



STUDIJŲ KOKYBĖS VERTINIMO CENTRAS
CENTRE FOR QUALITY ASSESSMENT IN HIGHER EDUCATION

COMMUNICATION FIELD OF STUDY

Vilnius University (VU)

EXTERNAL EVALUATION REPORT

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I. INTRODUCTION

1.1. OUTLINE OF THE EVALUATION PROCESS

The study field 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 study field.

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 a HEI; 2) a site visit of the review panel to the HEI; 3) the external evaluation report (EER) prepared by the review panel 4) accreditation decision taken by SKVC and its publication; 4) follow-up activities.

The main outcome of the evaluation process is the EER prepared by the review panel. The HEI is forwarded the draft EER to report 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 a HEI is not happy with the outcome of the evaluation, HEI 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).

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: Prof. dr. Ana Gaio
2. Academic member: Dr. Alberto Luis García García
3. Academic member: Prof. dr. Toni-Matti Karjalainen
4. Social partner: Artūras Olšauskas
5. Student representative: Adrian-Vasile Lăzărescu

1.3. SITE VISIT

The site visit was organized on 25 April 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)
- Team responsible for 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

Founded in 1579, Vilnius University (VU) is the oldest and largest higher education institution in Lithuania. VU is a public, self-governed institution whose structure is defined in the *Statute of Vilnius University* and implemented by its governing bodies, *Senate, Council, and Rector* in their respective capacities. The University has 15 core academic units: 11 faculties, 1 institute, 1 centre, 1 academy and 1 business school delivering programmes across a wide range of disciplines: Chemistry, Geosciences, Economics, Business Administration, Philosophy, Philology, Physics, Life Sciences, History, Communication, Mathematics, Informatics, Medicine, Education, International Relations, Political Science, Law and Business.

Overview of the study field

VU's Communication studies, and namely the programmes being evaluated – the first cycle (BA) study programme in Creative Communication, and the second cycle MAs in Communication Sciences, Public Relations, and International Communication – are based in the Faculty of Communication. Established in 1991, the FoC comprises of four research units, the Departments of: Book, Media and Publishing Studies; Organisational Information and Communication Studies; Digital Cultures and Communication; and the Centre for Journalism and Media Studies, which conduct research in their respective subjects and support the quality of studies. Research undertaken by FoC's groups includes: documentary media change and expressions; information and communication infrastructure and activities in organisations; digitalisation, communication and culture, analysing digital exclusion and inequality, digital storytelling; journalism, media and political communication in Lithuania and Europe. The Faculty also publishes academic journals and organises national and international conferences to disseminate research and promote cooperation; it also holds popular science events.

Previous external evaluations

The BA programme in Creative Communication was launched in 2011 and was evaluate for registration purposes only.

Previous evaluations of the MA programmes in the field of communication include: 2010 Communication Sciences (accredited for 6 years), 2010 'International Communication (accredited for 6 years), 2015 'Public Relations (accredited for 6 years).

Documents and information used in the review

The following documents were provided by the HEI before or during the site visit:

- *Self-evaluation report and its annexes*
- *Final theses*

Additional sources of information used by the review panel:

The following additional sources of information have been used by the review panel:

- *Sample Student Practical Training Agreement*
- *Number of applicants and admissions to the BA programme in Creative Communication and the competition scores of those admitted, 2020-23*
- *Drop-out rates in 2022*

II. STUDY PROGRAMMES IN THE FIELD

First cycle/LTQF 6

Title of the study programme	Creative Communication
State code	6121JX026
Type of study (college/university)	University studies
Mode of study (full time/part time) and nominal duration (in years)	Full-time, 4 years
Workload in ECTS	240
Award (degree and/or professional qualification)	Bachelor of Social Sciences
Language of instruction	Lithuanian
Admission requirements	Secondary education
First registration date	2011-12-22
Comments (including remarks on joint or interdisciplinary nature of the programme, mode of provision)	

Second cycle/LTQF 7

Title of the study programme	Communication Sciences	Public Relations	International Communication
State code	6211JX033	6211JX031	6211JX034
Type of study (college/university)	University studies	University studies	University studies
Mode of study (full time/part time) and nominal duration (in years)	Full-time, 2 years	Full-time, 1,5 years	Full-time, 1,5 years
Workload in ECTS	120	90	90
Award (degree and/or professional qualification)	Master of Social Sciences	Master of Social Sciences	Master of Social Sciences
Language of instruction	Lithuanian	Lithuanian	Lithuanian, English
Admission requirements	Higher education	Higher education	Higher education
First registration date	1997-05-19	1998-06-25	1997-05-19
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 Communication study field at Vilnius University is given a positive evaluation.

No.	Evaluation Area	Evaluation points ^{1*}
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	4
7.	Quality management and public information	4
Total:		28

The second cycle of Communication study field at Vilnius University is given a positive evaluation.

No.	Evaluation Area	Evaluation points ^{2*}
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	4
7.	Quality management and public information	4
Total:		28

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.

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III. 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

BA and MA programmes are reviewed by FoC study programme committees who consider the local labour market and its requirements as well as the competition in both the Lithuanian and international communication studies markets. A range of up-to-date research at Lithuanian and international level, feedback from employers (social partners), and regional economic, social, and security challenges and the various industry sectors are considered which go on to inform curricula, shape their uniqueness and relevance to the various segments of the labour market.

The employment rate of the BA programme in Creative Communication 2021 graduates 12 months after graduation was 75%, with most, 67.5%, employed in the private sector. MA Public Relations and MA Communication Sciences presented an even healthier picture with (respectively) 80% and 78% of graduates being employed in Lithuania 12 months after their studies' completion in both the private, public and state funded sector. This demonstrates that both cycles' programmes and their aims are relevant to the labour market and industry needs at their relevant levels.

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

VU's mission is 'to strengthen the cognitive and creative potential of Lithuania and the world, foster academic and other spiritual and social values, educate active and responsible citizens of Lithuania and social leaders' whilst strategic priorities involve, namely, 'The quality of studies (active, individual and interdisciplinary studies based on scientific inquiry, strengthening general competencies, enabling all students to gain international experience, increasing their engagement in their studies and training them to operate in the context of globalisation; [...] so that graduates are able to address societal challenges and pursue career changes.' These priorities are reflected in all four degrees' learning outcomes, the approaches to their delivery and the emphasis placed on the interdisciplinarity and internationalisation dimensions on all programmes.

ANALYSIS AND CONCLUSION (regarding 1.1.)

It is clear from the programme's performance in terms of graduate employment (cycles 1 and 2) that care is taken to ensure that programmes both reflect society's and the sector's needs and produce graduates that are ready to successfully join the industry's workforce and diversity of occupations. The programmes' aims and learning outcomes are aligned with VU's mission and relevant strategic priorities.

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

All programmes are compliant with the relevant study regulations as shown on Tables 1-4 below.

