reports. Seminars and workshops utilise active student participation through thematic presentations, group discussions, case studies, and project planning. Interactive tools like Mentimeter, Slido, H5P, and Padlet are used to enhance learning.

Courses such as *Cultural Policy Fundamentals* and *Concepts of Contemporary Communication* integrate theory with applied research and problem-based learning. Students engage in real-life project development, co-creation with teachers, and peer assessments. Media laboratories equipped with advanced technology support creative tasks, while courses like *Visual Communication* leverage these facilities to develop practical skills.

To ensure students actively participate throughout the semester, VMU employs a cumulative grading system. This includes components like exams, colloquiums, and individual or group assignments, with specific weightings based on the subject. For example, the final assessment of *Visual Communication* comprises 50% exam, 30% creative project assessment, and 20% colloquium. This system encourages continuous engagement and independent work, preparing students for professional life.

Students' independent work involves reading specified literature, preparing for seminars, writing essays, and completing individual or team projects. Teachers assess this work and include it in the cumulative grade. Research papers and practice reports are publicly defended and evaluated by a defence committee.

Various assessment methods are tailored to course specifics, including tests, written work evaluations, oral presentations, and project assessments. For instance, *Fundamentals of Cultural Policy* uses discussions, problem-solving evaluations, and case study presentations, while *Media Contexts and Cultures* includes mind map preparation and description as part of the assessment.

Graduates of the BA programmes can pursue MA degrees in communication and related fields at VMU or other universities, both in Lithuania and abroad. Graduates with an MA degree and scientific potential can further their studies through doctoral programmes at VMU or other institutions. Currently, six communication MA graduates are enrolled in doctoral study programmes. This structure ensures that students are well-prepared for advanced studies and professional careers in their respective fields.

4.1.2. Access to higher education for socially vulnerable groups and students with individual needs is ensured.

The Disability Policy of VMU *University of Inclusive Opportunities* ensures a sustainable action plan for equality in education and employment opportunities for all students. Socially vulnerable groups receive individual study schedules regulated by the *Description of Procedure for Submission of an Individual Study Schedule at VMU*. During the focus group meeting it was revealed that there is a team dedicated to creating an inclusive/non-discrimination/gender equality environment.

Discounts and scholarships are provided, and a disability coordinator advises students with disabilities. Lecturers are well-trained to provide an individual approach for students with needs. Teachers mentioned that they might face challenges when meeting someone's individual needs as it is required to implement some changes in the whole study process.

Facilities are mostly adapted for disabled students, including parking, libraries, classrooms, and dormitories, however, the corridors in the Faculty of Arts are fairly narrow, potentially limiting the access to some of the supporting equipment for disabled people. Educational events and campaigns are organised, and the study process is tailored to individual needs. In communication programmes, adjustments are made for dyslexic and blind students, reflecting the university's commitment to inclusivity.

ANALYSIS AND CONCLUSION (regarding 4.1.)

VMU meets the aim 4.1.1. of addressing student needs and enabling them to achieve intended learning outcomes. The university employs a variety of teaching and learning methods across its Bachelor's and Master's programmes, including full-time, distance, and blended learning formats. These approaches are supported by advanced tools and comprehensive support systems that ensure flexibility and accessibility. VMU's Innovative Studies Institute provides necessary support and resources to facilitate effective learning. The curriculum integrates theoretical knowledge with practical applications, encouraging active participation and continuous engagement. The university uses a cumulative grading system to ensure students remain engaged throughout the semester. Additionally, VMU's infrastructure, including advanced media laboratories, supports the development of practical skills. This comprehensive approach ensures that students are well-prepared for both further studies and professional careers, effectively meeting the specific aim of promoting student success and achievement.

VMU prioritises accessibility and inclusivity for students and staff with disabilities. Support includes individualised study schedules, financial assistance, disability advisors, and adapted facilities. Lecturers have

experience in adjusting studies to meet students' individual needs. Additionally, the university organises educational events and adjusts programmes to accommodate diverse needs, exemplifying its commitment to inclusivity.

