STUDIJŲ KOKYBĖS VERTINIMO CENTRAS
CENTRE FOR QUALITY ASSESSMENT IN HIGHER EDUCATION

ECOLOGY FIELD OF STUDY

Vytautas Magnus University

EXTERNAL EVALUATION REPORT

Expert panel:

1. Panel chair: prof. dr. Michał Grabowski …….. (signature)
2. Academic member: assoc. Prof. Mirela Sertić Perić
3. Academic member: prof. dr. Tiiu Kull
4. Academic member: prof. dr. Linas Kliučininkas
5. Student representative: Karolis Gritėnas

SKVC coordinator: Radvilė Blažaitytė

Report prepared in 2025
Report language: English

CONTENTS

I. INTRODUCTION

1.1. OUTLINE OF THE EVALUATION PROCESS

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

1.2. REVIEW PANEL

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

The composition of the review panel was as follows:

1. Panel chair: prof. dr. Michał Grabowski
2. Academic member: assoc. Prof. Mirela Sertić Perić
3. Academic member: prof. dr. Tiiu Kull
4. Academic member: prof. dr. Linas Kliučininkas
5. Student representative: Karolis Gritėnas

1.3. SITE VISIT

The site visit was organised on 11th February 2025 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

Vytautas Magnus University (VMU), founded in 1922 and re-established in 1989, is a classical university, recognized for its Liberal Arts education profile, fostering freedom, openness, and dialogue. With a strong foundation in humanistic culture, VMU offers a broad range of degree programs at the bachelor's, master's, and doctoral levels across various fields. The university's educational approach emphasizes interdisciplinary learning, enabling students to engage in comprehensive studies and adapt their academic paths according to their interests. VMU also has an international and multilingual focus, actively promoting global academic and research collaborations.

Overview of the study field

VMU offers two master's degree (2nd cycle) programs in the Life Sciences field: Ecology and Climate Change as well as Agroecosystems. The Ecology and Climate Change program, coordinated by the Faculty of Forest Sciences and Ecology, with contributions from this faculty to the Agroecosystems program, leveraging its environmental science expertise. It focuses on ecological systems and their relationships with climate change. Originally titled Applied Ecology, the program was renamed in 2022 to better reflect its emphasis on climate impacts. The Agroecosystems program blends ecology and agricultural sciences to address sustainable farming practices. It is primarily managed by the Faculty of Agronomy, which focuses on integrating agricultural sciences with ecology to promote sustainable farming and ecosystem management. These faculties collaborate to ensure a comprehensive and integrated learning experience. Both programs are hosted at VMU's Academy of Agriculture and adopt an interdisciplinary approach to environmental and agricultural challenges.

Previous external evaluations

In 2021, an international team of experts conducted an external evaluation of the Ecology field, including the Ecology and Climate Change and Agroecosystems programs. The evaluation rated VMU's learning facilities, study quality management, and resources as very good, scoring 4 out of 5. The aims, outcomes, and content of the programs, student admission and support, teaching staff, and graduate employment were rated as good, scoring 3 out of 5. The link between science and study activities was rated as satisfactory (2 points). Based on these evaluations, a series of recommendations were made, and VMU has since implemented actions to improve the study programs in line with the suggestions provided.

Documents and information used in the review

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

- *Self-evaluation report and its annexes;*
- *Final theses;*
- *Course descriptions.*

II. STUDY PROGRAMMES IN THE FIELD

Second cycle/LTQF 7

Title of the study programme	**Ecology and Climate Change**	**Agroecosystems**
State code	6211DX013	6213DX001
Type of study (college/university)	University	University
Mode of study (full time/part time) and nominal duration (in years)	Full time* / Part time** 2 y. (FT*), 3 y. (PT)**	Full time* / Part time** 2 y. (FT*), 3 y. (PT)**
Workload in ECTS	120	120
Award (degree and/or professional qualification)	Master of Life Sciences	Master of Life Sciences
Language of instruction	Lithuanian/ English	Lithuanian
Admission requirements	Bachelor's degree qualification	Bachelor's degree qualification
First registration date	19 May 1997 No 565	9 November 2007, No. 2166
Comments (including remarks on joint or interdisciplinary nature of the programme, mode of provision)		

* FT -Full-time
** PT - Part-time

III. ASSESSMENT IN POINTS BY CYCLE AND EVALUATION AREAS

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

No.	Evaluation Area	Evaluation points[1*]
1.	Study aims, learning outcomes and curriculum	3
2.	Links between scientific (or artistic) research and higher education	3
3.	Student admission and support	4
4.	Teaching and learning, student assessment, and graduate employment	4
5.	Teaching staff	3
6.	Learning facilities and resources	4
7.	Quality assurance and public information	4
	Total:	25

1

IV. STUDY FIELD ANALYSIS

AREA 1: STUDY AIMS, LEARNING OUTCOMES AND CURRICULUM

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

FACTUAL SITUATION

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

The section in the Self-Evaluation Report (SER) contains extensive repetition and overly detailed information about the alignment of the *Ecology and Climate Change* and *Agroecosystems* programs with societal needs and the labour market. The main points can be summarized as follows.
Ecology and Climate Change: This program aims to train specialists equipped with knowledge on the impacts of climate change on ecosystems. Graduates are prepared to address issues such as biodiversity loss, ecosystem management, and environmental policy, with a focus on sustainable solutions aligned with European and global environmental strategies. The program meets the growing demand for climate change specialists in various sectors, including research, environmental agencies, NGOs, and international organizations.
Agroecosystems: This interdisciplinary program focuses on the ecological aspects of agricultural systems. It prepares specialists in agroecology who can manage and improve the sustainability and productivity of agroecosystems. Graduates are equipped to work in research, environmental protection, and agricultural production, addressing the challenges of sustainable farming and resource management.

