



CENTRE FOR QUALITY ASSESSMENT IN HIGHER EDUCATION

EVALUATION REPORT
OF MIDWIFERY
NEW STUDY PROGRAMME
at Vilnius University

Expert panel:

1. Associate professor dr. Ana Polona Mivšek (panel chairperson), *academic;*
2. Ms. Stenback Pernilla, *academic;*
3. Dr. Joeri Vermeulen, *academic;*
4. Ms. Augusta Petrušaitė, *representative of social partners;*
5. Ms. Kamilė Pilvinytė *students' representative.*

Evaluation coordinator – Dr. Ona Šakalienė

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STUDY PROGRAMME DATA

Title of the study programme	Midwifery
Group(s) of study fields	Health Sciences
Study field	Nursing and Midwifery
Type of the study programme	University studies
Study cycle	First cycle
Mode of study and duration (in years)	4 (four)
Volume of the study programme in credits	240
Degree and (or) professional qualifications awarded	Bachelor's degree in Health sciences (field of study: Nursing and Midwifery) and Professional Qualification of a Midwifery

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I. INTRODUCTION

The new undergraduate study program in Midwifery (hereinafter referred to as the Program), which is planned to be implemented at Vilnius University (hereinafter referred to as the University), has been assessed by an expert group convened by the Centre for Quality Assessment in Higher Education (hereinafter referred to as the Centre). The aim of this external evaluation was to analyse both the quality and the implementation of the study program, as well as to offer recommendations for its enhancement. The evaluation was grounded in the Descriptor (hereinafter referred to as the Descriptor) for the proposed study program provided by the University, supplemented by insights gained from the expert group's on-site visit to the University.

The expert group initiated the external evaluation by reviewing the Descriptor of the study program and its annexes. The Program was evaluated in accordance with the laws governing University studies and other normative legal acts, such as:

- Methodology for the Evaluation of New Study Programs (approved by the Director of the Centre for Quality Assessment in Higher Education on 31 December 2019, Order No. V-149),
- Descriptor of the Study Field of Nursing and Midwifery (approved by Order No. V-1255 of the Minister of Education, Science, and Sport of the Republic of Lithuania on 9 July 2021),
- Description of General Requirements for the Provision of Studies (approved by Order No. V-1168 of the Minister of Education and Science of the Republic of Lithuania on 30 December 2016),
- The letter dated 14 April 2023 from the Ministry of Health of the Republic of Lithuania, no. 10-1697, which endorses Vilnius University intention to offer the first-cycle study program in Midwifery, among other documents required for the external assessment.

During the evaluation of the Descriptor and its associated documents, the experts requested the submission of a document that would outline the program's subjects/modules where students meet the EU Directive requirements for midwifery education.

On March 14, 2024, a group of experts visited the University. During their visit, they met with the University administration, the developers of the program descriptor, the intended teachers of the Program, and social partners interested in the professionals being trained under the Program. They also toured the material resources that will be used for the studies, including classrooms, libraries, and laboratories. At the end of the visit, the University representatives were briefed on the general observations made by the expert group.

On April 2024, the draft of the Report was prepared and submitted to the SKVC which was sent to the Programme promoters for information and comments on factual errors.

The University has not commented on factual errors. Vilnius University was also invited to correct the Programme within 10 working days. Based on expert recommendations, improved documents were submitted:

1. Revised descriptor of the intended study program "Midwifery" for the first cycle (with marked corrections);
2. Answers to experts' recommendations;
3. Explanation regarding individual studies conducted at Vilnius University;
5. CVs of additional program teachers;
6. The consents of additional teachers of the program to teach;
7. CVs of all program teachers;
8. Compliance with the requirements of the EU directive for midwifery training;
9. Practice diary;
10. Scope of practice;
11. Midwifery Skills Training Simulator
12. Breast palpation simulator (contract).

Following the receipt of the changes made by the Programme promoters to the Programme Descriptor and additional documents the Panel assessed the changes made and added to the report of the Programme evaluation accordingly. The final report was submitted to the SKVC in the middle of May 2024.

II. PROGRAMME ANALYSIS

2.1. STUDY AIMS, OUTCOMES AND CONTENT

The evaluation area is analysed according to the following indicators:

- *Evaluation of the conformity of the aims and outcomes of the study programme to the needs of the society and/or the labour market (not applicable to HEI's operating in exile conditions).*

Vilnius University applied for a new study programme "Midwifery" at their institution. Only two Lithuanian HEI prepare midwives at this moment - both situated in Kaunas. Due to social - economical reasons, graduates stay working in Kaunas region. Due to changing Lithuanian Health legislation, it is expected that more independent work will be performed by midwives both at inpatient and outpatient clinics. According to STRATA study, the society of midwives who already work in the field is getting older. Also, too much work is covered by obstetricians/ gynaecologists, which is not only economically inefficient, but also professionally incorrect.

During expert group meetings with social partners as future employers, all stated that the necessity of young professional midwives is obvious and that they are willing to support and mentor young midwives as autonomous specialists. Although, it was not 100 percent

clear whether all social partners truly understand what kind of independent role midwives cover.

Expert group agrees that it is very important to prepare young, autonomous midwives with modern evidence based medical knowledge, in order to fulfil the needs and possible future shortage. Midwifery education in EU countries follows the EU Directives for midwifery education (2013/55/EU). The EU Directives for midwifery education provide specific general and subject-specific topics for both theoretical and practical competencies. In the education practical training is with patient contact and covers all fields of midwifery. The EU Directives have numerical requirements for midwifery-related competencies to be fulfilled during the practical part of the education. The Descriptor with the study plan submitted by Vilnius University refers to EU directives, however from the submitted documents and interviews with teachers, programme developers and management it was not obvious, how the programme will fulfil EU requirements.