Table 1. BA Creative Communication compliance with legal requirements for first cycle study programmes

Criteria	Legal requirements (ECTS)	Programme compliance (ECTS)
Total programme workload	180–240 ECTS	240 ECTS
Study field	No less than 120 ECTS	170 ECTS
Studies specified by the University (including optional study)	Remaining ECTS	70 ECTS
- Final thesis	No less than 15 ECTS	20 ECTS
- Internship	No less than 15 ECTS	15 ECTS
Contact hours	No less than 20% of learning	30.5%
Individual student learning	No less than 30% of learning	69.5%

Table 2. MA Communication Sciences compliance with legal requirements for second cycle study programmes

Criteria	Legal requirements (ECTS)	Programme compliance (ECTS)
Total programme workload	90 or 120 ECTS	120 ECTS
Study field	No less than 60 ECTS	85 ECTS
Studies specified by the University (including optional study)	Remaining ECTS	Up to 35 ECTS of which 20 ECTS must be interdisciplinary
- Final thesis	No less than 30 ECTS	30 ECTS
Contact hours	No less than 10% of learning	21.4%
Individual student learning	No less than 50% of learning	78.6%

Table 3. MA Public Relations compliance with legal requirements for second cycle study programmes

Criteria	Legal requirements (ECTS)	Programme compliance (ECTS)
Total programme workload	90 or 120 ECTS	90 ECTS
Study field	No less than 60 ECTS	75 ECTS
Studies specified by the University (including optional study)	Remaining ECTS	15 ECTS of which 10 ECTS must be interdisciplinary
- Final thesis	No less than 30 ECTS	30 ECTS
Contact hours	No less than 10% of learning	20.8%
Individual student learning	No less than 50% of learning	79.2%

Table 4. MA International Communication compliance with legal requirements for second cycle study programmes

Criteria	Legal requirements (ECTS)	Programme compliance (ECTS)
Total programme workload	90 or 120 ECTS	90 ECTS
Study field	No less than 60 ECTS	85 ECTS
Studies specified by the University (including optional study)	Remaining ECTS	5 ECTS
- Final thesis	No less than 30 ECTS	30 ECTS
Contact hours	No less than 10% of learning	17.6%

Individual student learning	No less than 50% of learning	82.4%
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1.2.2. Programme aims, learning outcomes, teaching/learning and assessment methods are aligned

The documentation provided in Appendix 3 shows each programme's learning outcomes mapped against individual modules/subjects. These are clearly defined, are constructively aligned with well-designed/ subject relevant teaching and learning methods and assessment and clearly map onto their respective programme's aims. Assessment across the different programmes includes a creative and relevant mix of methods and formats providing a diverse range of opportunities for students to apply and demonstrate learned competences/knowledge, practical and creative skills. A student-centred learning model, comprising of a cumulative (continuous, interim and final) approach to assessment is in force in most units across programmes, enabling (1) active student engagement, (2) consistent and varied assessment of knowledge and skills, (3) monitoring of progress and achievement, and (4) workload distribution. Feedback on student performance is provided through this process although in so doing care must also be taken not to over-assess or overburden students' workloads.

1.2.3. Curriculum ensures consistent development of student competences

On the BA, the distribution of course units through semesters ensures the progressive and consistent development of competences from general toward subject-specific competencies covering specific relevant areas of communication and creative expression. The programme promotes a wide range of creative activities, practical as well as theory based alongside its implementation in practice e.g. through 3 internships. Elective subjects are offered in semesters 2-8 helping students to further explore particular areas of interest in-depth. First cycle students in the Student stakeholder meeting, however, expressed their anxieties around job seeking and a balance between theory and practice that takes this into account. Social partners also expressed the need to embed their topics or research needs into the programmes as well as more advanced critical thinking training and further development of practical skills training.

MA level studies follow a similar pattern whereby compulsory units develop foundational knowledge and skills specific to communication sciences and research in the field whilst elective units allow students to shape the content of their studies around individual need. Semester 3 is dedicated to MA thesis development under topic specialist supervision.

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

Students are provided with a number of opportunities to personalise their studies according to their needs, The interdisciplinary nature of the programmes, the mix of academic and applied approaches, and the programme structures in themselves provide for the customisation of studies. Individual plans of study, participating in academic exchanges, and the possibility to choose a secondary (minor) area of study are available to students. Programmes allocate a 'basket' of 60 credits for students to choose units/subjects of individual interest offered across VU faculties, interdisciplinary modules, general university units, additional internship, or participation in international exchanges.

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

VU's BA (20 ECTS) and MA (30 ECTS) theses are relatively substantial in comparison with other national HE providers. The preparation of theses and its assessment are internally regulated by VU enabling a rigorous

process of research development and assessment that culminates with the thesis defence before a committee of academics and social partners. The thesis lists (Appendix 5) for BA and MA reflect a vast range of topics and individual interests.

ANALYSIS AND CONCLUSION (regarding 1.2.)

The excellent and detailed programme information provided to this panel show how the 4 Communication BA and MA programmes’ aims and learning outcomes are current, relevant and diverse. Curricula and module diets are diverse but coherent within their discipline, provide for the progressive and consistent development of competences and skills as well as a variety of learning opportunities to students that cater not only for the diversity of the industry’s careers but that of students’ personal interests and ambitions. Assessment is likewise diverse, progressive and engaging. Excellent however the approach to assessment may be, care must also be taken not to over-assess or overburden students’ workloads.

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				X	
Second cycle				X	

COMMENDATIONS

1. Excellent programme documentation: detailed, clear and well presented.
2. The implementation of Assessment for Learning strategies across programmes/units.
3. The programmes’ focus on interdisciplinarity.

RECOMMENDATIONS

To address shortcomings

1. Not identified.

For further improvement

1. To keep in check (especially on the BA programme) potential over-assessment or the danger to overburden student workloads in an already busy programme.
2. To ensure that there is a meaningful balance between theoretical and practical content, especially on the BA programme where the acquisition of professional competences tends to be a more immediate concern of students.

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

The Communication study field belongs to the Communication and Information science field in the Social Sciences. Research in this field is carried out at the University by the Faculty of Communication. The 2023 report on the Faculty of Communication's comparative expert evaluation of R&D activities (2018–2022) concluded that the faculty carries out recognised research activities, including articles in high-level international research journals and book chapters in publications produced by international publishers and that it has successfully attracted external R&D funding. This highlights the Faculty's research impact both in academia and society. Researchers are also actively engaged in the work of various governmental authorities and other organisations, demonstrating the strong impact of the faculty at the national level. The Faculty's potential and progress are also reflected in the annual evaluation of research and artistic activities. The number of points obtained for research output has been increasing, and the quality of R&D activities has increased from 3 points to 3.5 points in the 2018–2023 period (compared to 2013–2018). Among Lithuanian higher education institutions, the field of Communication and Information sciences at Vilnius University scores second after the field of Communication and Information at Vytautas Magnus University (12.0) but is ahead of all other institutions.

During the period under evaluation, researchers working in the field of Information and Communication science, either alone or with co-authors, published 8 monographs, 4 studies, and 119 articles in peer-reviewed journals. In addition, research results have been presented at international conferences in Lithuania and abroad, and the faculty has actively engaged in national and international research projects with a high number of varied themes, including many programmes of the European Commission.

Moreover, the Faculty has established research teams organized around specific research topics. Research groups and plans are approved for a period of three years. Groups of researchers can submit applications for the establishment of an academic department within the Faculty. They are evaluated by the Scientific Committee that then give recommendations to the Board regarding the establishment of the academic unit. Four structural units were established at the Faculty for 2020–2023. The Department of Digital Cultures and Communication conducts research on differences in the consumption of digital entertainment cultural services resulting from digital and other social inequalities, encompassing the various forms of these differences and exploring the potential of services to enhance social and digital inclusion. The Centre for Journalism and Media Studies conducts research in the field of journalism and media in Lithuania, focusing on structural, ethical, technological, cultural and political issues in media and journalism. The Department of Information and Communication Research conducts research on the Information and Communication infrastructure and activities of organisations in the context of a networked society. The Department of Book, Media and Publishing Studies conducts research on traditional and digital media publishing phenomena and processes, media reception, and organises fundamental research in book studies, documentation research, media studies and applied research on publishing, reading and memory institutions.