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

The section provided in the Self-Evaluation Report (SER) highlights the alignment of the *Ecology and Climate Change* and *Agroecosystems* study programs with the mission and strategic goals of Vytautas Magnus University (VMU). The main points are as follows: VMU aims to be a community-based institution contributing to Lithuania's development and global academic progress. The university's Strategic Plan for 2021-2027 outlines five key areas, one of which is societal impact. The *Ecology and Climate Change* and *Agroecosystems* programs align with the university's goal to strengthen leadership in agriculture, forestry, water management, and rural development, particularly in line with VMU's objective 5.3. The programs directly contribute to the university's role in shaping national policy on agriculture and environmental sustainability (VMU's Strategic Goal 5.3). Specifically, the *Agroecosystems* program trains professionals to evaluate farming's environmental impact, promote sustainable farming practices, and support the circular bio-economy. Similarly, the *Ecology and Climate Change* program prepares specialists to analyze ecosystems and propose solutions for biodiversity protection, nature management, and ecological research.

ANALYSIS AND CONCLUSION (regarding 1.1.)

Ad. 1.1.1. While the SER provides valuable insights into the programs' alignment with societal and labour market needs, the text contains excessive repetition, making the information more cumbersome than necessary. A more concise version of the self evaluation would better highlight the unique contributions of these programs to environmental and climate action. Based on the self-evaluation report (SER) and the insights gained from interviews with various stakeholders, it is clear that both programs (*Ecology and Climate Change* and *Agroecosystems*) align closely with societal

and labour market needs. Both programmes are essential in responding to the urgent environmental and climate change challenges, with a clear focus on providing practical and theoretical expertise to tackle sustainability issues in agriculture and ecosystem management. They complement each other, as one (*Ecology and Climate Change*) focuses on broad ecological and climate change challenges (focusing on governmental roles in national conservation), while the other (*Agroecosystems*) specializes in agroecological solutions (focusing on agriculture industry careers). Based on the interviewees' responses, the university actively promotes international student recruitment, especially from Southeast Asia, and fosters collaboration with various industries, municipalities, and social partners for student placements and projects. In addition, the decrease in drop-out rates for *Agroecosystems* (from 17% to 9%, and now 0%) and *Ecology and Climate Change* (a steady 0% last year) suggests that the programmes are both in demand and meet students' expectations, confirming their relevance and attractiveness. Regarding the university community, alumni and social partners play an integral role in the university's ongoing success and connection to the labour market. The strong alumni network, particularly within protected areas, enables continued collaboration, with alumni often working together and offering career opportunities. Many alumni have found meaningful employment, with some advancing to PhD studies and others actively contributing to the field. The university fosters a work-study balance, appreciated by students, and regularly invites social partners to hold lectures and collaborate on European projects. Though they have not yet been consulted in shaping the study programmes, social partners offer valuable input by suggesting thesis topics each year. The unique combination of fieldwork, practical experience, and generational agricultural knowledge positions the programme as a leader in preparing graduates for the labour market, especially in nature protection, forestry, and agriculture.

Ad. 1.1.2. In conclusion, the aims and outcomes of both study programs align well with VMU's strategic objectives, particularly in advancing Lithuania's sustainability goals and contributing to global environmental initiatives like the European Green Deal. However, the SER contains some repetition in discussing the alignment, and the summary could be more concise while still clearly demonstrating the programs' contribution to the university's strategic plan.

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

Based on the information provided in the Self-Evaluation Report (SER), the evaluation of the *Ecology and Climate Change* and *Agroecosystems* study programmes demonstrates that both programmes adhere to the required academic standards and fully comply with national and European regulations. Key areas of compliance include: (i) Conformity with study cycle descriptors. The study programmes align with the general requirements for second-cycle learning outcomes as set out in the Description of Study Cycles. The learning outcomes for both programmes adhere to the required structural elements such as knowledge application, research, special, social, and personal skills. For example, the *Ecology and Climate Change* program focuses on analyzing ecosystems, climate change, biodiversity, and environmental policy, while the *Agroecosystems* program addresses biodiversity in agroecosystems and sustainable farming systems. (ii) Compliance with field of study requirements. Both study programmes meet the criteria outlined in the Ecology Study Field Descriptor. For instance, the *Ecology and Climate Change* program aligns with the field's objective of producing professionals who understand ecosystem functioning, biodiversity conservation, and environmental protection under climate change. Similarly, the *Agroecosystems* program trains students in sustainable agriculture and the management of agroecological processes. (iii) ECTS allocation and

student workload. The allocation of ECTS credits is consistent with the requirements for second-cycle programmes. ECTS credits are allocated based on the complexity of the learning outcomes and corresponding student workload, ensuring that students engage in both theoretical and practical learning. For example, 1 ECTS corresponds to 26.67 hours of work, with the distribution of student workload across courses and final thesis work well-defined. (iv) Interdisciplinary nature of the *Agroecosystems* program. The *Agroecosystems* programme is correctly described as interdisciplinary, incorporating both ecology and agriculture. While Table 1 may show no ECTS from other fields, Annex 1 clarifies that there are 102 ECTS from the core fields of Ecology and Agriculture (interdisciplinary), plus 18 ECTS from additional fields like bioeconomy, information technology, soil resources, GIS, etc. This reflects the interdisciplinary nature of the programme.

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

Based on the provided information from the Self-Evaluation Report (SER), the learning outcomes of both the *Agroecosystems* and *Ecology and Climate Change* study programmes are clearly formulated in alignment with the programme aims. The learning outcomes are organized into categories: Knowledge and its application, Research skills, Special abilities, Social abilities, and Personal abilities. These categories adequately cover the core aspects of the programmes' objectives. The use of Tables 2 and 3 in SER is an effective way to visualize the coherence of the programme's aims and learning outcomes with the individual courses. Active learning methods are emphasized in the SER, with a strong focus on creativity and innovation. Teaching methods such as case studies, problem-solving, report writing, project development, and information synthesis foster engagement and critical thinking - key elements for interdisciplinary fields like agroecosystems and ecology and climate change. These methods encourage students to apply concepts in real-world contexts. The SER indicates that assessment methods align with both course and programme aims, using tools such as tests, written questionnaires, observations, and discussion evaluations to assess knowledge and research skills. The report provides examples showing how assessments are tailored to evaluate specific skills and knowledge. Regular updates to course descriptions and assessment criteria, including the integration of new climate change strategies, ensure that assessments stay relevant and in line with current developments in the field. The SER further indicates that curriculum content and teaching methods are regularly updated to reflect new scientific, technological, and policy developments. This ensures that the study programme maintains its relevance in a rapidly changing field.