The study plan in the Descriptor is a 4-year bachelor's degree of 240 ECTS. The program's aim and intended learning outcomes start with the wording "the medical specialty of midwifery". Midwifery is not a medical speciality. It is an own independent profession within sexual and reproductive health; related to nursing and obstetrics, however distinct. It is therefore disturbing that the structure of the study plan is based largely on the topics of nursing education. The courses and study units in clinical practice are unclearly defined. In the study plan the amount of clinical practice of the whole education is unclear and the experts could not get the precise clarification in the interviews, how the amount of hours, prescribed as the minimum by the EU directives, will be fulfilled.

- *Evaluation of the conformity of the study programme aims and outcomes with the mission, objectives of activities and strategy of the HEI.*

According to Vilnius University Descriptor "Midwife" it is hard to evaluate, how programme aims and possible outcomes reflect Vilnius University mission, objectives and strategy - such information is not clearly provided. As group of experts read additional information at www.vu.lt, Vilnius University mission is: "The undeniable duty and the inalienable right of the University, arising from the past, encouraged by present challenges and passed on to future generations, to strengthen the cognitive and creative powers of Lithuania and the world, to foster academic and other spiritual and social values, to educate active and responsible leaders of the society and the citizens of the Lithuanian state. The goals of this programme are presented at Descriptor's p. 13 - 19, table 1. Despite structured presentation, there is not enough information about the continuous study process and exact tools to achieve main aims and prognose possible outcomes, moreover to reflect them with Universitie's mission.

- *Evaluation of the compliance of the study programme with legal requirements.*

In the study plan the amount of practical training and midwifery specific topics are unclear. There should be very clear that student will get at least 2300 hours of clinical training (with midwifery clients, not in simulation rooms), where he/she will be able to gather all procedures described by the EU directive requirements.

The aim and learning outcomes of the study programme "*Midwifery*" are based on academic and professional requirements, the needs of the state, society and the labour market. The links between the study programme's aims, learning outcomes and course units (modules) have been developed in accordance with several legal acts. The structure of the programme is not written strictly according to "Order on Approval Of The Descriptor Of The Study Field Of Nursing And Midwifery" provided by the Minister Of Education, Science And Sport Of The Republic Of Lithuania, but it reflects this document.

The Programme is based on several legal acts, as mentioned in the Descriptor p. 20 -22. Despite the whole list of these legal acts, it is not clear how EU- directives for Midwifery education and Lithuanian Medical norm "Midwife" will be achieved and fulfilled. In expert group opinion, it will be hard to prepare a completely autonomous midwife according to Programme plan and structure, especially since not enough midwifery teachers is available.

- *Evaluation of compatibility of aims, learning outcomes, teaching/learning and assessment methods of the study programme.*

The main study aims are presented in Descriptor at p. 13 - 19, table 1. The content of this study programme is filled with a wide range of theoretical lectures that covers not only basic medical fields, but also human development, sociology, psychology, research, evidence based medicine, etc. This is the strong side of this Program - it will ensure versatile professionalism, but lack of a professional language module, can arise future language barrier problems for graduates. Furthermore, to become an independent and autonomous midwife, students must have not only a strong theoretical base, but also need to have enough time for clinical training and practice. According to the provided study Descriptor, the expert group strongly advises to shorten all the theoretical parts and provide students with more credits for clinical (not simulation based) practise. Teaching and practical training for core midwifery competencies has to be done by midwifery teachers and midwifery clinical mentors.

- *Evaluation of the totality of the study programme subjects/modules, which ensures consistent development of competences of students.*

The subject modules of the study programme are arranged sequentially, following the principle that basic modules of biomedical sciences are first mastered and then the clinical modules are added gradually. There is not obvious enough that midwifery students will get midwifery contents that would educate them according to main midwifery

competencies as described in the document by International Confederation of Midwives (ICM).

- *Evaluation of opportunities for students to personalise the structure of the study programme according to their personal learning objectives and intended learning outcomes*

The Midwifery study programme consists of: individual studies course units, general modules of the field of study, special modules of the field of study and professional midwifery practice. *Students of the study programme have the opportunity to choose 25 ECTS for individualised studies.* Individualised studies covers various fields - profession related, including health literacy, mental health care and nursing practice, postpartum obstetric practice, anaesthesia and intensive care practice, and not profession related, including non formal education, foreign language, etc. Expert group concludes that 25 ECTS is too much. Elective subjects should be more midwifery prone.

Main distinctive features of the area:

None

Expert panel concludes that the proposed Midwifery study programme inadequately fulfils the required Indicators for the evaluated area of Study aims, outcomes and content, therefore following improvements are suggested:

Areas for improvement:

1. Re - write descriptor precisely based on “Order on Approval Of The Descriptor Of The Study Field Of Nursing And Midwifery” to cover all required topics.
2. National requirements are satisfied, however, it is not obvious enough how EU directive (requirements for midwifery studies) will be addressed.
3. Do not merge the programme “Nursing” with programme “Midwife”, since these two are separate professions.
4. Use correct terms for describing a midwife and midwifery - is not an obstetrician. Obstetrics is a medical profession, while midwife is an independent health professional.
5. Clarifying the exact amount of clinical training in the study Program for the whole education; according to different fields (where students need to gain practical procedures as defined by EU directive).