Research results and plans of the researchers working in these units are discussed in annual interviews with the Dean of the Faculty. The research production of the highest level is awarded. The incentive for high-level scientific achievements amounts to at least 5% of the sum of the salaries of the academic staff of the Faculty. The Faculty's internal funding mechanism for research activities also encourages researchers to undertake small-scale research projects. Researchers can also apply for funding from the centrally managed Vilnius University Science Promotion Fund which funds the mobility of teachers and the publication of articles. Furthermore, the Faculty has also developed a Faculty Science Development Plan. This strengthens the internationalisation of science, attracts young researchers and encourages them to engage in research projects. The plan also aims to promote activities that involve students in research and enable researchers and teachers more active engagement in creating positive changes in the society.

Researchers collaborate actively with colleagues from various foreign universities in terms of research projects and publications. Partnerships are also developed with cultural institutions from Lithuania and other countries, and the Faculty also coordinated the implementation of the Europeana Archaeology project, funded by the Connecting Europe Facility. The consortium included 16 partners from 14 European countries. Another example is the Debunk EU, which in cooperation with other partners concerned disinformation analysis and media literacy campaigns in various countries. The Debunk EU and the Faculty of Communication signed a cooperation agreement for research on disinformation in 2022, making empirical data and digital tools available to researchers of the Faculty. Moreover, the Political Communication Research Centre, established in 2023, gathers faculty researchers and practitioners in terms of monitoring and conducting research on political election communication and promoting active participation in discussions related to political election campaigns.

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

Studies at Vilnius University are heavily based on scientific research. The integration of research and studies takes concretely place in specific course units provided by teachers who specialise and have numerous research publications in the subject area in question. The evaluation highlights a high number of such integrations. In addition to scientific publications, various new products such databases, websites, virtual exhibitions, and maps are generated in research projects and serve as practical examples in teaching. The research interests of the teachers are also reflected in the topics of the student's final theses that engage students in up-to-date research in the field of communication research. Besides in the courses, information on the latest developments in science and technology is presented and discussed in other lectures, seminars and exercises. The required literature in the courses also include the latest literature, and information related to the latest scientific knowledge and the presentations of technological innovations.

Teachers are responsible for ensuring that the contents of the courses are relevant and up-to-date. They actively follow developments within the field, update the list of required and additional course literature with the latest publications, and include topical examples and case studies in the teaching material. The Study Programme Committee assesses the relevance and currency of the material and reviews the integration of the latest research findings and the course content, either by the approval of a new course outline or after the teacher has submitted and updated the course description. Students are also required to conduct a thorough literature review of the topic in their coursework or thesis to ensure that they are in line with the latest scientific developments. The choice of the literature is one of the assessment criteria.

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

In addition to described curriculum-related activities, students are actively engaged in research in other ways as well. Research-related activities for students start at the beginning of their studies. For example, the Faculty has a body called the Student Scientific Society that aims to foster cooperation between students and researchers by organising science communication and research activities. The Society contributes to the organisation of scientific conferences, initiates discussions, training, and open lectures on various topics of communication and information sciences. Students of all three study cycles are able to join these activities. During the pandemics, the Society was not that active, but efforts to revitalize this initiative have been done by discovering new methods of collaboration between faculty and students for joint research activities.

Another means of active integration is the Faculty's internal research funding system. In research project evaluation, extra points are awarded for student involvement. As a result, all projects funded for example in 2023 included students. The MA programmes in *Communication Studies and International Communication* also offer students possibilities for a research internship where they can develop research projects within external organisations. Some students are actively engaged in research activities and preparations of scientific publications with their supervisors, and teachers can involve students in national and international scientific events taking place at the Faculty. They can participate as speakers, discussion participants and active listeners in these events. Moreover, students have the opportunity to benefit from the Research Council of Lithuania's financial support for summer internships or research during the semester. Students who actively participate in research activities get extra points for admission to higher levels of study. Undergraduate and postgraduate students are also invited to submit their works to thesis competitions of student theses, and the Faculty has received many awards in them.

ANALYSIS AND CONCLUSION (regarding 2.1.)

The research environment and practices of the program are evaluated as very strong. Higher education integrates well the latest developments in scientific and artistic research and clearly enables students to develop their skills for scientific and artistic research. Research within the field of study is at a good level, the curriculum is linked to the current themes and developments in the field, the research by the Faculty is successfully integrated into the subjects taught, and there is a richness of opportunities offered for students in terms of engaging in research activities throughout the study cycle.

The research performance has clearly improved during the evaluation period. There is a well-functioning system and incentives in place to ensure effective planning and implementation of scientific activities. The organisational and collegial support have also enabled a vibrant research environment within the Faculty. The teaching staff is involved in a wide range of national and international research activities. However, international mobility in terms of research visits may not be fully exercised due to the contractual situations of the teaching staff.

AREA 2: 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				X	

Second cycle				X	
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COMMENDATIONS

1. Strong level of peer support and positive environment within the Faculty.
2. Critical and satisfied students (especially in the second cycle) who value the balance between research and practice and proudly represent the university.

RECOMMENDATIONS

To address shortcomings

1. Not identified.

For further improvement

1. Further increasing international cooperation in research activities, particularly concerning joint publications with foreign researchers.
2. Improving international mobility of the staff by revisiting their contractual situations and ensuring they allow longer research visits when appropriate.
3. Encouraging teachers to collaborate more with students in research activities, with clearer incentives provided also for students themselves, not only in terms of project support by the university.
4. Creating more research collaboration possibilities between first and second cycle students.

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

Admission to the BA programme is open to persons who have completed secondary education. For Lithuanian citizens, admission is based on a competition score, minding that structure and calculation methodology are determined in advance by the Minister. Usually, the bachelor's study programme in Creative Communication is chosen by citizens of the Republic of Lithuania, but the programme had candidates from neighbouring countries Poland or Ukraine

According to the SER, admission to MA study programmes is open to successful graduates from university undergraduate programmes in any field of study. The competitive admission process is autonomously conducted through Vilnius University's admission systems. The competition score for admission to Lithuanian state-funded study places is:

- the weighted average of the grades in the Diploma Supplement(s), excluding the final thesis and/or final examination(s);
- the grade (or average grade) of the final thesis and/or final exam, or the average grade of the final exams (weight = 2);

Also, additional points can be awarded applicants for significant achievements in international and national science olympiads and academic competitions, participation in military service and volunteering,

Applicants to the “International Communication” study programme who have a degree in another field than communication must submit a motivation letter where they should outline the reasons of choosing the study programme, the level of preparation for the studies and the connections to the future career. If they want to study in English, they should have at least B2 level of English. For this MA programme, admission contains an interview and the university decided to not compare the performance of candidates who are not eligible for a state-funded study place through the competitive score.

International Communication MA programme is delivered in Lithuanian and in English. In the evaluated period, all students that chose to study in English were foreigners (26 in 2020, 17 in 2021, 15 in 2022 and 13 in 2023). We can observe that the number of students in the English group decreased every year, halving since 2020).

The number of admissions to the MA programmes in Communication Sciences and Public Relations remains stable, with slight differences in the number of admissions related to the number of admissions to non-state-funded study places. Every year, 11–14 students are admitted to MA Communication Sciences and 17–22 students are accepted to MA Public Relations.