4.2. There is an effective and transparent system for student assessment, progress monitoring, and assuring academic integrity

FACTUAL SITUATION

4.2.1. Monitoring of learning progress and feedback to students to promote self-assessment and learning progress planning is systematic

The monitoring of student learning progress at VMU is regulated by the *VMU Study Regulations* and the *Description of Procedure for Monitoring Study Process and Providing Assistance to Students*. The monitoring process involves several stages: analysing first-year students' preparation for studies, analysing students' registration for study courses, examining reasons for students' non-participation in colloquiums and final examinations, analysing intermediate and final evaluations, gathering data from periodic surveys, and monitoring students' learning progress, social integration, and study experiences. These evaluations aim to improve study organisation and quality, promote academic engagement, ensure social integration, and implement preventive measures to manage underachievement. The university provides academic, social integration, financial, and psychological support based on the collected data. Lecturers monitor students' achievements during the semester and offer additional consultations or assistance if they notice any difficulties. They inform the administration of non-attendance at lectures or reports, prompting the administration to contact students to understand the causes and offer help. The Vice-Deans of the Faculty of Arts and the Faculty of Political Science and Diplomacy, along with teaching and administrative staff, manage the processes of helping and monitoring achievement.

After the first set of examinations, individual interviews are conducted with students who received lower grades to find solutions and improve their performance. Students are encouraged to seek additional advice from their lecturers. Those who miss midterm or final examinations for serious and justified reasons can reschedule their exams. Additionally, there is an option to retake a colloquium and/or an examination once, free of charge. Students facing significant difficulties and considering withdrawing from their studies are offered academic leave.

Faculties regularly monitor student performance, and students are involved in self-monitoring their progress and study processes. This includes registering for studies, revising study plans, monitoring and improving their learning achievements, and accessing survey results for quality improvement. Feedback to students is systematically provided through various means. Assignments given during lectures and seminars are immediately discussed by lecturers, and feedback on homework assignments is given during lectures, seminars, or in written form. Students' work and questions are discussed privately if requested. After midterm and final examinations, students receive grades and comments on their performance. Feedback is given orally during lectures, in writing through general emails and personal responses, and on Moodle by commenting on assignments and providing individual feedback. Midterm report results are announced individually on the university's intranet and discussed in class within two weeks. Final examination results are published on the intranet within three working days and then discussed in the student group.

4.2.2. Graduate employability and career are monitored

During the visit it was evidenced that collaboration with VMU alumni is both formal and informal. It occurs mainly through alumni clubs and individual university departments. Graduates receive periodic newsletters and advice from an alumni coordinator on cultural and educational activities.

The VMU Career Centre conducts an annual electronic survey of graduates one year after graduation, asking about their employment status, job satisfaction, and experiences. Unemployed graduates are asked about their job search and any work experience. All graduates provide feedback on their career satisfaction, the usefulness of their preparation, and VMU's contribution to their readiness for the labour market. This helps assess the effectiveness of VMU's preparation and its contribution to graduates' readiness for the labour market.

4.2.3. Policies to ensure academic integrity, tolerance, and non-discrimination are implemented

The principles of academic integrity at VMU are established in the university's *Statute*, the *Code of Academic Ethics*, the *Provisions on Prevention of Plagiarism in Student Written Works*, and the *Study Regulations*. Non-discrimination is addressed within the *Code of Academic Ethics*. Additionally, the *VMU Gender Equality Plan for 2021-2025* outlines activities and measures to promote gender balance and cultural change at both institutional and departmental levels.

When dishonest behaviour is observed during final examinations or other assessments, teachers are required to stop the student's performance and report the incident in writing to the Dean of the Faculty or the Academy Chancellor and the Department of Studies. The student's final evaluation is recorded as '0'. An investigation is then initiated by the faculty Dean or Chancellor regarding the student's unfair behaviour.

The Provisions on Prevention of Plagiarism in Student Written Works detail the types of plagiarism, methods for detecting it, and the procedures for addressing it. It also provides recommendations for teachers and students on preventing plagiarism. Both teachers and students can appeal to the University's Academic Ethics Commission, which has the authority to make final decisions on issues of academic integrity.

Students are introduced to the principles of fair studies, and teachers reinforce these rules before assignments and exams. Plagiarism prevention is emphasised throughout the assignment writing process, with teachers providing guidelines on proper citation and use of information. If plagiarism is discovered during the preparation of BA or MA theses, supervisors explain what constitutes plagiarism, remind students of proper citation rules, and give them an opportunity to correct their work. These preventive measures have proven effective in reducing dishonesty in reports and plagiarism in written research and final theses. All final theses are checked using plagiarism detection systems like iThenticate and OXSICO. During the analysis period, no instances of plagiarism were detected in the final theses of communication students.