6. Shorten theoretical part of the study in exchange for: simulations have to be included in the theoretical part of the study programme (clinical training needs to be with midwifery clients).
7. Midwifery specific subjects have to be taught by a midwife teacher and clinical training of the students has to be monitored by midwifery clinical mentors; this is not clearly stated in the submitted documentation.
8. There is 25 ECTS of elective studies, which seems too much, especially since electives are not applied to midwifery that would be beneficial for midwifery students.
9. Include a professional language module.

Corrections made based on expert recommendations (to be completed if the experts submit a proposal to revise the programme within 10 working days)

The VU has sent the re-written descriptors that are in line with midwifery and distinguished from nursing and obstetrics.

They also submitted detailed document how the EU directive requirements for the field of midwifery are going to be achieved in the study programme; they specified the number of hours in the clinical placements (separately from theoretical part of the study, where simulations are planned) and assigned midwifery teachers and clinical mentors (midwives at the clinic) responsible for certain area of practical training. They developed students' portfolio for record keeping, so that at the end of the study they could confirm that each individual student achieved procedures, prescribed with EU directive.

VU also provided argumentation with regard to mandatory theoretical part and elective subjects and they demonstrate the subject, where students will learn foreign language.

This aspect has been significantly improved and expert group concludes that after corrections made by VU, the majority of above mentioned weaknesses are not relevant any more.

2.2. LINKS BETWEEN SCIENTIFIC (ART) AND STUDY ACTIVITIES

The evaluation area is analysed according to the following indicators:

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

The Descriptor of the planned midwifery program at Vilnius University describes an activity in research, as described in the submitted documentation the research is

extensive within Medicine and Nursing. Research in women's healthcare and obstetrics as well as nursing will benefit midwifery education even as the research is not the moment midwifery-specific.

The study program is built upon the aim to have evidence-based care and research conducted in courses within the curriculum. The use of midwifery-related research is not that clear in the documentation as a part of the study activities as the midwifery program is at this moment not a study program at Vilnius University. Midwifery research is an own field within research and has a main role as the core of evidence-based care within midwifery. Midwifery students must get a strong base from evidence-based midwifery in their education as the identity and the applied professional care have their fundamental in midwifery evidence based care.

The study plan in the Descriptor of Vilnius University has a clear structure over the study years and it is possible to see a progression in theoretical competences. What is unclear is the link between theoretical research based teaching and applied research to midwifery skills and competencies. Skills and simulation are not mentioned as a part of theory courses in the Descriptor.

During the visit to Vilnius University on the 14th of March 2024, it became clear that all teaching is as in the Descriptor planned to be research based. The general studies as well as common methodology will be taught in common with nursing and other medical students. It was also clear that the research of the University is active and extensive. As the teachers presented at the visit (and as written in the documentation) were mainly nurses or physicians, the concern of how the midwifery specific research based theoretical and technical competencies within the education will be fulfilled. Especially the technical skills in midwifery are not clarified in the Descriptor as simulation and skills training as a part of theory courses.

- *Evaluation of the link between the content of the study programme and the latest developments in science, art and technology.*

Nurses and midwives are related professions, but independent and distinct. Similarly, they have profession-specific research as a foundation, the profession-specific research should be clearly described in the education program. A clarification of evidence-based midwifery and research in the curriculum, course content, and research/project is thereby proposed by the expert group.

Main distinctive features of the area:

1. The applied research and publications within nursing is clearly defined, however midwifery (in terms of research, evidence-based knowledge and practice) is a distinct field.

Expert panel concludes that the proposed Midwifery study programme fulfils the required Indicators for this evaluation area satisfactorily, however the following improvement has to be done:

Areas for improvement:

1. We recommend that midwifery is more clearly and explicitly described throughout the curriculum, course content, and research. Even though nursing has a lot related to midwifery, they are separate professions that should be clearly stated throughout the curriculum.
2. Specific midwifery-related research in the curriculum as the ground for evidence-based teaching in the midwifery program has to be clear and precisely named.

Corrections made based on expert recommendations (to be completed if the experts submit a proposal to revise the programme within 10 working days)

The aspect to be improved is not relevant after the correction of the Program made by VU.

2.3. STUDENT ADMISSION AND SUPPORT

The evaluation area is analysed according to the following indicators:

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

Students will be admitted to the Bachelor of Midwifery study programme under the general admission procedure i.e., all students will be required to submit their applications via LAMA BPO (Association of Lithuanian Higher Education Institutions for Centralised Admissions) in conformity to the Ministry of Education, Science and Sports of the Republic of Lithuania and Vilnius University. A total of 50 students are expected to be admitted in the first year of the programme. 25 students will be admitted to a state-funded place and the remaining 25 students will be admitted to a non-state-funded place.

The admission requirements to Vilnius University consist of two main parts - the entrance score and the minimum requirements. The admission score consists of the components of the marks in the subjects of the matriculation certificate. In the midwifery study programme, the highest weighting coefficient (0.4) will be given to the assessment of the matriculation examination in the main (first) subject, while the weighting coefficient for the other matriculation examinations will be 0.2. Persons graduating from high school in 2024 and applying for state-funded places and non-state-funded places with a scholarship for bachelor's and full-time studies at the University must have passed the Lithuanian Language and Literature State matriculation exam, the Mathematics State matriculation

exam and a matriculation exam of the applicant's choice. The minimum competition score must be at least 5 points. The ten-point scale is used to calculate the competition score, which is the standard assessment system in the Lithuanian education system. On the basis of the 100-point scale, the grades obtained in national matriculation examinations, entrance examinations or school matriculation examinations may be recalculated or equated to annual grades on a scale of 4 to 10 points. It is important to note that only A-level (foreign language B1 and B2) grades in subjects at level A are recalculated for admission to university degree programmes. In addition, applicants may be given additional points on the basis of the basic criteria set out in the admission rules.