According to the additional data given by VU, the number of students dropping out of studies at the Faculty of Communication in 2022 would be 16.85% for bachelor's degree programmes (compared VU's overall indicator is 30.20%) and 20.24% for master's degree programmes (compared to VU's overall indicator is 21.60%).

At Bachelor studies, in 2020-2021, VU received 1429 applications (297 as first priority). They admitted 91 candidates on state funded places and 14 candidates on non-funded places. Next academic year, the university had 1145 applications (255 as first priority). They admitted 100 candidates on state funded places and 2 candidates on non-funded places. In 2022-2023, VU received 1203 applications (256 as first priority). They admitted 89 candidates on state funded places and 22 candidates on non-funded places.

Regarding the admission scores, in the evaluated period, for state funded places, the maximum admission score was between 9.89 and 11.74 (due to extra points) and the minimum score was between 7 and 7.5. Only in 2020 there is a significant difference between the minimum score, being 5.91. In the next two academic years the admission score is near identical (7.2 and 7.21)

The average score for state funded places was 8.24 (in 2020), 7.94 (in 2021) and 8.13 (in 2022).

For not-funded by state places the average score was 7.7 (in 2020), 7.27 (in 2021) and 7.61 (2022).

There is a difference between the averages around 0.5-0.6, which is not so significant in terms of students' level of knowledge.

Information about admission conditions and requirements is published on the websites and also on social media pages.

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

According to the SER, VU recognises different qualifications and competencies acquired by students. The university has its own procedures to recognise qualifications and respects the national laws and regulations.

134 applications for the assessment and recognition of qualifications obtained abroad were received between 2020 and 2022. The largest number of applications came from applicants for the MA programme in International Communication, with a few additional applications for the BA programme in Creative Communication. In most cases (93%) decisions were affirmative.

In the period from 2020–2021 to 2022–2023, 9 students of the analysed study programmes, who enrolled from other higher education institutions to continue their studies at VU, were credited with the subjects studied at other higher education institutions.

VU students may also submit applications to credit study results achieved through non-formal or informal learning following the description of procedures approved by the VU Senate. Information on the documents required for the recognition of competencies or qualifications and the crediting of study results is available on the website. During the period under review, no applications to credit competencies acquired through non-formal and/or informal learning were submitted.

ANALYSIS AND CONCLUSION (regarding 3.1.)

Despite stable admission numbers over the evaluated period, slight fluctuations occur in the acceptance of non-state-funded study places. Notably, dropout rates within the Communication faculty at VU remain lower than the university's overall indicators, indicating effective support mechanisms and academic guidance within the program.

Overall, VU's admission processes, coupled with its recognition mechanisms, contribute to a dynamic and inclusive academic environment, ensuring that students from diverse backgrounds have the opportunity to pursue their educational goals within the field of Communication Sciences.

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

According to the SER, students are introduced to mobility opportunities during Integration Week in their first year. Updated information on mobility is published on the website, Facebook account, newsletters and also is sent to the VU community by email. They also have the chance to contact the International Relations Department to address their questions.

As revealed in the visit, students are not so involved in international mobilities due to their work commitments and to inadequacy of the grant to cover the expenses of staying abroad.

During the period under analysis, 46 students in communication took advantage of the Erasmus+ exchange programme for partial studies. All students were successful in their studies in foreign higher education institutions and all planned credits were completed and credited (30 credits per student). In this period (2020-2023), 11 students (8 from MA and 3 BA) decided to have an internship experience abroad. In the last two academic years, 41 BA students and 5 MA students were involved in partial studies in other HEIs.

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

Regarding academic support, VU Student Services and Careers Office department offer assistance on various matters, including admissions, the study process, financial support and other academical related areas. They

also offer career counselling. This office also coordinates mentoring activities by helping students find an experienced, successful and inspiring mentor – a teacher, alumnus/alumna, representative of an organisation or another student more experienced to create a mentorship relationship.

Talking about financial support, all information about financial support for students is available on the websites of the VU and the Faculty of Communication and is presented to students during Integration Week. There are incentives and social scholarships, one-off social grants for financial assistance and for performances in arts, sports, culture etc. There is also an opportunity to apply for reducing tuition fees or for being exempted to pay tuition fees.

Each year, 100 of the most talented students from economically challenged families are awarded a special VU 450th Anniversary (formerly 440th Anniversary) scholarship, which currently amounts to 300 Euros per month and is provided for the first 10 months of their studies.

In matter of personal support, students who are citizens of foreign countries receive consultations from the International Relations Department of VU regarding visas, residence in Lithuania and other related issues. Professional psychologists and psychotherapists offer their services to VU students in three psychological counselling rooms located in three different VU buildings.

3.2.3. Higher education information and student counselling are sufficient

As specified in the SER and revealed in the discussions, The Vilnius University Students' Representation (VU SR) plays an important role in this process by contributing to academic and social well-being, organising cultural activities, and fostering student traditions.

A freshers' camp and integration week is organised for students of all undergraduate study programmes of the Faculty. These events include various meetings and discussions covering topics such as studies, the chosen profession, meetings with the Faculty representatives, presentations about the chosen study programmes, academic ethics requirements, essential information about the study process, counselling and support services, students' rights and obligations, leisure activities, and more.

The Faculty's Student Representative Office also assigns a senior student mentor to first-year undergraduate students, who can be contacted with any questions a newly enrolled student may have. Also, the Faculty's Student Representative Office also assigns a senior student mentor to first-year undergraduate students, who can be contacted with any questions a newly enrolled student may have.

All key institutional information for students is available on the VU website.

ANALYSIS AND CONCLUSION (regarding 3.2.)

The provision of comprehensive information, orientation events, and mentoring programs underscores the university's commitment to empowering students throughout their academic journey. The support ecosystem, including academic, financial, social, psychological, and personal domains, is robust and tailored to meet diverse student needs.

Furthermore, the active involvement of the Vilnius University Students' Representation enhances the academic and social well-being of students, fostering a supportive and inclusive community.

AREA 3: CONCLUSIONS

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

COMMENDATIONS

1. Very good academic and social support for students.

RECOMMENDATIONS

To address shortcomings

1. Not identified.

For further improvement

1. Not identified.

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

SER and site visit facts outline how the teaching and learning processes within the programs are designed to be student-centric and prepares students for advanced studies. Student-Centric participation is actively encouraged through various interactive and practical learning methods such as projects, case studies, and real-world applications, which are integral to the curriculum.

The programs offer clear pathways for continuation into graduate education, with master's and doctoral level studies that are well-structured to advance from undergraduate learning. SER highlights the use of innovative teaching methods including digital tools and blended learning environments which cater to the evolving educational landscape. The educational approach includes regular assessment and feedback mechanisms that allow for continuous improvement in teaching methods and curriculum design.

Most importantly, teaching and learning are designed to align closely with the needs of the labor market, ensuring that the educational outcomes are relevant and practical.

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

The university clearly demonstrates its commitment to making higher education available to every student. SER details a structured approach to consultations which are designed to guide socially vulnerable groups and students with individual needs on their educational options. Additionally, the university employs individualised study plans to accommodate students with specific needs, allowing flexibility in coursework, deadlines, and examination formats. On top of that, continuous investments in accessibility, such as ramps, elevators, and adapted restrooms, as well as accessible digital platforms, are examples of the university's commitment to inclusivity.