1.2.3. Curriculum ensures consistent development of student competences

The Self-Evaluation Report (SER) for both *Agroecosystems* and *Ecology and Climate Change* presents well-rounded programmes that are closely aligned with the demands of modern environmental science. Both programmes emphasize the development of key competencies for students, ensuring a clear and consistent progression of skills. Strengths encompass the following: (i) Comprehensive core knowledge. Both programmes offer foundational courses in key areas such as agroecology, land management, biodiversity conservation, and climate change. Courses like *Agroecology*, *Climate Change and Agroecosystems*, and *Terrestrial Ecosystem Diversity and Protection* ensure that students gain essential knowledge in both ecological theory and the practical implications of climate change and land management; (ii) Research skills development. Courses such as *Scientific Research Methodology in Ecology* and *Research Planning and Analysis* emphasize the importance of research skills, equipping students to conduct independent, high-level research. This focus on research, coupled with the Master's Thesis, ensures students can demonstrate competence in scientific inquiry and application; (iii) Practical and interdisciplinary focus: Both programmes integrate practical skills with interdisciplinary approaches. For instance, the *Agroecosystem Modelling* and *GIS in Ecological Research* courses provide students with tools for data analysis, while *Policy of Environmental and Climate Change Management* and *Technologies for Climate Change Adaptation Managemen*t bridge the gap between science and policy; (iv) Diverse electives. The flexibility of elective courses, such as *Renewable Agricultural Resources* and *Waste Treatment* and *Environmental Epidemiology*, allows students to tailor their studies to their specific interests, making the programmes adaptable to evolving environmental challenges.

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

The Self-Evaluation Report (SER) highlights several opportunities for students in the *Ecology and Climate Change* and *Agroecosystems* programmes to personalise their study paths, supporting their individual learning goals and intended outcomes. Students have the flexibility to design an individual study schedule that accommodates their specific needs, allowing them to determine the timing of courses, consultations, assessments, and examination sessions. This flexibility ensures that students can align their studies with their personal and professional commitments, fostering a tailored approach to learning. Both programmes allocate 18 credits to elective courses, allowing students to personalise their studies based on their interests. The opportunity to choose electives from different fields, including interdisciplinary options and PhD preparation, further supports students in pursuing specific learning objectives within their desired focus areas. Students have the option to select their thesis topic and supervisor from a wide pool of faculty members across various departments at VMU. This flexibility allows students to choose a supervisor whose expertise aligns with their personal research interests, facilitating a more meaningful and individualised thesis project. The programmes offer part-time study options, enabling students to balance their education with professional work. This is especially beneficial for those who wish to gain practical experience while pursuing their studies. The individual study plan for part-time students extends over three years, allowing for thoughtful planning of electives and accommodating professional obligations. VMU's diverse, multilingual environment also offers students the chance to study foreign languages, further enhancing their ability to personalise their academic experience, especially in an international context.

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

Based on the information provided in the Self-Evaluation Report (SER) and annexes, the final thesis process in both the *Ecology and Climate Change* and *Agroecosystems* study programmes follows VMU's regulations and guidelines. The process is clearly defined, with structured guidelines and procedures for both preparation and defence. These include methodological guidelines specific to the respective faculties, regular updates, and clear assessment criteria, which ensure that final theses align with the field and cycle requirements. A notable strength is that the final theses reflect the competences developed through the study programmes, with students expected to produce a research project and publish their findings in scientific conferences or journals. This helps demonstrate the students' ability to contribute to their fields of study. Additionally, the thesis topics are closely linked to both academic objectives and societal needs, with several examples provided, such as research in collaboration with municipalities on climate change and water quality assessments. This shows a clear connection between the programme's outcomes and real-world challenges, enhancing the relevance of the students' work.

ANALYSIS AND CONCLUSION (regarding 1.2.)

Ad. 1.2.3. In conclusion, the *Ecology and Climate Change* and *Agroecosystems* study programmes comply with all relevant legal and academic requirements, including national descriptors and the European framework. However, the self-evaluation report (SER) could benefit from more clarity regarding the apparent discrepancy in the ECTS allocation for the *Agroecosystems* programme, as outlined in Annex 1 but not fully reflected in Table 1. Additionally, the structure of the part-time study programme, which lasts longer than the full-time version, is not sufficiently explained in relation to its ECTS allocation. The report's explanation of student workload is also unclear, particularly the difference in student work hours between full-time and part-time study modes. The SER mentions that in full-time studies, 60 ECTS corresponds to 1,600 hours of student work per year, while part-

time studies, which total 40 ECTS, correspond to only 1,067 hours of student work. This raised questions about whether part-time students have a reduced workload for the same degree. These issues were clarified during the interviews. Given the growing demand and student interest in part-time studies, the extension of the study duration for part-time students was adjusted to accommodate their needs. The longer duration for part-time students, which extends across six semesters both for *Agroecosystems* and for *Ecology and Climate Change*, results in a reduced number of ECTS and student engagement hours per year, which is justified. The increased ECTS and workload in the full-time mode correspond to the more intensive study format.