Publicity about student admissions will be carried out on the Vilnius University and Vilnius University Faculty of Medicine websites - www.vu.lt and www.mf.vu.lt.

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

Recognition of academic qualifications is part of the admission process at Vilnius University. An academic qualification and its value is confirmed when the acquired qualification (education) substantially meets the academic requirements for the relevant qualification (education) in Lithuania. The University's website provides information on the documents required for the recognition of a qualification. The procedure is carried out by the Student Admissions Subdivision of the Study Quality and Development Division of Vilnius University, in cooperation with the specialists of the relevant department where the candidate wishes to study, in accordance with the Government of the Republic of Lithuania's Resolution No. 212 of 29 February 2021, which approved the "Description of the Procedures for the Recognition of Educational Qualifications and Qualifications Associated with Higher Education and Obtained in the framework of the Educational Programmes of Foreign Countries and International Organisations".

No more than 75 per cent of the desired undergraduate, postgraduate or full-time study programme may be credited if the results of partial studies of a person who has previously studied at a higher education institution in Lithuania or abroad meet the formal and subject requirements of the desired study programme. Students can start their studies at Vilnius University from the beginning of the semester. The admission conditions and procedure are clearly regulated in the document "Description of the admission procedure for a person who has studied at another higher education institution in another country or abroad and wishes to continue studies at Vilnius University". There are procedures and principles for crediting the results of studies of a person who has studied in a higher education institution in Lithuania or abroad on the basis of agreed and unmatched study content. These procedures and principles are stipulated in the "Description of the Procedure for Crediting Study Results at Vilnius University" approved by the Vilnius University Senate Resolution No SPN-20 of 20 April 2021.

A maximum of 50 per cent of the study programme may be credited to students who have acquired their competences through non-formal or informal learning (work activities, internships, courses, seminars, etc.). The procedure for the recognition of acquired competences and the crediting of study subjects (modules) on the basis of this recognition shall be detailed in the "Description of the Procedure for the Recognition of Competences Acquired by Students of Vilnius University through Non-formal and Informal Learning and the Crediting of Study Subjects (Modules)".

A professional qualification from a European country is recognised if it meets the following conditions the recommendations of the European Association of Midwifery Professionals. Qualifications or partial studies obtained in other countries shall be recognised after an expert assessment by qualified assessors with the necessary specific knowledge in the field, who will be appointed by order of the Dean of the Faculty of Medicine of Vilnius University.

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

The most important institutional information for students is provided by the Vilnius University website, available at www.vu.lt. The Study Information System provides students with personalised information, tailored to the needs of each student. In this system, students have access to their study plan, course descriptions, session timetable, results of the final assessment of achievements, study fees, as well as the possibility to choose elective courses, submit applications, etc.

According to the Programme description and the social support measures listed on the official website of the higher education institution, it can be stated that the social support of Vilnius University includes opportunities for active leisure, offers to join various clubs, assessing the student's interests, and offers to take part in the development of competences related to career and science. Psychologists and psychotherapists working at Vilnius University provide their services individually, in groups or as a couple (family). There are also chapels where a chaplain and facilitators provide spiritual support. This makes a significant contribution to the psychological and spiritual well-being of students.

All information about the study process, including partial studies abroad, study fees, scholarships and study financing options is available from the Study Department of the Faculty of Medicine of Vilnius University. Students are also advised on the study process by the Vilnius University Faculty of Medicine Study Department and the Study Programme Committee. Career counsellors at Vilnius University are available to help students seeking information about their studies or advice on how to solve any problems they may have during their studies.

Financial support at Vilnius University is provided in several ways in accordance with the "Vilnius University Scholarship Regulations". Financial incentives are given to active, well-educated students who excel in the fields of art, sports and science. In addition,

persons with disabilities studying at the University may receive targeted support, and students with financial difficulties may pay for their studies in instalments. It is important to note that students studying at their own expense and successfully completing the session may be eligible for a state-funded place if one becomes available. The best-performing students may be reimbursed for the actual tuition fees paid, or part of them, from the state budget.

- *Evaluation of the sufficiency of study information and student counselling.*

Vilnius University has a Student Services and Careers Unit, where academic advisors are available to help students with any questions they may have about the study process. E-communication tools and live meetings are used to advise students and provide information about their studies. It is important to note that this unit provides career planning services, such as individual career counselling, advice on internships and job searches and etc. To help students develop their career paths even better, a career management system karjera.lt has been developed. An important part of the department's activities is also the coordination of mentoring, which gives students the opportunity to find an experienced, successful and inspiring person with skills and experience that can be used to achieve their goals. These mentors can be professors, alumni, representatives of organisations or even experienced students.

International students can consult the Vilnius University International Relations Department regarding visas, living in Lithuania and other study-related issues. Before starting their studies, these students receive an institutional information pack in English, which contains detailed information about the necessary documents, living conditions in Lithuania and other important aspects. The VU Student Union produces a "Student Life Handbook" for undergraduate students in both Lithuanian and English. In addition, students can use the VU Video Guide, which consists of short videos on topical topics relevant to university admission. An integration week for students of all nationalities is organised offering short, free Lithuanian language courses for foreigners and introducing them to the city of Vilnius.