Implementing these strategies helps to create an inclusive educational environment that not only provides access but also supports the success of all students.

ANALYSIS AND CONCLUSION (regarding 4.1.)

It's clear that the university successfully meets its goal – it ensures that students are prepared for independent professional activity. A lot of effort is being invested in combining the student-centric learning method with the needs of the labour market. Additionally, important steps are being taken in the field of Structured Consultations and Investment in Accessibility.

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

Based on the review of the Self-Evaluation Report (SER) and additional observations from the site visit, the institution appears to have implemented an effective and transparent system.

Student Assessment monitoring is facilitated through the use of digital platforms that track and analyze student performance data. This system allows for real-time feedback and early identification of students who may require additional support.

Assessment criteria and grading policies are well-documented and openly shared with students at the beginning of each course. In addition, feedback mechanisms are in place, allowing students to receive detailed comments on their assessments.

On top of that, a clear policy on academic integrity is in place, which includes guidelines on plagiarism, cheating, and other forms of academic dishonesty.

To conclude, the measures implemented by the institution demonstrate a robust framework for student assessment.

4.2.2. Graduate employability and career are monitored

Now graduate employment and career paths are tracked using the karjera.lt system, which is shared across most Lithuanian higher education institutions. Despite its extensive use, the career management system

karjera.It has limitations, such as only collecting data on graduates who remain in Lithuania and excluding those who are self-employed or unemployed due to specific reasons like parental leave or illness.

Incorporating the opinions of graduates, social partners, and employers can significantly enhance the continuous improvement of educational programs.

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

The institution has established policies aimed at ensuring academic integrity, tolerance, and non-discrimination, which are critical for fostering a respectful and ethical academic environment.

Regular reviews of policy effectiveness are conducted, incorporating feedback from the community to improve and adapt policies as necessary.

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

The procedures for submitting and processing appeals and complaints at the institution are designed to be effective and accessible, ensuring that students and staff have a clear path to address their concerns.

ANALYSIS AND CONCLUSION (regarding 4.2.)

The review of SER and observations from the site visit indicate that the institution has effectively implemented a robust and transparent system for student assessment, progress monitoring, and assuring academic integrity. Therefore, while the system is effective and transparent, it requires sustained effort and periodic review to maintain its effectiveness and adapt to new academic challenges.

AREA 4: 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				X	
Second cycle				X	

COMMENDATIONS

1. The existing implementation includes regular training sessions for students and faculty on the importance of academic integrity and the use of plagiarism detection software.
2. Tolerance and Non-Discrimination policies prohibit discrimination based on race, gender, age, disability, sexual orientation, religion and similar.
3. A formal procedure is in place for reporting violations of these policies. This procedure ensures that complaints are handled promptly and fairly, with respect for confidentiality.

RECOMMENDATIONS

For further improvement

1. Continue hosting regular events such as career fairs, seminars, and workshops where employers can interact with current students and recent graduates, providing a platform for direct feedback.
2. Utilise internship and placement programs as a feedback mechanism with regular evaluations from employers about the performance of interns and recent graduates.
3. Analyse trends and changes in the job market to assess the demand for certain skills and competencies. Research the market using world-wide and self-adapted artificial intelligence tools. This analysis can help in adjusting educational programs to better align with employer needs.

AREA 5: TEACHING STAFF

5.1. Teaching staff is adequate to achieve learning outcomes

FACTUAL SITUATION

The evaluation of academic programs has shown that the ratio of professors with academic capabilities to achieve the program objectives is appropriate for both the first and second cycles of studies. It is worth noting that there are more professors with PhD degrees in MA studies than in BA studies. This is advantageous, as it benefits the quality of specialization in each cycle of studies.

However, it should be noted that the number of professors with PhD degrees in BA studies is not sufficient, as they only represent 7% of the total number of professors. In contrast, in Second Cycle studies, professors with PhD degrees represent 22% of the total number of professors.

To assist faculty in meeting their obligations, teacher training programs have mechanisms in place. The University itself finances research, publication of articles, and participation in international congresses, even among professors from different faculties. Funding for mobility is also available from European support systems.

The teaching staff's internationalization is in line with that of the students, which enhances the quality of the curricula. Professors from various countries, such as Poland, France, Germany, Sweden, Spain, etc., are part of the teaching staff. This benefits the integration of different cultural viewpoints in teaching and research topics.

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

There is an interesting predisposition towards faculty autonomy within the Faculty itself. Staff members told us at the meeting that there is a department of studies and a department of research. Each professor can decide whether or not to belong to a department. In addition, he/she can teach in the programs of another department. In other words, there is no real assignment of professors to a department, which reinforces the idea of finding the most specialized professor for a subject regardless of his or her departmental assignment.

As far as teaching is concerned, the subjects taught by the professors are directly related to their lines of research, both in BA and MA. The publications contributed by the professors are along the same lines. There is an integration between the profile of the teaching staff and the training objectives to be achieved in the curricula.

The years of professional experience are in the same direction; even given the high number of years of professional experience and teaching experience provided in most cases, it is assumed that they complement both activities. From the point of view of the skills to be acquired by the students, this dual activity helps to improve the training capacity in new workflows and technical means for a continuously evolving work environment.

In the MAs it is interesting and advisable to involve teachers with academic and research experience, together with professionals who are working on their doctoral thesis.

The majority of professors who leave the University are professionals who find it impossible to combine both jobs, as indicated in the SER. The number of associate professors is very high, so this risk is assumed in both BA and MA. At the same time, the professionals who teach incorporate up-to-date knowledge. Therefore, a balance must be achieved between both concepts in such a way that the stability of the teaching staff can be improved and the necessary relationship between the University and the company can be maintained.

The student/teacher ratio is reasonable in both BA and MA studies, highlighting the possible dedication that a professor can maintain with the MA students (1:3). For this reason, we do not understand that some students regret that some professors decide to give their class online and that they have feedback problems with the faculty to resolve doubts about their training. This point is key in order to maintain sufficient quality in the academic training of students. Online training should be a tool used to solve a need and not as a way to avoid the inconveniences of face-to-face training.

ANALYSIS AND CONCLUSION (regarding 5.1.)

VU has achieved a teaching staff with a high research capacity and a high level of teaching specialization. The curricular programs are highly specialized, so the faculty must satisfy this curricular requirement.

The major drawback is that there is a high number of full-time professors who are the ones who, together with retiring professors, have a higher dropout rate. We believe it is desirable to have a relatively stable faculty to help build a shared dynamic of teaching methodology. At the same time, it is important to motivate faculty professional development. In a faculty with such a large number of students, it is necessary to consolidate an academic trajectory that allows the formation of a team of professors who can embark on solid teaching developments in the medium and long term. Therefore, it would be convenient to establish a concrete and strategic plan to consolidate the exclusive dedication of the faculty to the University by increasing the ratio of professors and categories with the highest qualifications. Professional specialization can be achieved through updated course content delivered by associate professors, as well as the extensive experience of the professors. In order to establish a necessary link between the academic and productive sectors, it is essential to employ professors who are contractually stabilized. Focusing on this line of work can help reduce teacher dropout rates.

With a favorable student-to-teacher ratio, it is crucial to dedicate exquisite attention to the needs of the student body. This is achieved by creating study environments that allow each student to feel individually

attended to. To achieve this, we must avoid teaching techniques that inhibit the direct relationship between a teacher and their students. While online classes may be necessary, they should not be used as a substitute for face-to-face teaching.