4.2.4. Procedures for submitting and processing appeals and complaints are effective

Until 2023, appeals and complaints regarding the study process at VMU were regulated by the *Regulations for Submission of Appeals Regarding Evaluation of Learning Outcomes and/or Assessment Procedure*. Currently, these issues are addressed according to the *VMU Regulations of the Dispute Resolution Commissions*, the *Provisions on Prevention of Plagiarism in Student Written Works*, and the *Study Regulations*. Students have the right to submit appeals concerning the assessment of their learning

achievements and the procedures followed during assessments. Upon reviewing an appeal, the commission can decide to uphold the appeal and change the evaluation, uphold the appeal but not change the evaluation if violations did not affect the outcome, allow the appellant to retake the test/examination if procedural violations are found, dismiss the appeal, or notify relevant administrative staff if unrelated violations are discovered. A committee, established by the Dean's decree, examines student appeals and complaints. The committee reviews the student's appeal or complaint, the teacher's explanation, and any other pertinent material before making a decision. This decision is then communicated to the student, the teacher, and the faculty administration. During the period under review, no student appeals or complaints were received.

ANALYSIS AND CONCLUSION (regarding 4.2.)

VMU satisfies the following aims:

Aim 4.2.1. Monitoring of learning progress and feedback to students to promote self-assessment and learning progress planning is systematic. VMU systematically monitors student progress and provides feedback to promote self-assessment and learning progress planning. Student progress is tracked through various stages, including course registrations, participation in assessments, and evaluation results. The university uses this data to improve study organisation, academic engagement, and implement preventive measures for underachievement. Support is offered to students facing difficulties through academic, social, financial, and psychological assistance. Continuous feedback is provided through various channels, ensuring students are informed of their performance and areas for improvement.

Aim 4.2.2. Graduate employability and career are monitored. VMU monitors graduate employability and career progression through formal and informal methods. Collaboration with alumni occurs via clubs, departments, and alumni coordinators. Annual electronic surveys conducted by the VMU Career Centre gather data on graduates' employment status, job satisfaction, and career readiness. This feedback helps assess the effectiveness of VMU's programmes in preparing students for the labour market, ensuring that graduates are well-equipped for their professional endeavours.

Aim 4.2.3. Policies to ensure academic integrity, tolerance, and non-discrimination are implemented. VMU enforces policies on academic integrity, tolerance, and non-discrimination as outlined in its *Code of Academic Ethics* and other regulatory documents. The university employs measures to prevent and address dishonest behaviour, including plagiarism detection systems and clear guidelines for academic conduct. Students are educated on these principles from the beginning of their studies, and teachers reinforce them regularly. The *VMU Gender Equality Plan* further promotes a balanced and inclusive academic environment.

Aim 4.2.4. Procedures for submitting and processing appeals and complaints are effective. VMU has effective procedures for handling appeals and complaints related to the study process. Students can appeal assessment outcomes and procedural violations, with their cases reviewed by designated committees. These committees ensure a fair review process and communicate decisions to all relevant parties. The system is designed to uphold academic standards while addressing student concerns, ensuring transparency and fairness in the resolution of disputes.

AREA 4: CONCLUSIONS

AREA 4	Negative - 1 Does not meet the requirements	Satisfactory - 2 Meets the requirements, but there are substantial shortcomings to be eliminated	Good - 3 Meets the requirements, but there are shortcomings to be eliminated	Very good - 4 Very well nationally and internationally without any shortcomings	Exceptional - 5 Exceptionally well nationally and internationally without any shortcomings
First cycle					
Second cycle					

COMMENDATIONS

1. Student progress is well monitored, and the teaching tools employed clearly help the students to achieve their goals.
2. The thoughtful adjustments made within communication programmes to accommodate dyslexic and blind students and the amount of financial aid offered reflect VMU's proactive stance on inclusivity, ensuring that every student has equal opportunities to excel in their studies.
3. Teachers demonstrate a high level of skills and readiness to provide individual approach and even implement changes into the whole study process.
4. Course evaluations were systematic, and the students made clear in interviews that faculty were open to contact and communication.

RECOMMENDATIONS

To address shortcomings

No shortcomings were identified

For further improvement

1. Additional attention should be paid to ensure accessibility of university facilities (narrow corridors at the Faculty of Arts building can make trouble for students with movement difficulties).

AREA 5: TEACHING STAFF

5.1. Teaching staff is adequate to achieve learning outcomes

FACTUAL SITUATION

5.1.1. The number, qualification, and competence (scientific, didactic, professional) of teaching staff is sufficient to achieve learning outcomes

In the field of communication there are 25 members of staff listed on the website for the department of public communications. The SER states that there are 73 teachers in total, 51 of which work permanently in the communications field. This reflects the interdisciplinary nature of the programme. Numbers are appropriate for the number and level of programmes provided and co-teaching provides students with access to a range of competencies and teaching styles (visit). The varying staff numbers reflect the interdisciplinary nature of the courses.