Ad. 1.2.4. Based on the interviewees' responses, the aims and learning outcomes of the *Ecology and Climate Change* and *Agroecosystems* study programmes are well aligned with societal and labour market needs, particularly in areas such as nature protection and agriculture. Both teachers and students highlighted a blend of theoretical lessons, practical work, field visits, and interactive tools, all of which contribute to a comprehensive understanding of the subjects. Innovative teaching methods, such as case studies, field expeditions, and the use of visual tools (e.g., videos produced by students) and QR codes in experiments, provide students with modern and engaging learning experiences. Furthermore, the transition to English teaching has been accompanied by curriculum adjustments to ensure the content meets the needs of international students, thus enhancing their employability both within Lithuania and internationally. In response to feedback from the previous report, it is evident that the programmes have made efforts to diversify assessment methods. The earlier report highlighted that exams were the predominant form of assessment; however, there has since been a greater emphasis on incorporating research papers, presentations, and practical reports into the evaluation process. This shift aligns better with employer preferences for workplace-relevant skills, such as the ability to work collaboratively in group settings. The inclusion of practical reports and group work would further strengthen the assessment methods, offering students the opportunity to demonstrate competencies that are more directly transferable to real-world situations. This development indicates progress in making assessments more meaningful and authentic. In summary, both programmes generally comply with Criterion 1.4, demonstrating a clear alignment between the aims, learning outcomes, teaching methods, and assessment strategies. The learning outcomes are carefully linked to both the course content and broader programme objectives, with a clear emphasis on active, student-centered learning. The ongoing updates to the curriculum ensure that it remains relevant in the rapidly evolving fields of ecology and climate change. However, to further enhance the programme, it could benefit from a more explicit focus on interdisciplinary learning, particularly in areas like social sciences, policy, and economics. These are crucial for addressing complex environmental issues such as climate change, and an interdisciplinary approach could further enrich students' education and their ability to tackle such challenges in the future. Additionally, the integration of regular student feedback into the evaluation and refinement of teaching methods would help maintain the effectiveness and relevance of the curriculum and assessment strategies. This process is already in place, with students' feedback being actively considered for course updates, but a more formalized system of incorporating this feedback could further strengthen the overall teaching and learning experience.

Ad. 1.2.5. The structure of the *Agroecosystems* and *Ecology and Climate Change* study programmes fosters consistent development of student competences by combining theoretical knowledge with practical application. In the first year, students primarily focus on building a strong foundation in theory, while the second year shifts to hands-on experiences such as fieldwork, laboratory practice, and case study analysis. This approach exposes students to various areas of expertise, like invasive species recognition and forestry, which set them apart from graduates of other universities. Additionally, students have the opportunity to participate in exchange programmes, broadening their perspectives and gaining international exposure. By integrating applied skills into the curriculum, such as interactive teaching methods and experimental stations/fields, the programmes ensure that students are well-equipped for the workforce. The focus on both ecological and agroecosystem subjects provides students with a versatile skill set suitable for employment in sectors such as environmental conservation, agriculture, and public administration. Both the *Agroecosystems* and *Ecology and Climate Change* programmes are well-structured and align with contemporary environmental needs. They effectively integrate core competencies in ecology, climate change, and sustainable agriculture. However, there is potential to make the education even more comprehensive

by enhancing interdisciplinary approaches, incorporating social sciences and advanced technologies, and increasing practical experiences. Areas for improvement include providing a more holistic education, the programmes could incorporate courses addressing the social and economic dimensions of environmental issues, such as climate economics, environmental justice, or agricultural policy. These additions would better prepare students to engage with the broader societal impacts of agroecosystems and climate change. Additionally, incorporating emerging technologies like climate modelling, data science, and machine learning would help students tackle modern challenges in agroecosystem management. Courses such as *Precision Agriculture* or *Big Data for Ecological Analysis* would ensure students are equipped for the technological demands of the field. Furthermore, a stronger emphasis on fieldwork, internships, or other practical applications would offer students deeper insights into real-world environmental challenges and improve their preparedness for the workforce. A course on international environmental policy or climate governance could provide students with valuable insights into global frameworks like the Paris Agreement and climate finance. Finally, introducing emerging topics such as *Climate Resilient Agriculture*, *Rewilding*, or *Urban Ecology* would help students stay updated with the latest developments in these evolving fields, ensuring the programme remains relevant in a rapidly changing world.

Ad. 1.2.6. Both the *Ecology and Climate Change* and *Agroecosystems* programmes offer students significant opportunities for personalisation, allowing them to tailor their academic paths to align with their interests and career goals. Students have the freedom to select their master's thesis topics from a broad list of available subjects or propose their own, refining them to match their personal academic pursuits. This flexibility extends to the structure of the programmes, including the option for part-time study, which enables students to balance work and study according to their individual circumstances. The university also supports students' professional development by providing opportunities to attend scientific conferences, where they can present their research and receive valuable feedback from experts. The programmes further enhance personalisation through flexible study schedules, elective courses, and the ability to choose thesis topics and supervisors. The availability of elective credits and the ability to adjust study plans for part-time students contribute to a highly adaptable curriculum. However, there is potential for improvement in ensuring the consistent availability of electives. Currently, electives are offered if at least six students express interest, and increasing the frequency of elective offerings could provide students with more opportunities to align their studies with their specific goals. Additionally, while students have substantial freedom in tailoring their learning experience, clearer guidance on how to integrate personal learning objectives across various subjects – such as elective courses, thesis work, and fieldwork – would help them navigate the available opportunities more effectively. Providing structured advice on how to align electives with the overall programme structure would enhance the coherence of personalised learning plans, ensuring students can make the most of the flexible curriculum while pursuing their unique academic and career aspirations.

Ad. 1.2.7. The final theses in both the *Ecology and Climate Change* and *Agroecosystems* programmes align well with the academic and professional requirements of the fields. Teachers and students confirm that students are required to write a research paper and present their findings at scientific conferences, which provides them with valuable exposure to the academic community and opportunities for feedback. The university supports students in selecting thesis topics, offering both a list of suggested subjects and the option to propose their own, allowing them to tailor their research to their personal interests. Thesis topics proposed by alumni and social partners seem to help bridge the gap between academia and industry, ensuring that the research is relevant to the current labour market needs. The integration of practical skills, such as fieldwork and case studies, into the thesis process further enhances the real-world applicability of the students' research. This approach ensures that the final theses not only meet academic standards but also contribute to the students' professional development. While the thesis process is well-structured and meets the necessary academic and societal requirements, there is room for improvement in aligning thesis topics with emerging global challenges in ecology and agroecosystems. Providing more explicit information on opportunities for collaboration with industry partners and expanding research opportunities could further strengthen the relevance and impact of the final theses, fostering deeper connections between academic learning and professional practice.

AREA 1: CONCLUSIONS

AREA 1	Unsatisfactory - 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
Second cycle			x		

COMMENDATIONS

1. The *Ecology and Climate Change* and *Agroecosystems* programmes are well-aligned with societal and labour market needs, focusing on critical issues such as sustainability, nature protection, and agriculture;
2. Strong international student recruitment efforts contribute to the global relevance of the programmes;
3. The active involvement of alumni and social partners in offering career opportunities and suggesting thesis topics strengthens the programmes' ties with labour market needs;
4. The significant decrease in drop-out rates and considerable student demand for both programmes highlight their relevance and attractiveness;
5. The flexibility in personalising study paths through elective courses, thesis topics, and part-time study options provides students with the opportunity to align their education with their individual goals;
6. Final theses integrate practical skills, such as fieldwork and case studies, ensuring relevance to both academia and industry (labour market).