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

FACTUAL SITUATION

There are sufficient mobility programs in which the VU is involved, so the possibilities for faculty exchange are reasonable.

Regarding teacher training, the VU has a system of regulation for the acquisition of competencies that is articulated through the Department Directors.

There is a Study Program Committee that coordinates every program. This Committee is important to articulate the teaching concepts to be taught in each subject and, at the same time, as we were told in the meeting, it helps professors to establish their strategic lines of research according to their professional development.

VU professors belong to different international organizations related to the area of Communication (ECREA, EUPRERA, NIC...) and others at a more local level. This fact demonstrates the vocation for the internationalization of the teaching staff, which leads to the need for mobility. To this end, they are attached to the main European funding programs for mobility. They have also launched 2018 a funding fund for the University itself related to faculty mobility and participation in international research projects, as well as mobility for teaching activities related to the delivery of content and the faculty's learning.

At the same time, they have designed a descriptor plan for the contribution to the quality of studies, on which the training opportunities demanded by the faculty to achieve academic excellence are based.

5.2.1. Opportunities for academic mobility of teaching staff are ensured

VU is part of several mobility programs funded by the European Union, which facilitate the exchange of professors between different European universities. Some of these programs include Erasmus, Erasmus Internship, Baltic Sea Virtual Campus, European Masters of Professional Communication, ARQUS, and COIMBRA Group Network Exchange. The average duration of these mobility programs is seven days, which is the standard period for mobility within the ERASMUS+ program. However, it is not clear from the information provided whether research stays of longer duration are common or not. This is because professors often have other work commitments outside of VU, and there is no faculty stabilization plan in place to allow for greater dedication to VU. Internationalization is crucial for creating academic and research connections, which can lead to more substantial research projects. Additionally, increasing the student/faculty ratio, especially in the MA program, and encouraging longer research stays could be a solution to this issue. In short, the ties of cooperation would be closer since it would be possible to collaborate in more consolidated research and teaching activities.

This spirit of internationalization also seems to translate into the University's relationship with international students. They have an international department and the Study Committee (Faculty and another at the university level) to help international students. They have tutors to help them.

International students have different perspectives on the same subject. The language and the professor motivate them to interchange their different points of view. This philosophy consolidated in VU's relationship with the students should also be consolidated for the faculty, since, although there are international professors who visit VU, we believe that this exchange should be encouraged even more.

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

During our interview with the faculty, we learned about the Professor Club. This is an informal group that meets once a month and includes professors from different disciplines, who even invite students to join them. This experience is fascinating because it promotes collaboration between professors from different fields, which can lead to interdisciplinary research topics and more relevant funding. Such collaborations are especially vital in the Social Sciences.

VU is dedicated to teacher training and has approved a plan to enhance the quality of studies. The training plans focus on improving the teacher-student relationship and, to a lesser extent, updating teacher knowledge, such as in AI.

The professors indicate that they have a certain pressure to publish and, in this way, obtain funds to be able to pay for publications. In addition, the faculty itself motivates the publication of scientific articles, which translates into economic compensation for the professor and, at the same time, is recognized as a merit for faculty promotion. In this line, the faculty can obtain economic compensation if they present papers at congresses.

The professors indicated in the meeting that they have courses to obtain funds from the EU, making these courses very relevant for younger professors. In this line, PhD students are required to teach five teaching credits. The PhD thesis supervisors control these teaching times of PhD students, in addition to the fact that the students themselves count on funding from the VU itself.

The VU faculty has a measurement of results from the institution itself, in addition to the student's evaluation of their teaching activity.

ANALYSIS AND CONCLUSION (regarding 5.2.)

In terms of faculty mobility, there seems to be a lack of attention given to this aspect. There is no clear evidence that the institution has a well-defined internationalization plan that allows teaching staff to undertake stays in other universities, beyond the ones facilitated through European programs such as ERASMUS+. The issue appears to be less about the economic support offered by the institution itself and more about the lack of job stability for teaching staff. This makes it difficult for them to undertake stays that last more than seven days, which is typical of ERASMUS+.

It is clear that there is an interest in international students, as evidenced by the SER and our interviews with various departments. Therefore, this interest should be extended to faculty mobility to establish academic

and research relationships that can help optimize the professional development of teachers. Ultimately, this can have a positive impact on teaching.

Regarding faculty development, it would be interesting to consider courses related to the acquisition of new competencies, for example, in AI. Most of the courses proposed in the SER and, according to what we were told in the meeting held with the faculty and the Staff, have to do with the acquisition of teaching techniques and languages. These courses are adequate and we believe that they promote the development of teachers' competencies, but it would also be very interesting to initiate a specific training strategy for new competencies related to new technological proposals such as AI.

AREA 5: 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				X	
Second cycle				X	

COMMENDATIONS

N/A

RECOMMENDATIONS

To address shortcomings

N/A

For further improvement

1. Establish a faculty stabilisation plan to build up a pool of highly qualified full-time faculty members at the University.
2. Establish faculty mobility plans with longer stays. In this way, closer ties would be forged between professors from different international entities.
3. Establish mechanisms for rapid response by faculty to any communication problems or requests for information from students.
4. Use online teaching methodologies only when necessary, and establish mechanisms for rapid response to student demands by teachers if this option is used.
5. Define a training strategy for teachers related to the new competencies that will come with AI.

AREA 6: LEARNING FACILITIES AND RESOURCES

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

FACTUAL SITUATION

The teaching spaces are fully equipped with all the necessary facilities for teaching. Each classroom's technical resources are tailored to the student's requirements, and some classrooms have furniture that allows for various activities within the same space, such as formal teaching, debate, teamwork, etc. This arrangement is beneficial for teaching quality as it helps to plan different actions based on the subject content.

Although we could not physically see the technical means as they were under refurbishment, we were shown a video that depicted the different spaces and their equipment for practical learning. Therefore, our evaluation is based on the audiovisual form, and we can confidently say that the technical means are in line with the requirements for practical teaching.

The building is accessible and allows for continuous mobility throughout the facility, making it convenient for individuals with mobility issues.

The library is an exclusive building with all the technical innovations to make it fully accessible. It has an excellent bibliographic collection and an excellent subscription to scientific journals. It is very positive that it is open twenty-four hours a day and seven days a week, so it has become an ideal place to motivate students to study at the University. In fact, during our visit, we were able to see that the library was full of students.

Regarding the facilities for external internships, there are agreements to which students apply regularly.

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

The building has all the facilities for safe and smooth mobility for people with mobility problems. Visually impaired students also have specific software to address their problem by converting text to speech. The library has furniture adapted for mobility problems and Braille keyboards.

It should be noted that the library has sufficient bibliographic funds to meet the needs of the students of the Communication Area. Subscription to electronic journals is also a noteworthy point. It is important to value the fact that the library has become a study center so that the academic life of the students is articulated around this building, as we could see during the visit. In addition, the library has a particularly novel system of collection, delivery, and return of books, which allows a fluid operational dynamic to be able to allocate the library to full temporary use by students. In short, the library is particularly relevant at VU.

Regarding external internships, there are sufficient agreements and it seems that students are satisfied with the level of internships available to them. One of the reasons given for choosing VU for their training is its capacity for external internships.

However, students and social partners demand a greater depth in practical training, integrating the needs of social partners in the programs of the subjects. Social partners would value more advanced critical thinking training and further development of practical skills training.