Staff are highly qualified with a large proportion in receipt of PhDs that specialise across a range of areas in the communication field and education in the sector (Appendix 7). The SER provides aggregate figures for experience which includes staff who are not working in the field under evaluation.

There is a thriving research community with evidence of a range of outputs including publications in well-known, high level international journals, book chapters and monographs, research projects and wider engagement as journal editors and academic experts at both civic and academic associations and organisations (SER). Other staff have extensive and impressive relevant experience in their specialisms such as composers, theatre directors, broadcasters etc (SER, visit).

The staff-student ratio is difficult to ascertain precisely due to the mix of full-time, part-time and additional lecturing staff including guests from overseas who provide sessions online. However, the low rate of staff turnover ensures stability (SER).

ANALYSIS AND CONCLUSION (regarding 5.1.)

The research outputs of the academic staff across publications, research grants, projects and as academic experts strongly evidence their competencies beyond the requirements of the learning outcomes. Staff are developing their interests both in the subject area itself and in teaching and education which provides a good range of expertise across the faculty and sufficient staff with extensive experience. Professional practitioners bring practical and professional knowledge and expertise which benefits the more practice based modules or module elements.

The panel found that the staff were suitably qualified and engaged in research, teaching and practices at a high level as required to achieve the learning outcomes for the programmes fully meeting the aim.

5.2. Teaching staff is ensured opportunities to develop competences, and they are periodically evaluated

FACTUAL SITUATION

5.2.1. Opportunities for academic mobility of teaching staff are ensured

Faculty staff are international which provides a range of perspectives and experiences which will benefit all staff and students. All faculty members are encouraged to engage with the Erasmus + programme, Transform4Europe and research fellowships. Staff from partnering organisations also visit and pass on their own experiences and expertise. Since the pandemic, some exchanges have taken place online. The benefits of this are less evident.

Some staff are engaged with international networks which increases mobility, knowledge and development of staff. There has been some movement of staff during the self-evaluation period but this has not impacted teaching and PhD students have had opportunities to develop teaching skills and move into faculty positions (SER).

5.2.2. Opportunities for the development of the teaching staff are ensured

Development is provided under the heading of general (including languages), professional and personal. Staff are expected to spend 20 hrs per year engaged in professional development activities, the time for this is taken from the portion of the contract that is connected to research (visit). Recently staff underwent extensive training for the realignment of LOs with competencies (visit).

If training is provided by an external provider staff can apply for funds from their research clusters or in conjunction with Erasmus +. A professional development fund was established in 2022 and has not yet been evaluated for effectiveness (SER).

Staff provide details of training undertaken at the end of every year within the annual review cycle, the workload allocation for training is effectively taken from part of the research portion even if it is directed towards teaching (visit).

Teacher training is diverse and provides an opportunity to engage with and discuss a range of pedagogical issues. Staff have developed these into interesting approaches to assessment and module engagement (visit). Students are less aware of these innovations (visit).

Development for research is embedded in incentives and research groups. Staff will work up to 60 hrs per week in order to engage in research projects that they have successfully bid for as this is conducted in addition to a full workload (SER, visit).

ANALYSIS AND CONCLUSION (regarding 5.2.)

The university has employed an effective strategy to ensure that staff have opportunities for mobility and development in teaching and research, the latter through an incentive scheme. This is working well as staff are engaged with ongoing research and developing teaching practices.

The practice of taking on additional hours for research projects, in effect using 'overtime' to supplement income is not sustainable as it requires a constant churn of grant income and disadvantages those with caring responsibilities, particularly those without access to additional domestic support. This group could be the most disadvantaged through both the incentive and the research funding allocation schemes. The system of working in excess of the EU working time directive for extended periods could also disadvantage early career researchers and those with caring responsibilities. It is understood that these additional hours supplement salaries but this could undermine elements of the university's equal opportunities strategy. Similarly, with fewer hours to develop publications, research grants, or other research relevant outputs it is more difficult for early career researchers to benefit from the incentive schemes than more established staff.

The panel however found that all aims are fully met with interesting and innovative approaches to training and development employing a range of opportunities through a coherent strategy and a supportive and collegiate environment.