RECOMMENDATIONS

For further improvement

1. The self-evaluation report (SER) could be more concise, reducing repetition while clearly highlighting the programmes' unique contributions to environmental and climate action;
2. Further emphasis on interdisciplinary learning, particularly in social sciences, policy, and economics, would enrich students' education and better prepare them for complex environmental challenges;
3. More consistent availability of elective courses should be ensured, potentially increasing the frequency of elective offerings to allow students more opportunities to tailor their studies;
4. Provide clearer guidance for students on how to integrate personalised learning objectives across electives, thesis work, and fieldwork, ensuring better coherence in their learning plans;
5. Align thesis topics more explicitly with emerging global challenges in ecology and agroecosystems, and provide more opportunities for collaboration with industry partners to strengthen the connection between academic learning and professional practice;
6. Expand the curriculum to include courses addressing the social and economic dimensions of environmental issues, as well as emerging technologies like climate modelling and data science, to ensure the programmes remain at the forefront of environmental education.

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 both assessed programs, i.e. *Agroecosystems* and *Ecology and Climate Change*, demonstrate a strong alignment with the criteria for integrating scientific research and fostering student research skills in higher education. The research conducted by the teaching staff is characterized by a strong practical orientation. It focuses on critical areas such as assessing the environmental impact of agricultural practices, developing models for sustainable farming, and analyzing the effects of climate change on ecosystems. This research is academically rigorous and highly relevant to contemporary environmental and agricultural challenges. Teachers in these programs are actively involved in research across several vital domains related to the field of study and both programs, including climate change, ecosystem dynamics, and environmental protection. This engagement ensures that they remain at the forefront of their fields, bringing the latest knowledge and practices into the classroom. Funding for these research activities is secured through a variety of sources, including the Lithuanian Research Council, various ministries, EU structural funds, and other funding bodies. This diverse funding base not only supports the wide scope of research but also ensures its sustainability. A significant aspect of the research is its collaborative nature. Partnerships with other research institutions, both within Lithuania and internationally, facilitate a rich exchange of ideas and methodologies, enhancing the quality and impact of the research. The outcomes of these scientific studies are disseminated through publications in reputable peer-reviewed journals and presentations at international conferences. This ensures that the research contributes to the broader scientific community and is subject to critical review. Moreover, the integration of this research into the teaching process is a key factor in providing students with an education that is grounded in the most current scientific findings and practices.

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

The curricula of both the *Agroecosystems* and *Ecology and Climate Change* programs are meticulously designed to reflect the latest advancements in science and technology. This ensures that students are learning material that is not only current but also relevant to the evolving demands of their fields. For instance, the *Agroecosystems* program includes up-to-date studies in organic farming, agroecology, and environmental protection. This equips students with the knowledge and skills needed to contribute to sustainable agricultural practices. Similarly, the *Ecology and Climate Change* program covers the most recent developments in climate change science, ecosystem research, and environmental protection, preparing students to tackle some of the most pressing environmental challenges of our time. Students are actively involved in research projects that are linked to latest developments in ecology and agronomy. This hands-on experience is invaluable, providing them with practical skills and insights that complement their theoretical learning.

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

Students in both assessed programs have ample opportunities to engage in research, aligning with the academic cycle and fostering a continuous learning and discovery process. Students participate in research projects led by VMU staff that explore the latest trends in climate change, ecosystem studies, organic farming, agroecology, and environmental protection. This involvement allows them

to apply their knowledge in real-world scenarios and contribute to meaningful research. This is crucial in developing their research skills and deepening their understanding of these complex issues. Students are encouraged to take part in conferences, providing them with platforms to present their research and engage with the wider scientific community. They are also supported in publishing their work in peer-reviewed journals, which is essential for academic and professional development. In summary, the study programs effectively integrate current scientific research into their curriculum and provide students with consistent opportunities to participate in research. This approach not only enhances their educational experience but also prepares them to be competent and contributing professionals in their respective fields.

ANALYSIS AND CONCLUSION (regarding 2.1.)

Ad. 2.1.1. The research conducted within the both VMU faculties responsible for the study programs of *Agroecosystems* and *Ecology and Climate Change* is characterized by its robust practical orientation, strategically focusing on critical, real-world applications. The teaching staff is actively involved in a range of research areas, including climate change, ecosystem research, and environmental protection. Their research is pivotal in assessing and mitigating the environmental impact of agricultural activities, a field of study that has gained increasing importance in the face of global climate change and the growing need for sustainable food production. By delving into this area, researchers are providing actionable insights that can lead to tangible improvements in environmental management in Lithuania, other parts of central and eastern Europe and beyond. A significant component of the research conducted at VMU involves the development of sustainable farming systems. This is an interdisciplinary endeavour that requires a deep understanding of agronomy, ecology, economics, and social sciences. The researchers are tasked with creating innovative approaches that can maintain or enhance agricultural productivity while minimizing environmental harm. This includes exploring methods such as crop rotation, organic farming, and integrated pest management, which are crucial for the future of agriculture. Moreover, the research extends to analysing the multifaceted impacts of climate change on ecosystems. This involves studying how rising temperatures, altered precipitation patterns, and increased frequency of extreme weather events affect natural habitats and biodiversity. Such analyses are vital for developing strategies to conserve ecosystems and the services they provide, such as carbon sequestration, water purification, and pollination. The research work at VMU is supported by funding from diverse sources, including the Lithuanian Research Council, the Ministry of Agriculture, the Ministry of Environment, and EU structural funds. Such financial backing underscores the significance of their research and its alignment with national and European priorities. Collaboration is a cornerstone of the research efforts. Partnerships with other research institutions in Lithuania and abroad facilitate a rich exchange of knowledge, ideas, and best practices. These collaborations enhance the quality of the research and amplify its impact, ensuring that findings are relevant and applicable in a variety of contexts. The outcomes of the research conducted at VMU are disseminated through publications in peer-reviewed journals and presentations at international conferences, including also the participation of students. This ensures that the research contributes to the global scientific community and is subject to rigorous review. Furthermore, the integration of the research findings into the teaching process is a key factor in providing students with an education that is grounded in the most current scientific knowledge and practices. In conclusion, the research within these fields of study is not only sufficient. It is characterized by its practical orientation, interdisciplinary nature, and significant contributions to addressing pressing environmental and agricultural challenges.