About economic possibilities, there is a clear demand on the need to increase the salaries of public university professors in Lithuania. We believe that exclusive dedication is accompanied by a decent salary to cover economic needs. Therefore, to make progress in the achievement of implementing improvements in the learning process, it is necessary to stabilize the teaching staff using an economic remuneration that allows full-time dedication, it seems clear that work should be done in this direction.

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

The plan to maintain the advances in the library has a budget and will be maintained in the short and long term, according to what we were told.

Regarding the classrooms, although their capacity and technical resources are adequate for the current teaching conditions, there seems to be a plan to divide them and make them spaces for smaller groups, as indicated in the SER. This is a good idea for the future, but it must be accompanied by a teaching methodology that goes along with this idea. It would be convenient to think about focusing the teaching methodology on more applied training in which the work projects are developed in smaller and dedicated groups, as indicated by students and social partners. In this way, this new architectural vision would make complete sense.

The SER also indicates that there is a plan to move forward with improving facilities for people with mobility problems and, especially, for blind people. Braille signage seems to be the main advance in the short term, which we believe is a wise move in this economic investment strategy.

Investing in technical resources appears to be an ongoing process at VU. While the recent video showcasing these advancements seems promising, we noticed a lack of focus on acquiring software related to emerging technologies like AI.

The academic programs offered at VU will inevitably be influenced by the use of AI, as they are closely tied to the practical applications of AI in communication. It would be beneficial to create a strategic plan that addresses this need, covering both the integration of AI into teaching content and the necessary training required for teachers to effectively implement these new technologies in the coming years.

ANALYSIS AND CONCLUSION (regarding 6.1.)

The University has excellent resources and facilities available for training purposes which meet all the requirements necessary for delivering high-quality education. It is important to note the vital role played by the library in the academic environment, as it has become a central hub for students and professors from various disciplines to connect and interact.

The infrastructure is designed to accommodate the specific needs of individuals with mobility and visual impairments. It is also worth highlighting the serene and peaceful environment in which the University is located, which is essential for academic life.

However, it seems that not much consideration has been given to the influence of AI on the academic programs being evaluated. It is crucial to recognize the significant impact that AI will have on the content of these programs, particularly in areas such as marketing, disinformation, political communication, business, social media, and more. Therefore, it is imperative to provide adequate training to teachers in this area and optimize the technological tools required to teach the content that will be needed in the coming years.

The possibility of creating smaller classrooms to work in groups with fewer students is a good strategic decision if we take into account considerations that have occurred in the interviews concerning the application of theoretical content in more practical training and the development of skills and competencies needed in the professional world.

Finally, the professional and salary stabilization of the teaching staff will help to create more innovative and dedicated strategies to implement the new scenario implied by the use of AI in the field of Communication.

AREA 6: 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				X	
Second cycle				X	

COMMENDATIONS

- The library has become a center for consultation and study for all students, which facilitates the academic and personal relationships between students and professors from different scientific areas. In the case of the Social Sciences, this factor is fundamental to achieving better levels of academic and research excellence.

RECOMMENDATIONS

To address shortcomings

- Not identified.

For further improvement

- To keep up with the evolving technological landscape, it is important to acquire software and licenses that allow the integration of AI in the dynamics of the subjects. Additionally, creating training plans for teachers in this scientific field is crucial. This is particularly relevant since the programs evaluated deal with aspects so closely related to AI such as political communication, disinformation, etc.
- Implement teaching methodologies that deepen the formation of critical thinking linked to the acquisition of professional competencies.

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

On the University level, the study quality assurance system at VU was developed within the project “Development and Implementation of the Internal Study Quality Management System of Vilnius University” and is implemented following the standards and guidelines for quality assurance in the European Higher Education Area, the Statute of Vilnius University, as well as the documentations of “Procedures of Preparation, Implementation and Improvement of Study Programmes” and “Regulation of Study Programme Committees at Vilnius University”. The VU Senate and academic units as well as the VU’s Department of Study Quality and Development control and monitor internal quality assurance, but the Study Programme Committees have the responsibility in implementation. The quality assurance is driven by the University’s mission, monitoring and analysis of study data, and internal dialogue on continuous quality improvement. The quality is ensured by external quality assessment and accreditation of study fields. There are also various internal mechanisms such as periodic monitoring and evaluation of study programmes, collection and analysis of data on study programmes and the study process, as well as monitoring and evaluation of the feedback of stakeholders. Adequate and sufficient material resources and environment necessary for studies are also part of quality assurance, as are the measures to enhance the qualifications and competences of teachers and to improve the management of study programmes, study administration and student support. Furthermore, the means include periodical updates of study programmes and courses, promotion of innovative teaching and assessment methods, dissemination of good practices, as well as publication of accurate and easily accessible information on performance and performance assessment.

The Study Programme Committees function as the main bodies for the management and implementation of quality assurance of studies. The activity of the Committees is guided by the "Regulations of the Vilnius University Study Programme Committee". The Committee ensures the integrity of the study programme's purpose, student competencies, learning content and methods and evaluation of student achievements, aligns them with the legislation regulating higher education, the needs of the labour market and the society, and ensures the relevance and competitiveness of the study programme. Further, it has the tasks of improving the study programme by following the quality indicators for its implementation of the study programme and informing the community about the major changes taking place in the study programme.

One of the main tasks of the Committee is to ensure coherence between programme aims, competencies to be acquired, its content, methods, and student performance evaluation. The Committee also ensures that the programme is up-to-date and competitive. Changes to the ongoing study programmes are discussed in the Committees, and, in the case the proposed changes are substantial, they are discussed in and approved by the Faculty Board. After this, the changes are decided by the VU Senate. This measure ensures a rational number of study programmes with unique objectives, results, and content. The process of programme renewal is overseen by the VU Study Quality and Development Department, and administrative support is provided by the Faculty's Study Department, headed by the Vice Dean of Studies.

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

Each Study Programme Committee included in the present analysis is composed of at least five representatives of teaching staff, as well as at least one external social partner and one student representative. The work is organised by the Head of the Study Programme Committee approved by the Faculty Board.

Student representatives are actively involved in the quality assurance activities of the study process. They sit in the Faculty Board, Study Programme Committees, the College of Studies, Academic ethics and dispute resolution commissions, Teachers' attestation committee, and in various working groups for study quality issues formed at the Faculty. Student representatives also have monthly meetings with the Faculty administration where they discuss issues important to students, and seek solutions to possible problems that have arisen. Moreover, students are actively involved in the promotion of the Faculty's study programmes.

The social partners engage in internal quality assurance and integrity of study programmes in various ways. They participate in the activities of the Faculty Board and the Study Programme Committees. This enables them to contribute to building the structure of the curriculum, to identify market needs for the competencies to be developed and, to respond to the study objectives and to give suggestions on the content of the specific subjects. The opinion of the social partners is particularly important for the revision and renewal of the curriculum plan as well as on discussion on the topics of bachelor and master's theses. In the latter instance, social partners participate in the defence committees for bachelor's and master's theses, allowing them to learn about research implemented by students, assess their acquired competencies, ask specific questions and suggest topics for future theses. They also participate in quality assurance through supervising students' internships at the internship institutions, by giving lectures and seminars to students as invited guests, and by informally participating in the activities, meetings and discussions of the Faculty and providing their insights and opinions on the labour market and the qualification of graduates.