AREA 5: CONCLUSIONS

AREA 5	Negative - 1 Does not meet the requirements	Satisfactory - 2 Meets the requirements, but there are substantial shortcomings to be eliminated	Good - 3 Meets the requirements, but there are shortcomings to be eliminated	Very good - 4 Very well nationally and internationally without any shortcomings	Exceptional - 5 Exceptionally well nationally and internationally without any shortcomings
First cycle					
Second cycle					

COMMENDATIONS

1. Excellent, enthusiastic staff members with a clear passion for their subjects and practices and a genuine desire to support student learning.
2. A strong and supportive research culture.

RECOMMENDATIONS

To address shortcomings

No shortcomings were identified

For further improvement

1. Consider the impact of current (national) practices for engaging with funded research in terms of funding, sustained working beyond the EU working time directive and the impact this might have for the equalities strategy.
2. Consider an evaluation process to assess the effectiveness of incentives and initiatives.

AREA 6: LEARNING FACILITIES AND RESOURCES

6.1. Facilities, informational and financial resources are sufficient and enable achieving learning outcomes

FACTUAL SITUATION

6.1.1. Facilities, informational and financial resources are adequate and sufficient for an effective learning process

The communication programmes at VMU are supported by the university's material resources, ensuring an effective learning process for both students and teachers. The university provides 311 classrooms of varying sizes, all equipped with necessary technological tools such as computers, internet, multimedia projectors, and audio-video equipment. This infrastructure supports diverse teaching and learning methods, ensuring optimal study conditions. VMU has 46 computer rooms, each with sufficient equipment to meet student needs. Larger events can be held in the VMU Grand Hall or the Small Hall, with ample seating capacity. The Faculty of Arts and the Faculty of Political Science and Diplomacy house the majority of communication courses, facilitating easy access to administrative and teaching staff. The Faculty of Arts, located in a modernised building, offers nine lecture rooms, seminar rooms, and computer labs, all equipped with the latest technology for virtual meetings and distance learning. The faculty also has specialised facilities such as a media research lab, photo studio, sound studios, and various informal meeting areas.

The Faculty of Political Science and Diplomacy, one of the newest university buildings, provides 10 lecture rooms, a media lab, self-study areas, and a modern library. These facilities offer extensive resources for students, including professional video and audio equipment, VR technology, and editing software. The Romas Sakadolskis Media Lab is a notable facility where students can work on media projects, utilising professional-grade equipment and software.

Buildings are equipped for disabled access, including elevators, automatic doors, and specialised equipment in libraries and classrooms. Students with disabilities have access to adapted dormitory rooms and individualised study processes, supported by disability education campaigns and integrated data systems.

VMU uses Moodle, a comprehensive virtual learning environment, allowing for digital content creation, diverse course organisation, practical activity management, and progress monitoring. Important IT tools like the Student and Teacher Portals provide centralised study process information and facilitate efficient communication and monitoring.

The university library offers access to a large collection of print and electronic resources. The library has nearly 1.7 million informational resources, including over 1 million physical documents and extensive electronic resources. It supports academic pursuits with modern facilities, including self-checkout devices, software for users with special needs, and digital subscriptions to a wide range of journals and eBooks. The library also conducts information literacy training and collaborates with academic staff to ensure up-to-date resources are available for studies in communication.

VMU also opened a large sports complex in 2021, which includes various sports facilities and is designed to be accessible for people with disabilities. This complex enhances the physical education and leisure opportunities for the university community. For practical experience, communication students can choose

from a list of practice institutions provided by the practice subject coordinator or find their own, subject to approval. These institutions span a wide range of sectors, including businesses, government, media, education, culture, NGOs, healthcare, sports, social services, and more, offering students valuable real-world experience.

Overall, VMU's physical, informational, and financial resources are adequate and well-suited to support the educational needs of communication students, providing a solid foundation for their academic and professional development.

6.1.2. There is continuous planning for and upgrading of resources.

The planning and upgrading of resources for field studies at VMU follow resource development plans prepared annually by the faculties and submitted to the university authorities. These plans are based on the specific study needs. The infrastructure for communication studies is well-equipped, with no significant updates needed beyond regular maintenance. VMU maintains a centralised system for hardware and software updates, renewing about 20% of computers annually and constantly updating network security systems. Only legal software is used in computer classrooms, and educational licences are provided free of charge to students. The software is audited and updated every six months.