Ad. 2.1.2. The curriculum of the *Agroecosystems* and *Ecology and Climate Change* programs is crafted to reflect the advancements in science, art, and technology. This ensures that students are equipped with the current knowledge and skills, preparing them to be leaders and innovators in their respective fields. In the *Agroecosystems* program, the curriculum includes in-depth studies of the latest developments in organic farming, agroecology, and environmental protection. This focus is crucial as the world increasingly recognizes the need for sustainable agricultural practices. Students are taught about the modern techniques in crop management, soil health, and biodiversity conservation, all of which are essential for maintaining ecosystem balance while ensuring food security. The program also emphasizes the importance of agroecology, an integrated approach that combines ecological principles with agricultural practices. This interdisciplinary field is vital for

developing farming systems that are not only productive but also resilient and environmentally sound. Students learn how to design and manage agricultural systems that mimic natural ecosystems, reducing the reliance on synthetic inputs and enhancing ecosystem services. Environmental protection is another cornerstone of the *Agroecosystems* curriculum. Students are educated on the latest policies and practices for minimizing the environmental impact of agriculture, including water and waste management, pollution control, and the conservation of natural resources. This comprehensive approach ensures that graduates are well-prepared to address the complex challenges at the intersection of agriculture and the environment. Also, the *Ecology and Climate Change* program is designed to keep pace with the rapidly evolving fields of climate science, ecosystem research, and environmental protection. The curriculum covers a wide range of topics, from the fundamentals of climate dynamics to the latest research on climate change mitigation and adaptation. Students learn about the impacts of climate change on various ecosystems, and how to develop strategies for conservation and resilience. Ecosystem research is another critical component of the program. Students are trained in the latest methods for studying ecosystem structure and function, including remote sensing, ecological modelling, and biodiversity assessment. This hands-on experience is invaluable, providing them with practical skills and insights that complement their theoretical learning. The program emphasizes the importance of environmental protection in the context of climate change. Students learn about the latest policies and practices for reducing greenhouse gas emissions, promoting renewable energy, and enhancing carbon sequestration. This comprehensive approach ensures that graduates are well-prepared to tackle the complex challenges of climate change and environmental sustainability. In both programs, students are actively involved in research projects that are closely linked to cutting-edge developments in science and technology. This is invaluable, providing them with practical skills and insights that complement their theoretical learning.

Ad. 2.1.3. The study programs of *Agroecosystems* and *Ecology and Climate Change* offer numerous opportunities for students to engage in research, aligning with the academic cycle and fostering a continuous learning and discovery process. In the *Agroecosystems* program, students have the chance to participate in research projects that explore the latest trends in organic farming, agroecology, and environmental protection. These projects are often interdisciplinary, allowing students to work alongside VMU faculty members, researchers from various fields and practitioners/staleholders. Such collaborative environment enhances their learning experience and provides them with valuable networking opportunities. Students in this program are encouraged to develop their own research ideas and proposals, fostering a spirit of innovation and independent thinking. They learn how to design experiments, collect and analyze data, and interpret results, all of which are essential skills for a career in research or academia. Students have the opportunity to present their research findings at conferences and symposia, both locally and internationally. This helps them build their presentation skills but also allows them to receive feedback from experts in their field. Similarly, the *Ecology and Climate Change* program provides students with ample opportunities to engage in research related to the latest developments in climate science and ecosystem research. They can participate in ongoing research projects or develop their own research initiatives, working closely with VMU faculty members who are experts in their respective fields and also with stakeholders. Students in this program have access to state-of-the-art research facilities and equipment, enabling them to conduct cutting-edge research on a wide range of topics, from climate modeling to biodiversity conservation. They also have the opportunity to collaborate with researchers from other institutions, both within Lithuania and abroad, expanding their research horizons. Furthermore, students are encouraged to publish their research findings in peer-reviewed journals, a crucial step in establishing themselves as researchers and contributing to the scientific community. They receive guidance and support from faculty members throughout the publication process, ensuring that their work meets the standards of scientific rigor. In both programs, students have the opportunity to participate in field trips and internships, providing them with hands-on experience in real-world settings. Such experiences enhance their practical skills but also broaden their understanding of the complex issues they are studying. Overall, the study programs effectively integrate current scientific research into their curriculum and provide students with consistent opportunities to participate in research. This approach not only enhances their educational experience but also prepares them to be competent and contributing professionals in their respective fields.

AREA 2: CONCLUSIONS

AREA 2	Unsatisfactory - 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
Second cycle			x		

COMMENDATIONS

1. The programs effectively integrate the modern scientific research into the curriculum, ensuring students are exposed to cutting-edge developments in their fields. They demonstrate a responsiveness to current environmental and agricultural challenges, preparing students to tackle real-world problems and contribute to a sustainable future;
2. The programs foster an interdisciplinary approach, encouraging students to explore the intersections between different scientific fields and understand the complex nature of ecological and agricultural challenges. Thus, they contribute to sustainable development goals, addressing critical issues such as climate change, ecosystem preservation, and sustainable agriculture;
3. The programs promote collaboration and partnerships with other research institutions and stakeholders, enhancing the quality and impact of research and providing students with valuable networking opportunities;
4. There is a strong emphasis on the practical application of knowledge, enabling students to develop skills for scientific research through hands-on experience;
5. The research infrastructure available to researchers and students is mostly new and modern, offering a variety of research opportunities;
6. Students are encouraged to disseminate their research findings through publications and presentations, contributing to the broader scientific community and enhancing their communication skills.