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

The Committee analyses the feedback and opinions of students, graduates, teaching staff and social partners in terms of the programme content and its implementation. The possibilities of enhancing the programme and the study-related challenges faced by the students are also discussed. In addition, the Committee organises formal and informal meetings with other social partners and potential employers. The comments and expectations collected in the meetings are passed on to the teachers, and the content of the course units or the competencies to be acquired are adjusted accordingly.

The study programmes undergo regular reviews and improvements. Information on these is first presented to the student representatives of the respective study programmes who participate in the activities of the Study Programme Committee. The updates to the study programmes and the rationale behind the decisions are also taken on the table in the Faculty's College of Studies and the Faculty Board. The summarised results of the surveys of single course units are presented to the students during the first lectures, discussed during the meetings of the respective Study Programme Committees and at meetings with teachers, student representatives and social partners.

A part of the survey results is available to all VU staff on the VU internal website. All relevant information about each study programme is made available to the prospective and current students and other interested

parties on the websites of the VU and/or the Faculty of Communication. The guidelines for the evaluation of the field of study and related documents are made publicly available.

7.1.4. Student feedback is collected and analysed

Feedback is collected from students, residents, doctoral students, and graduates through surveys. There are numerous student surveys conducted periodically. A survey on the quality of semester studies is conducted at the end of each semester by the VU Study Quality and Development Department. In addition, detailed results of the surveys by Faculties and study programmes are available to all VU staff. These include surveys on the quality of specific course units, a survey of first-year students on the admission process, a survey of final year students about the study programme, a survey of incoming exchange students on the implementation of exchange programmes, a survey of students who have completed an internship abroad on the quality of the internship, and a survey of students who have terminated their studies on the reasons for their decision. Additionally, if needed, the Faculty conducts surveys of its students and also arranges focus group discussions to identify specific challenges and find appropriate solutions to them. Moreover, starting from 2023–2024, a standardised student survey on the quality of the internships will be conducted at the end of each semester that includes internships.

The results of the student surveys are shared with various stakeholders. Teachers use the results to improve the content, quality of teaching, and assessment procedures of their courses. Study Programme Committees use them to improve study programmes and ensure their quality, to prepare self-assessment for the external evaluation of the study field, and to analyse the study programmes to be implemented. The administration of the University and the faculties use the results to improve the activities of the faculties and the University. The Admission-Attestation Commission may need the survey results for teacher attestation and the Best Teacher Election Committee for their selection of the best teachers in each Faculty.

To ensure the quality of teaching and assessment for a given subject, the Faculty of Communication teachers have conducted student surveys during their courses. Students are asked to provide their assessment and their expectations about the course. Additionally, surveys may be conducted at the end of the course, allowing teachers to promptly review the course.

Further, a survey of graduates on the competencies acquired during their studies and their establishment in the labour market is conducted 12, 36 and 60 months after graduation by the Student Services and Careers Division. However, there has been a really low turnout of graduates responding to it. Therefore, systematic solutions are being sought to increase the participation of graduates in the surveys at the University level. There is however continuous collaboration ongoing with the alumni who return to the Faculty as social partners providing new ideas on the study programmes with regard to contemporary market needs.

ANALYSIS AND CONCLUSION (regarding 7.1.)

The development of the field of study is strongly based on an internal quality assurance system that involves all stakeholders and applies continuous monitoring, transparency and public information. The quality assurance system is planned and implemented in an exemplary thorough manner, both on the University and Faculty level. The internal quality assurance system for the evaluated programmes is effective. There is clear division of responsibilities between various administrative and academic levels responsible for quality. Involvement of all stakeholders in internal quality assurance is also sufficiently arranged. Faculty members and stakeholders are involved in the feedback cycles, which allows for quality support, assurance, and rapid

identification of quality issues. In addition, constant student feedback is collected and analysed through numerous surveys through the VU's centralised system and other means. This ensures a comprehensive evaluation of the quality of studies. The implemented feedback system allows for regular and systematic collection and accumulation of information on the implementation of studies, monitoring of trends and reaction to them.

In the previous evaluation, more cooperation with external experts and social partners was recommended to ensure the quality of studies. To respond to this, the study programmes have included more active social partners on the committees to regularly help to review and update the study outcomes and plans. The social partners also participate in student-initiated events, as guests in the lectures; and in all thesis defence committees. They are also participating as co-organisers and partners in the Faculty's scientific events involving students and partners in projects run by the Faculty. A second recommendation was to present MA curriculum updates to teachers and engage them in discussion and feedback. This is enhanced by the means of meetings by the Heads of the Study Programme Committees with teachers at the beginning and the end of the semester to share feedback, and to discuss the results of the study programmes and updated study plans. Thirdly, the experts recommended alumni surveys (in MA International Communication). Alumni surveys are conducted centrally by VU, but the Faculty forwards the invitation to the alumni to increase the response rate.

AREA 7: 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				X	
Second cycle				X	

COMMENDATIONS

1. VU has a well-developed quality assurance system that benefits the Faculty and all the programmes in terms of providing valuable feedback.
2. There is a high number of student surveys provided by the centralised VU system.

RECOMMENDATIONS

To address shortcomings

1. Not identified.

For further improvement

1. Developing the survey on graduates and particularly finding means to increase the response rate through incentives. This may be important to get a better view on their career development and new market needs.

2. Even though response rates to surveys are generally good, students may be more actively encouraged to participate in them through additional incentives and more detailed feedback on the results.

IV. SUMMARY

This External Evaluation Report (EER) was compiled by the expert panel and is based on the detailed Self-Evaluation Report and supporting documentation submitted by VU as well as the information gathered from the various stakeholder meetings and campus tour during the site-visit. The panel wishes to thank VU and the stakeholders involved for their efforts in the preparation of the SER and evidence base and for their engagement with this panel.

These activities enabled the panel to appraise the different aspects of curriculum design, delivery and quality assurance and to identify some of the key strengths of VU's provision, in particular, the focus of the programmes on interdisciplinarity; and likewise the interaction between faculty from different disciplines; the satisfaction of students (especially second cycle) with the programme's mix of theory and practice; the deployment of assessment for learning strategies; the peer support and positive environment within the faculty; the academic and social support provided to students; the ethics framework to systematically address integrity in academic practice; as well as the equality, diversity and inclusion policies to ensure fairness in the workplace; the library provision, space and social space; the robust quality assurance system at both school/programmes and university levels.

The panel, however, also noted areas needing attention and improvement, namely, the assessment workload of students (especially on the BA programme); encouraging student participation in faculty research projects; promoting international joint-research activities and cooperation; planning to ensure stable staffing levels so that students across all programmes can benefit fully from high-quality teaching provision; a more agile response to students in relation to issues emerging with the provision; the response rate of graduates to the employment survey, not least to close the information loop with graduates by sharing the survey's results.

This expert panel's final recommendation acknowledges the impact of Artificial Intelligence (AI) and the cruciality of AI skills for every sector and occupation, specifically, Higher Education and the communication industry. It therefore urges VU to embrace the topic of AI across its programmes more explicitly: both as a tool for teaching and learning and as a Communication subject-specific area of competency and skill whilst promoting its responsible use by students.

Overall, the panel is satisfied that VU delivers a strong first cycle and suite of second cycle study programmes which prepare graduates to successfully engage with the industry and job market.

V. EXAMPLES OF EXCELLENCE

Examples of excellence should include examples exhibiting exceptional characteristics that are, implicitly, not achievable by all.

- The library, as a container of bibliographical resources and as a space that creates and motivates study, is an excellence in its own right.