Recent upgrades to the Media Research Lab at the Faculty of Arts include the 2023 renovation of two media classes with 19 workstations each, now equipped with the latest software and hardware such as Adobe CC, FinalCut, Cubase, Logic Pro, Da Vinci Resolve, Wacom drawing tablets, external sound cards, headphones, and MIDI keyboards. This upgrade cost approximately EUR 140,000. Additionally, new professional video and photo cameras, lenses, and video monitors were purchased for EUR 23,000. The photo studio also received new lighting systems, light modifiers, and scanners for digitising analogue films, costing EUR 15,000. In 2024, the plan includes acquiring new hybrid cameras, high-speed storage media, and video stabilisers, with a total investment of EUR 26,000. This was completed in May 2024.

The Media Laboratory at V. Putvinskio Street requires equipment renewal, particularly video cameras. The university administration has initiated the process to update this equipment, expected in the first half of 2024, funded by available university resources.

For renewing information resources, teachers responsible for study programmes coordinate with the library. The need for study resources is analysed, and acquisition recommendations are made by teachers and library employees, including subject librarians. These curators regularly communicate with faculty councils, inviting participation in the development of information resource collections and the acquisition of new documents relevant to studies.

The principles and criteria for forming the information resources fund are defined by VMU's *Description of the Procedure for Forming the Information Resources Fund*. This document outlines the acquisition, access, and structure of the library fund, including monitoring indicators. The academic community can submit proposals for needed publications through an interactive form on the library website, specifying the requirements. Teachers receive feedback on resource availability, deadlines, storage locations, and access conditions. The university community can also order publications not available at VMU library through the interlibrary loan system.

ANALYSIS AND CONCLUSION (regarding 6.1.)

VMU clearly meets the following aims, providing world-class facilities conducive to university work and study:

Aim 6.1.1. *Facilities, informational, and financial resources are adequate and sufficient for an effective learning process.* VMU's communication programmes benefit from well-equipped facilities and resources that support effective teaching and learning. The university offers a variety of classrooms and computer labs, all outfitted with the necessary technological tools to facilitate a diverse range of teaching methods. The library provides extensive resources, ensuring students have the support needed for their academic pursuits. The infrastructure is inclusive, with provisions for students with disabilities. The comprehensive virtual learning environment and IT tools further enhance the learning experience by enabling efficient communication and progress monitoring.

Aim 6.1.2. *There is continuous planning for and upgrading of resources.* VMU demonstrates a strong commitment to the continuous improvement of its resources. Annual resource development plans are prepared by faculties and reviewed by university authorities, ensuring that infrastructure and technological needs are met. The university systematically updates hardware and software, maintaining high standards of security and functionality. Recent upgrades to various facilities reflect this proactive approach, with significant investments in new equipment and technology. Plans for further enhancements are in place, indicating ongoing efforts to support the evolving needs of students and faculty.

AREA 6: CONCLUSIONS

AREA 6	Negative - 1 Does not meet the requirements	Satisfactory - 2 Meets the requirements, but there are substantial shortcomings to be eliminated	Good - 3 Meets the requirements, but there are shortcomings to be eliminated	Very good - 4 Very well nationally and internationally without any shortcomings	Exceptional - 5 Exceptionally well nationally and internationally without any shortcomings
First cycle					
Second cycle					

COMMENDATIONS

1. Excellent learning and multimedia facilities.
2. Clearly well-financed and well thought-out student spaces.

RECOMMENDATIONS

To address shortcomings

No shortcomings were identified

For further improvement

1. As noted in the SER, the Media Laboratory at V. Putvinskio Street requires equipment renewal, particularly video cameras.

2. The classrooms and learning facilities at V. Putvinskio Street could also feel somewhat cramped and narrow and could do with possible expansion or remodelling.

AREA 7: QUALITY ASSURANCE AND PUBLIC INFORMATION

- 7.1. The development of the field of study is based on an internal quality assurance system involving all stakeholders and continuous monitoring, transparency and public information

FACTUAL SITUATION

7.1.1. Internal quality assurance system for the programmes is effective

VMU has specific procedures to support quality assurance on various levels from SPCs to central university bodies according to the *Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area*. Responsibilities for the development and approval of study programmes, as well as ongoing monitoring of study programmes are clearly defined at the university level, faculty level, department level and study programme level.

Among the documents mentioned in the SER (p. 81f), the *VMU Quality Manual* presents the principles, responsibilities and processes of quality assurance as well as related documents and quality indicators aimed at the continuous quality enhancement of studies and learning. *The Description of Procedure for Study Quality Assurance at VMU* defines in more detail the quality assurance processes, instruments and responsibilities when planning, implementing, evaluating and improving studies.