RECOMMENDATIONS

For further improvement

1. Althought a general improvement can be observed in this area, there is still a room for improvement in highly-ranked international journals.
2. There is more emphasis on being leaders of smaller or local projects rather than large-scale, international and high-impact research initiatives in the scientific activity of the VMU teachers.
3. The integration of students in active research projects, affecting the development of their practical research skills, is still not excellent and should be improved..
4. The entrepreneurship and innovation should be encouraged by providing students with opportunities to develop and commercialize their research findings, fostering a culture of

translating scientific discoveries into practical solutions, e.g. for nature conservation/protection and sustainable farming.

5. VMU academic staff could be more active in applying for large, influential and international research grants, and include students in research teams to ensure that they have strong research skills and the ability to work in collaborative investigations.

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

The student selection and admission process for VMU's graduate programs in "Ecology and Climate Change" and "Agroecosystems" is well-aligned with the learning outcomes, ensuring that applicants possess the necessary background to succeed in these fields. The admission criteria are transparent, with clear communication through the university's website, promotional materials, and informational events, such as study fairs. Students are assessed based on their academic achievements, including undergraduate GPA and thesis grades, and professional experience and additional studies are also considered. If applicants lack the required knowledge base, supplementary courses are offered to ensure they meet the necessary prerequisites, reinforcing the program's commitment to academic rigor. The stable admission numbers (approximately 10 students per year) indicate consistent interest and successful recruitment efforts, with a relatively low dropout rate, largely due to the motivated nature of students and effective retention strategies. Over the 2021-2024 period, the average admission scores for "Ecology and Climate Change" have risen, while those for "Agroecosystems" have decreased.

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

The recognition of foreign qualifications is handled by the International Relations Department, which adheres to Lithuanian regulations and Lithuanian Centre for Quality Assessment in Higher Education guidelines. For students who have completed partial studies abroad, such as those through exchange programs, recognition is based on pre-approved study plans and academic transcripts from partner institutions, ensuring that the credits and knowledge gained are aligned with the program's requirements. Furthermore, VMU also acknowledges non-formal and informal learning, including work experience and self-study, by assessing whether these competencies meet the academic standards of specific programs. This approach ensures that a wide range of students, including those from diverse educational backgrounds and countries like Azerbaijan and Morocco, are able to have their prior learning and qualifications recognized, fostering inclusivity and broadening the program's appeal. The university's commitment to a fair and consistent recognition process supports the integration of international students and non-traditional learners into its academic environment.

ANALYSIS AND CONCLUSION (regarding 3.1.)

The student selection and admission process at VMU for the graduate programs in "Ecology and Climate Change" and "Agroecosystems" is structured to align with the learning outcomes of the programs, ensuring that applicants possess the necessary academic and professional background to succeed. The clear admission process helps to ensure that the selected students are well-prepared for the challenges of these programs. The relatively stable admission numbers indicate a consistent level of interest in these fields, while the low dropout rates suggest that the selection process successfully identifies motivated and committed students. The slight fluctuation in admission scores, with an increase for "Ecology and Climate Change" and a decrease for "Agroecosystems," reflects changing trends in demand and perhaps the evolving appeal of these programs. Furthermore, the recognition of foreign qualifications and prior learning at VMU is thorough and inclusive, supporting students from diverse international backgrounds, such as those from Azerbaijan and Morocco. The adherence to Lithuanian regulations and guidelines from the Lithuanian Centre for Quality Assessment in Higher Education ensures that the recognition process is rigorous and consistent. The university's recognition of both formal and non-formal learning, such as work experience or self-study, provides a flexible approach that accommodates a variety of educational paths, contributing to a more inclusive academic environment. VMU's transparent

recognition procedures, alongside its clear admission criteria, support the university's goals of ensuring a high-quality, diverse, and academically rigorous learning environment for all students.

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

VMU offers a wide range of academic mobility opportunities for students, with a primary focus on the Erasmus+ program, which allows students to study or undertake internships abroad. In addition to long-term mobility options, the university also has started to search for short-term mobility opportunities through Erasmus+, such as the Blended Intensive Program (BIP). This flexibility has led to an increase in participation, but students have expressed interest in more of these being organised. Moreover, VMU offers opportunities for non-EU academic exchanges and special scholarships, such as the F. L. Mockūnų scholarship for Lithuanian studies abroad, further expanding international exposure for students. Despite these offerings, high student employment rates have limited the full utilization of these mobility opportunities, as many students are unable to commit to studying abroad due to work obligations. The university ensures that exchange credits are pre-approved by the administration, making the process streamlined. The Ecology and Climate change programme is negotiated to be a joint degree with a university in Germany.

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

VMU provides a comprehensive range of academic, financial, social, psychological, and personal support to its students. Academic support includes easily accessible information through Moodle, student portals, and regular consultations with professors, allowing students to clarify topics, assignments, and provide feedback. Financial support is available through fee reductions, reimbursement for event participation, and scholarships based on academic achievements, social activities, or financial need. Social and personal support includes counseling, spiritual support, and a disability coordinator, ensuring that students have the necessary resources for both academic success and personal well-being. It was confirmed by one of the students that his disability was accommodated. However, many students still rely on professors for assistance instead of using the official channels, indicating that the available information and platforms could be more utilized. Feedback collection could also be improved, especially considering that students are not always on campus and may miss out on in-person discussions. Additionally, foreign students expressed a need for more events to help integrate with local students.

3.2.3. Higher education information and student counselling are sufficient

VMU provides a range of resources to ensure that students have access to comprehensive and timely study information and counselling. Prospective Master's students are introduced to the programs through an Information Week, helping them align their academic and professional goals with the right program. Detailed descriptions of study programs, including course aims, learning outcomes, assessment methods, and required literature, are made available on Moodle and the VMU website. Students also receive personalized emails and can access information via a dedicated student portal. Professors share course-related materials via Moodle and provide avenues for communication such as discussion forums and scheduled consultations. Study administrators ensure that students in specific study programs receive information in a timely manner through emails and contact with group leaders.

ANALYSIS AND CONCLUSION (regarding 3.2.)