Since 2000, Vilnius University has had an ESN Mentor Programme, the aim of which is to ensure that the international student has the opportunity to have contact on a variety of issues before arriving in Lithuania and to integrate smoothly into the life of the University with the help of a mentor assigned to them.

Members of the VU Students' Union of the Faculty of Medicine represent the students' name in various bodies of the University's organisations and help to resolve academic and social problems that arise. Students receive the necessary personal support through regular contact with their mentors.

Main distinctive features of the area:

1. A wide range of academic and social support for students is reported.

Expert panel concludes that the proposed Midwifery study programme fulfils the required Indicators for the evaluated area of Student admission and support excellently, therefore no improvement has to be made.

Areas for improvement:

None

2.4. STUDYING, STUDENT PERFORMANCE AND GRADUATE EMPLOYMENT

The evaluation area is analysed according to the following indicators:

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

The whole study process is organised in semesters. At the beginning of each module, module overview, aims, schedule of theoretical lectures, seminars, laboratory works, simulations and all the requirements for this module - material, interim assessments, final assessments - will be provided. The entire study process is organised with an emphasis on student-centred learning and the importance of self-study. Traditional and innovative study methods will be used. The following classical study methods will be employed: lectures, seminars, practical training, laboratory work, independent literature studies, problem-based training, case studies, and project preparation and presentation. The following innovative, interactive, and inclusive methods will be applied: information technology, scripted role-playing simulations, and teamwork with peers and midwifery professionals. Lectures will also be available to students in the virtual learning environment (VLE). The following forms of self-study will be employed: reports, preparation for intermediate examination/test, project work, preparation for laboratory work and a seminar, an overview of scientific articles, preparation of a scientific article, preparation of a presentation, and preparation of the bachelor's thesis.

For the practical training, students sign a three-party agreement with Health Care institutions. According to the Descriptor, it is not clear how the clinical practice process will be held - whether students have mentors, who will follow clinical practice progress, who will make sure that all objectives, whether EU directives are going to be fulfilled and how they will be reached.

As it was mentioned during meetings with future employers, the necessity of young professional midwives is obvious and that they are willing to support and mentor young midwives as autonomous specialists.

Learning to become an independent midwife is a lifelong learning process. The competencies are gained in education by theory and practice from colleagues and

partners. For a midwifery student, colleagues and future colleagues include not only fellow students in their study group but also midwifery students at other universities and midwives working in clinical settings. Enabling cooperation between students during their studies is a start to collegiality in future working life. The Descriptor shows that the University has Erasmus collaboration which means an international exchange during studies may be possible, but it is unclear if there is any national collaboration between different educational institutions.

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

Vilnius University claims to be an open community for students with disabilities and socially vulnerable groups. Vilnius University has adapted the whole environment for students with various disabilities - movement impairment, hearing impairment, etc. Students with special needs or requirements can contact a coordinator, fulfil special questionnaires, seek for volunteer guidance and achieve all the help that is required. Students with disabilities can also seek for an individualised study program, the process is regulated by "Description of the individualisation of studies procedure at VU based on individual needs arising from disability". Both academic society and students can request special seminars, guidelines or other events to solve various situations.

Being able to perform independent midwifery work does not mean working alone. The midwife has a broad cooperation network both within and across professions. As a student, the learning environment should be safe and respectful where the student learns the future competence and profession under supervision. The documents submitted by Vilnius University show that students receive support and guidance from the University in addition to academic, social, personal, and psychological support, students can also apply for various forms of financial support. Simulation training is not described as a part of theoretical studies in the study plan. In the simulation, students allow training and growth of their professional identity. The multi-professional cooperation during the education between the different education programs initiates further multi-professional cooperation in the clinical context and future working life.

Cooperation between midwifery education programs is fruitful for the teachers as they can develop their competence as midwifery teachers and learning processes, content, and realisation of competence learning through cooperation. National cooperation is recommended and international contacts between education programs, especially those that follow the same EU directives, are a strength for education.

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

As it is mentioned in Descriptor, all the students before starting their studies, should know the "Code of Academic Ethics of Vilnius University". This is the main document that

regulates academic integrity at Vilnius University. Student and teacher representatives participate actively to evaluate the process and how honesty and integrity requirements are held during the final module exams. Vilnius University has a well prepared strategic plan for diversity, equal opportunities and legal rights (for example gender equality, non-discrimination by cultural difference, sexual orientation, etc.).

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

Vilnius University provides an opportunity for students who are not satisfied with their grades, to appeal for reassessment. As mentioned in the Descriptor p. 52 “A student who disagrees with the final course assessment, has seven calendar days from the date of publication of the final grades, to apply to the Dispute Resolution Committee of the relevant CAU. No appeals against the final grade for the course may be filed. A student who wishes to complain regarding the grades of the interim/final examinations or regarding the breach of the thesis defence procedures has three business days from obtaining the grades of any such interim/final examination or the date of thesis defence, to apply to the Dispute Resolution Committee of the relevant CAU. The Dispute Resolution Committee of the relevant CAU will take the final and definitive decision with respect to the grade of the examination/credit”.

Main distinctive features of the area:

1. Curriculum is structured from basic knowledge (anatomy, physiology etc.) to more specific and complex (neonatology, paediatrics, obstetrics...).
2. Social partners support new study programme and are prepared to be involved in the practical training of the students; they state to employ the graduates.
3. Study conditions for vulnerable students are adapted adequately.