As appears from the SER (section 7.1), the Senate and Rectorate discuss strategic issues of study programmes in the field, and they approve essential renewals. Study-related decisions are made by the Faculty Councils, the SPCs, Deans of the Faculties and Heads of the Departments. The Faculty Councils are responsible for the quality assurance of the whole study field, and the Heads of the Departments and the Deans of the Faculties supervise the Programmes.

SPC's main responsibilities include coordination of the programme's implementation regarding the curriculum-related questions and assurance of programme quality. The SPC performs internal programme quality assessment and renewals, and they are responsible for the preparation and implementation of the programme quality improvement plans. The SPC makes sure that programme learning outcomes correspond to the labour market and society's needs, and they maintain contact with social stakeholders.

Each programme in the communication field of study has its own SPC. The chairpersons are in charge of coordination of programme quality assurance and effective SPC work, they organise annual programme assessment and preparation of quality improvement plans as well as monitoring the implementation of these plans.

Teachers are responsible for the revision of the programme learning outcomes and curriculum design to include recent research and didactic requirements and trends. The social partners' representatives participate in the revision of the programme learning outcomes to make sure they are in line with labour market needs, and they provide recommendations for renewal. Programme alumni and student representatives are also actively involved and contribute to quality management and curriculum renewals within the SPCs.

The SPC carries out an analysis of studies each year on the basis of statistical study information, data gathered by surveys, etc. The annual analysis includes the relevance of the study programme to the latest trends in the programme area and to the labour market and its needs, the demand for the study programme, the

professionalism and evaluation results of the study programme's teachers, the achievements of students, the mobility of students and teachers, etc. The results of the assessment are applied by the SPC when preparing the annual study programme improvement plans.

7.1.2. Involvement of stakeholders (students and others) in internal quality assurance is effective

In the SER, VMU highlights the active involvement of social partners in the implementation, evaluation, and improvement of its communication study programmes. The Faculty of Arts maintains a periodically updated list of over 30 diverse organisations as social partners, reflecting different cultural perspectives and representing the entire creative industries labour market. Representatives from these social partners participate in SPCs, offering feedback on the programmes' alignment with labour market requirements and the relevance of student practical skills. They are also involved in thesis defence committees. Information from social partners is also gathered through surveys, Career Days at the university, targeted discussions, and cooperation agreements with cultural and creative organisations, including both national institutions and private creative businesses.

Students are encouraged to actively provide feedback in surveys and informal discussions with faculty staff and lecturers. VMU Council, Senate, various commissions, Student Parliament, faculty councils, SPCs, course elders of study programmes, and dormitory councils include student representatives.

In graduate surveys organised by the university, which are conducted 12 months after graduation, alumni participation is minimal.

7.1.3. Information on the programmes, their external evaluation, improvement processes, and outcomes is collected, used and made publicly available

Results of surveys and stakeholder discussions, statistical data, external experts' conclusions, etc. are applied in the improvement of studies. The SER details the collection of data as referred to in the previous sections as well as the stakeholders involved.

When following the link from the SER to pages on VMU faculties, only the Lithuanian version of the website could be accessed. When switching to English, the page was not working and showed a 404 Error (at least during the evaluation period). For this reason, a translator was used to get acquainted with the information published on the faculties' websites.

General application procedure and deadlines, requirements, and information about tuition fees and scholarships are clearly explained and available on the *Admission to Degree Studies* webpage of the VMU website.

Accreditation decisions and external reports of VMU fields of study already evaluated can be found on VMU's website. However, the gateway to progress reports is not straightforward and only outdated ones could be located.

7.1.4. Student feedback is collected and analysed

Description of Procedure of Feedback for Improvement of Quality of Studies at VMU governs feedback-gathering processes. Students are encouraged to actively provide feedback in surveys, the SPCs and Faculty

Council discussions and direct conversations with lecturers, while student representatives contribute to planned improvements in study programmes. University surveys are conducted using an electronic survey system. A variety of student surveys is provided: 1) first-year Bachelor’s survey (takes place in order to get to know about students’ reasons for choosing VMU and the programme and their expectations and concerns); 2) surveys on each study subject (material, study methods, workload and course relevance are evaluated); 3) EXIT surveys for both BA and MA graduates (students rate the whole study programme and their readiness for the labour market); 4) StudentPulse (identify the need to revise study content and strengthen practical courses). Lecturers and faculty staff attract students to participate in direct more informal discussions on study material and study process throughout the study year.

Generally, students rate communication programmes at VMU as ‘good’ and ‘good enough’. VMU students highlight the top qualifications of teachers, good communication and the support that they received during their studies. There is a space for improvement in terms of participation in student organisations and international experience. It is seen that students’ voices are heard (e.g., changes were implemented regarding thesis preparation).

ANALYSIS AND CONCLUSION (regarding 7.1.)

During the visit, it was evident that social partners and alumni play a crucial role in curriculum development, updating, and quality assurance processes. They engage in university life in various ways, such as giving lectures, offering internships, participating in volunteer events, collaborating with students on cultural projects, providing feedback, and suggesting improvements in response to changing environments.

Social partners are genuinely passionate about collaborating with the university, exemplifying successful mutual benefits. The report mentions plans to establish an advisory body composed of external stakeholders to sustain the integration of social partners in training and curriculum development efforts. This initiative is highly recommended to further enhance these collaborations.

Responsibilities for the development and approval of study programmes, as well as ongoing monitoring of study programmes are clearly defined at the university level, faculty level, department level and study programme level. The continuous quality enhancement of studies and learning demonstrates a high degree of adaptability to incorporate relevant feedback to continuously improve the courses and programmes.

AREA 7: CONCLUSIONS

AREA 7	Negative - 1 Does not meet the requirements	Satisfactory - 2 Meets the requirements, but there are substantial shortcomings to be eliminated	Good - 3 Meets the requirements, but there are shortcomings to be eliminated	Very good - 4 Very well nationally and internationally without any shortcomings	Exceptional - 5 Exceptionally well nationally and internationally without any shortcomings
First cycle					
Second cycle					

COMMENDATIONS

1. The university employs a diverse range of surveys to gather comprehensive feedback and identify areas for improvement across different aspects of the student experience.
2. VMU demonstrates a commitment to acting upon student feedback by implementing changes, thereby enhancing the overall quality of education.
3. The continuous quality enhancement of studies demonstrates a high degree of adaptability to incorporate relevant feedback.

RECOMMENDATIONS

To address shortcomings

No shortcomings were identified

For further improvement

1. Not many graduate students participate in various surveys provided by VMU, thus, there is a need to popularise or make surveys more interactive to alumni to make formal involvement higher.
2. VMU should ensure that all webpages related to quality assurance, programme descriptions and admission requirements can be easily reached in both English/Lithuanian languages (even though communication studies are conducted in Lithuanian, there are many incoming students from abroad).

V. SUMMARY

The panel expresses gratitude to the VMU community for their thorough preparation and engagement during the evaluation process. The clarity of the self-evaluation report and the organisation of the site visit were highly appreciated.

The programme aims and learning outcomes are well-aligned with societal and labour market needs, demonstrating a clear understanding of the increasing demand for communication professionals and the necessity to develop new competencies. This alignment is consistently reflected in the communication study programmes' objectives, course content, and assessment methods, ensuring that the learning outcomes are effectively integrated and articulated.

The curriculum aligns well with various national and European strategic documents and market studies, providing students with a well-structured progression from undergraduate to postgraduate levels. The programmes offer flexibility for students to tailor their studies to individual needs and include innovative teaching practices and robust Erasmus opportunities.

VMU fosters a strong research culture, though there is a noted need for greater critical engagement to enhance the integration of innovative thinking and practice. The university supports students comprehensively through academic, financial, mental, and social resources, and ensures clear recognition processes for prior learning and qualifications.

The academic staff at VMU are highly qualified and engaged in research and teaching, bringing practical knowledge and expertise to the programmes. The involvement of social partners and alumni in curriculum development and quality assurance further strengthens the programmes.

Overall, the panel found VMU's communication programmes to be of high quality, with a clear commitment to continuous improvement and relevance to current trends and market demands.

VI. EXAMPLES OF EXCELLENCE

The range and quality of learning and multimedia facilities demonstrated a sustained commitment to providing students with every opportunity to explore, experiment and develop relevant skills and the potential to apply theory in these practices. The inclusion of analogue technologies in addition to digital facilities provides students with a deeper level of understanding and enhanced opportunities for experimentation and innovation. The additional benefits of these facilities were evident in the extra-curricular projects that students engaged with in their own time with or without professional staff. The use of these facilities by industry professionals means that students can experience professional practices first-hand. Beyond this, these facilities provide the opportunity for staff, practitioners and students to be part of a wider learning community that goes beyond the University walls.