Expert panel concludes that the proposed Midwifery study programme inadequately fulfils the required Indicators for this evaluated area; we are proposing following implementations:

Areas for improvement:

1. In order to educate autonomous midwifery graduates, midwifery teachers as the role models must play a greater role in the theoretical part of the study.
2. A clarification of the midwifery competencies according to EU directives in the midwifery curriculum.

3. It has to be stated clearer that students will gain appropriate amount of clinical training (number of hours according to EU directive), to be able to autonomously practice in future working areas.
4. It has to be proven that students will get practical training with midwifery clinical mentors, who will monitor clinical achievements and progress (according to the prescribed procedures by EU directive). Faculty needs to create special diaries for the student to fill during clinical practice.

Corrections made based on expert recommendations (to be completed if the experts submit a proposal to revise the programme within 10 working days)

The VU has sent the re-written descriptors. They also submitted detailed document how the EU directive requirements for the field of midwifery are going to be achieved in the study programme; They specified the number of hours in the clinical placements (separately from theoretical part of the study, where simulations are planned) and assigned midwifery teachers and clinical mentors (midwives at the clinic) responsible for certain area of practical training. They developed students' portfolio for record keeping, so that at the end of the study they could confirm that each individual student achieved procedures, prescribed with EU directive.

This aspect has been significantly improved and expert group concludes that after corrections made by VU, the above mentioned weaknesses are not relevant any more.

2.5. TEACHING STAFF

The evaluation area is analysed according to the following indicators:

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

In the prepared documents, Vilnius Medical Faculty mentioned 49 lectures to be involved in the delivery of the midwifery programme. In table 11 (on page 55 of the submitted document, describing the proposed study programme) only one junior assistant is from the field of midwifery and one lecturer with the BSc in midwifery, who is planned to teach midwifery in the community. In the enclosed list of teachers' CVs three teachers were found with a BSc of midwifery background. Altogether there was 8 teachers from the field of nursing, 27 from the field of medicine, while others had different educational backgrounds (like biology, education, social sciences etc.).

In the conversations with different groups it became obvious that midwives in Lithuania rarely possess the appropriate level of education in order to teach at the faculty. Level

programmes therefore other health professionals were included on a list of teaching staff. The developers of the programme emphasised the meaning of interdisciplinary collaboration. In the group of teachers it was expressed (and this is of great concern) that midwives will take part in clinical subjects only, while they do not hold a title high enough to teach theoretical subjects within the faculty.

Since midwifery is a different profession from nursing and obstetrics, it is of crucial importance that autonomy is achieved already in the educational area. Within the curriculum, not only knowledge and skills are being taught, but also values and philosophy of the profession are being passed to the future graduates. Through professional socialisation members of the professional group are getting a strong professional identity. In order to raise autonomous and independent midwives, who will accept competencies and responsibilities of the midwifery profession, midwifery students need strong models to identify with.

Therefore it is unacceptable that the midwifery study programme does not include midwifery teachers, who would lecture about study fields that are core midwifery competencies - normal pregnancy, birth and the postpartum (at least). Performing a midwifery study programme with midwives only being included as clinical mentors will not provide midwives that would take upon all roles that International Confederation of Midwives is predicting for midwifery graduates.

Faculty management needs to support midwifery teachers, so that the core of midwifery teachers in midwifery study programme grows and eventually separates from other professions. It is true that multidisciplinary can benefit the study programme, however the majority of the teachers in the midwifery programme need to be midwives.

- *Evaluation of the conditions to improve the competences of the teaching staff.*

Teachers are being regularly evaluated in order to achieve and improve their competencies. Vilnius University has Regulations for qualification training of academic staff; a document that manages career development of the staff. They are offered several courses for improving digital skills, pedagogic approaches and language fluency.

Midwifery teachers need to be included also in the theoretical part of the study. The majority of the teachers should have a midwifery background. Since preconditions for lecturing at the faculty level are high, there has to be a clear strategy by the faculty management, how will they provide a strong support, so that the midwifery teachers will be able to fulfil the requirements (scholarships for MSc and PhD midwifery studies etc.).

In the meantime (while establishing a strong base of midwifery academic teachers), collaboration with other midwifery schools, who already have teachers with appropriate credentials (assistant professors, associate professors and professors) is recommended,

so that students are being lectured about midwifery core competencies by midwives themselves. Only in this way, independent practitioners of midwifery practice can be raised.

Main distinctive features of the area:

1. The staff included in the proposed program is multidisciplinary.

Expert panel concludes that the proposed Midwifery study programme currently does not fulfil the required Indicators for this evaluation area; it is the weakest point of the proposal. Midwifery teachers are not numerous enough, they do not participate adequately in the theoretical part of the study. They should at least cover contents that International Confederation of Midwives (ICM) considers the core midwifery competencies.

Areas for improvement:

1. Midwifery teachers must be adequately included also in the theoretical part of the study, if currently they do not hold credentials to lecture at the faculty, teachers from other institutions should be involved.
2. As told in the conversation with teachers, midwifery teachers only collaborate in clinical training. They should teach midwifery theory too.

Corrections made based on expert recommendations (to be completed if the experts submit a proposal to revise the programme within 10 working days)

The VU submitted a document with the list of additional midwifery teachers who will participate in the theoretical and in practical part of the study programme. They have also enclosed their CV's where from it is obvious that the teachers have midwifery education. All additional teachers (12) signed the agreement to actively participate in the education of midwifery students.

This aspect has been significantly improved and expert group concludes that after corrections made by VU, the majority of above mentioned weaknesses are not relevant any more.

2.6. FACILITIES AND LEARNING RESOURCES

The evaluation area is analysed according to the following indicators:

- ***Evaluation of the suitability and adequacy of the physical, informational and financial resources of the study programme to ensure an effective learning process.***

The faculty has enough lecture rooms and it has six computer classrooms. Around the faculty there are several places for self-study (with wi-fi spots). Library has good access

to different relevant databases that students can access from faculty or from home. The library also offers books from the field of midwifery, neonatology, obstetrics and nursing as hard copies. Library has long open hours so that students can study. The facilities are adapted for impaired students.

The link between theory and clinical work needs to provide a smooth transition for the students, gaining practical skills in simulation rooms. Simulation practices should be used only for bridging the theory and practice in clinical settings; they may not replace clinical hours, prescribed by the EU directive. The equipment we have seen at the faculty is more useful for general nursing procedures than midwifery; manikins for midwifery are few. More specific manikins are provided at the simulation centre in *VU Hospital Santaros Klinikos*. We were not entirely convinced (by the programme leaders and teachers) that the simulation centre in this hospital will not be used as a part of clinical placements. It was repeated many times that midwifery study needs to have at least 2300 hours of practical training (simulations excluded).

Simulation centre in *VU Hospital Santaros Klinikos*, also owned by the faculty, however has adequate equipment to prepare students for the clinical training. A person who is skilled in preparing simulations is also actively involved in creating learning situations.

We estimate that the faculty has a sufficient number of contracts with clinical institutions to offer adequate opportunities for students' clinical training. In the conversation with social partners the wish for a midwifery study programme was expressed very clearly and they also confirmed their preparedness to be involved in the practical part of the study programme.

- *Evaluation of the planning and upgrading of resources needed to carry out the study programme.*

The new research centre is being planned, within it will be also a simulation centre that could be used by midwifery students.

The expert group has got the impression that the Medical Faculty currently does not have enough resources to prepare midwifery students, especially in concern to manikins. Plans are made, however if the first generation of midwifery students would start already in autumn 2024, it is of great danger that quality of midwifery education would be low.

At VU Hospital Santaros Klinikos, has manikins for midwifery students, however the location is far from the faculty and students would have to travel long distances to be a part of the training. More equipment should be available on the site; in the laboratories of the faculty.

The faculty needs to bear in mind that simulation and skills training for midwifery students is a part of the theory courses in the curriculum as EU directives for midwifery education do not recognize simulation as practical training. As the simulation equipment

is located at the hospital, the risk is that the skills training and simulation are going to be a part of the clinical practice. Therefore simulators/manikins have to be available at the faculty.

The midwifery teachers need to be prepared in how to educate students in simulation labs; they all need competencies and pedagogical skills to include simulations in the theoretical part of the study. Simulations need to be appropriately managed, so that the students get as much as possible from this method of education.

Main distinctive features of the area:

1. Library is well equipped, with long working hours to enable self-study for the students.
2. Simulation lab in the hospital is well equipped; however students need to have manikins also in the faculty facilities.

Expert panel concludes that the proposed Midwifery study programme fulfils the required Indicators for this field as adequate, however the following improvement has to be done:

Areas for improvement:

1. Midwifery manikins should be available for midwifery students also at the faculties' laboratories, not only at the hospital settings.
2. Midwifery teachers should be trained in simulation pedagogics and skilled how to use simulations in the theoretical part of the study.

Corrections made based on expert recommendations (to be completed if the experts submit a proposal to revise the programme within 10 working days)

The VU has sent the proof of the purchase of two manikins, relevant for the field of midwifery study that will be available for the students of midwifery at the faculty.

We recommend that skill stations are used as a part of midwifery study from the 1st year of the study programme on, not only for high risk skills in the last study years; the simulations need to be embedded into the study programme throughout the education.

We also recommend that VU takes care that midwifery teachers get enough knowledge on the pedagogic skills for performing simulations (how to prepare, conduct and reflect upon certain practical exercise); this area is developing fast and requires different didactical approaches as other methods of theoretical teaching.

However, we conclude that this aspect has been significantly improved and after corrections made by VU, the majority of above mentioned weaknesses are not relevant any more.

2.7. STUDY QUALITY MANAGEMENT AND PUBLICITY

The evaluation area is analysed according to the following indicators:

- *Evaluation of the effectiveness of the internal quality assurance system of the studies.*

Internal quality assurance is controlled by the Senate of Vilnius University and the councils of the CAUs, but the greatest responsibility lies with the VU Study Quality and Development Department. The quality of study programmes is ensured and improved by an external quality evaluation of the study programme, publishing the results of the external evaluation; performing an internal quality evaluation of the study programme; collecting data on the study programmes, analysing them and publishing the results; continuous monitoring of feedback and immediate decision-making; ensuring the adequacy and sufficiency of material resources required for studies; improving the qualification of teaching staff; monitoring and analysing the progress of studies; improving the management of study programmes; promoting the use of innovative teaching and evaluation methods; regularly updating study programmes; disseminating good practices; and applying other measures.

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

Each semester, standardised online surveys of students' overall satisfaction with studies and evaluation of each course they have taken. Survey results on students' overall satisfaction are published and available to all VU staff members on the VU intranet. Survey results on specific courses are available on VUSIS to the head of the academic unit and deputy head for studies, to the chair of the SPC (information on specific study programmes and courses) and to the teaching staff (information on the courses they teach). The survey results are also used during the evaluation of teaching staff and for the annual best lecturer award.

Stakeholders are involved including students. Cooperation with the social partners is planned e.g. organisation of student, joint study and research projects. Prospective employers, administrators of healthcare institutions, as social partners, will be invited to the SPC for midwifery to solve various issues of content, implementation quality of the study programme and other issues, where they will be able to submit proposals on the application of new, innovative teaching methods, strengthening the links between the content of the study programme and the needs of the labour market.

Main distinctive features of the area:

1. Quality assurance protocols are established and already performed in other fields of studies in VU.

Expert panel concludes that the proposed Midwifery study programme fulfils the required Indicators for the field of Quality management and publicity very good; therefore no short term improvement has to be made.

Areas for improvement:

None

III. RECOMMENDATIONS

Recommendations that the higher education institution have to take into account within 10 working days of the receipt of the draft report (to be completed if the experts submit a proposal to revise the programme within 10 working days)

1. Re - write Descriptor precisely based on “Order on Approval Of The Descriptor Of The Study Field Of Nursing And Midwifery” to cover all required topics. Submit the adapted list.

The recommendation has been implemented. VU prepared re-written descriptors.

2. Do not merge the programme “Nursing” with programme “Midwifery”, since they two separate professions. Rewrite the submitted documents and clearly mark the changes.

The recommendation has been implemented.

3. Use correct terms for describing a midwife and midwifery – it is not an obstetrician. Obstetrics is a medical profession, while midwife is an independent health professional. Rewrite the submitted documents and clearly mark the changes.

The recommendation has been implemented.

4. Clarifying the exact amount of clinical training in the study program for the whole education; according to different fields (where students need to gain practical procedures as defined by EU directive). Submit a list of clinical settings with exact number of hours and exact number of clinical procedures that student will gain.

The recommendation has been implemented. VU prepared detailed document of clinical settings, number of hours devoted to it and areas of EU directive requirements that a certain field of practical training will cover.

5. Shorten theoretical part of the study in exchange for; simulations have to be included in the theoretical part of the study programme (clinical training needs to be with midwifery clients). Rewrite the submitted documents and clearly mark the changes.

The recommendation has been implemented. Simulations were clearly placed in the theoretical part of the study programme.

6. Midwifery specific subjects have to be taught by a midwife teacher and clinical training of the students has to be monitored by midwifery clinical mentors; this is not clearly stated in the submitted documentation. Send a list of midwifery theoretical subjects with midwifery teachers assigned to lecture them and send a list of midwifery clinical mentors that will participate in clinical mentoring of midwifery students.
The recommendation has been implemented. VU prepared re-written descriptors. VU provided a list and CV's of additional midwifery teachers that will be involved in lectures and agreed to participate in the study programme (written individual agreements were submitted).
7. Include a professional language module in the curriculum.
The recommendation has been implemented.
8. Specific midwifery-related research in the curriculum as the ground for evidence-based teaching in the midwifery program has to be clear and precisely named. Rewrite the submitted documents and clearly mark the changes.
The recommendation has been implemented.
9. Faculty needs to create special diaries for the student to fill during clinical practice, where there will be obvious that the student gained before the graduation all procedures prescribed by EU directive. Send a template of such journal.
The recommendation has been implemented. VU created a student's portfolio for record keeping.
10. Midwifery teachers must be adequately included also in the theoretical part of the study, if currently midwifery teachers at VU not hold credentials to lecture at the faculty, teachers from other institutions should be involved. Not only a list, but also a letter of confirmation of midwifery teachers, who will be included in the programme has to be submitted.
The recommendation has been implemented. VU prepared re-written descriptors. VU provided a list and CV's of additional midwifery teachers that will be involved in lectures and agreed to participate in the study programme (written individual agreements were submitted).
11. Midwifery manikins should be available for midwifery students at the faculties' laboratories too, not only at the hospital settings. A proof of a purchase of the manikins suitable for the field of midwifery has to be submitted.
The recommendation has been implemented. The VU has sent the proof of the purchase of two manikins, relevant for the field of midwifery study that will be available for the students of midwifery at the faculty.
12. Midwifery teachers should be trained in simulation pedagogics and skilled how to use simulations in the theoretical part of the study. A clear plan of how faculty managers

will provide them with these skills has to be submitted with proof that midwifery teachers are going to participate in workshops that will prepare them for this role.

The recommendation has been partially implemented. VU has sent the argumentation, however we still strongly recommend that VU takes care midwifery teachers will get enough knowledge on the pedagogic skills for performing simulations (how to prepare, conduct and reflect upon certain practical exercise); this area is developing fast and requires different didactical approaches as other methods of theoretical teaching.

Other recommendations:

1. The core of midwifery teachers at the faculty needs to grow in the long-term. Faculty administration and managements needs to support them getting the credentials (MSc ad PhD in midwifery).
2. We recommend that the midwifery program collaborates with other midwifery education within the country and in the future also internationally. The midwife students from Vilnius University will be colleagues with the midwife students from other educations in Lithuania and abroad. The collaboration between the upcoming colleagues can strengthen the midwifery identity and the midwife profession.
3. During simulation practice or clinical practice, do not merge nursing, medical students together with midwives (separate clinical practice). These are separate health professions with distinctive roles.
4. Involve future employers in study process, introduce them with EU Midwifery Directives, involve in clinical practice mentor programme.

IV. GENERAL ASSESSMENT

The first cycle study programme Midwifery at Vilnius University is given positive evaluation.

Study programme assessment in points by evaluation areas.

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

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

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

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

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

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

Expert panel chairperson signature:

Associate professor dr. Ana Polona Mivšek
(signature)