VMU provides a well-rounded and effective support system for its students, offering a wide range of academic, financial, social, psychological, and personal services. The university's focus on academic mobility, particularly through the Erasmus+ program, along with short-term options like BIP, demonstrates its commitment to providing international exposure. However, student participation is somewhat limited due to high employment rates, which prevent many from fully engaging in these opportunities. Moving forward, strengthening international collaborations (like the upcoming joint degree) opportunities could further enhance the scope and appeal of VMU's Ecology programs. VMU also ensures that students have easy access to information through platforms like Moodle, student portals, and personalized communications via email. Despite the availability of official channels, many students still rely on professors for assistance, suggesting that these resources could be better promoted or more user-friendly. While the support provided is relevant and effective, there are still improvements needed especially for the growing international student body. During the interview session it was mentioned that surveys for alumni as well as current students do not receive many respondents, therefore, feedback collection could also be improved to have more respondents in surveys covering a bigger variety of opinions.

AREA 3: CONCLUSIONS

AREA 3	Unsatisfactory - 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
Second cycle				x	

COMMENDATIONS

1. VMU's student selection and admission process for the "Ecology and Climate Change" and "Agroecosystems" graduate programs is transparent and aligns with program learning outcomes, ensuring applicants are well-prepared. The process effectively attracts motivated students, with stable admission numbers and a low dropout rate;
2. VMU's recognition of foreign qualifications and prior learning is thorough and inclusive, adhering to Lithuanian regulations and ensuring international students' qualifications are recognized;
3. VMU provides a comprehensive student support system, offering academic, financial, social, and personal resources.

RECOMMENDATIONS

For further improvement

1. VMU should encourage utilization of official resources, such as academic support platforms and career counseling services, to ensure that students fully benefit from available support and social partners can communicate skills needed for the current job market;

2. Offering more opportunities for student integration, particularly for international students, through events and initiatives, would foster a stronger sense of community and enhance the overall student experience;
3. VMU should enhance student feedback mechanisms having higher participation in surveys during studies as well as after studies;
4. VMU should invest more time in arranging more possibilities for student mobility, such as BIPs, or international collaborations by distance.

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

4.1.	Students are prepared for independent professional activity

FACTUAL SITUATION

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

The Dean, Chancellor, Department Head, and Programme Committee members hold regular meetings with students to discuss key academic and career-related matters. Additionally, the Faculty staff and Academy administration office are available daily to provide guidance on academic and study-related concerns.

Most courses are delivered through the Moodle platform, ensuring a structured and accessible learning environment. The assessment process adheres to principles of professionalism, transparency, fairness, and objectivity. A diverse range of evaluation methods—including tests, written assignments, laboratory work, projects, and presentations—is utilized to assess students' progress. Additionally, innovative teaching approaches, such as educational YouTube content and video games, are integrated into the curriculum. The use of summative assessments provides students with a clear understanding of evaluation criteria and expectations.

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

The university is committed to inclusivity, offering individual study schedules for socially vulnerable students and those with special needs. These flexible study arrangements are governed by the VMU Individual Study Schedule Procedure. Moreover, a dedicated disability coordinator is available to assist students with disabilities in navigating academic and environmental challenges.

ANALYSIS AND CONCLUSION (regarding 4.1.)

The university adopts a student-centred approach, employing a diverse range of teaching methods aimed at maximizing the achievement of intended learning outcomes. Active student engagement is fostered through summative assessments, while regular feedback ensures continuous and in-depth learning. Additionally, the curriculum emphasizes interdisciplinarity, creativity, and critical thinking, alongside social responsibility and problem-solving skills.

The university has established effective policies and procedures to ensure equitable access to higher education for vulnerable groups and students with individual needs. A comprehensive diversity and equality strategy has been developed, focusing on disability inclusion, gender equality, cultural diversity, and social integration. Concrete measures have been implemented to enhance the physical accessibility of university facilities and provide students with assistive equipment. Additionally, a disability coordinator has been hired to help students with special needs.

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

Throughout the semester, students' progress is actively monitored. If challenges arise, they offer additional consultations or support. In cases of absenteeism from lectures or assessments, administrators are notified, and they reach out to students to identify any issues and offer assistance.

4.2.2. Graduate employability and career are monitored

Graduate employment outcomes are actively monitored. According to data from the National Education Management Information System, one year after graduation, most graduates are employed in high-skilled positions or are successfully self-employed.
Collaboration with social partners and employers is ongoing, though often informal. Employers engage with students by participating in practical courses, proposing MSc thesis topics, and delivering guest lectures. Their feedback on graduates and employers has been highly positive, highlighting strong practical training, work readiness, and in-depth knowledge of natural sciences. Social partners also contribute to faculty-organized discussions and meetings, as well as thesis defenses and student placements.

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

The institution has implemented all necessary policies to ensure academic integrity, tolerance, and non-discrimination. Over the past three years, no violations of these principles have been recorded in the evaluated field of study. Plagiarism detection software is systematically used to uphold academic standards.

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

Students are granted the right to appeal against assessment results or violations of assessment procedures. All necessary documents and regulations have been adopted by VMU. However, during the last years there have not been any complaints.

ANALYSIS AND CONCLUSION (regarding 4.2.)

Study programs apply a variety of teaching methods to meet the different needs of students and with the very tight communication with teachers, gives excellent possibilities for students' high level education and personal development.
Graduates of the curricula are highly appreciated by the employers and get easily high-skilled jobs. Employers are participating in the teaching process in practical lessons and lecturing but could be more engaged in curriculum development.
The institution has implemented all necessary policies to ensure academic integrity, tolerance, and non-discrimination as well as gives students the right to appeal against assessment results or procedures.

AREA 4: CONCLUSIONS

AREA 4	Unsatisfactory - 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
Second cycle				x	

COMMENDATIONS

1. Students' monitoring system is really good and seems to reveal quickly the obstacles they may have.
2. The variety of teaching methods is wide and especially should be appreciated introduction of innovative ones as videogames etc.

RECOMMENDATIONS

For further improvement

1. Employers and social partners seem to be very motivated and active in cooperation with the university. The report declares that their representatives are also in the program committee. However, the people we met were unaware of that. Therefore we recommend putting it on a broader scale.
2. The report says that participation in surveys organised by VMU for graduates is low therefore we recommend to organize annual meetings with them for getting more feedback. Identification of areas for improvement could enhance the program´quality.

AREA 5: TEACHING STAFF

5.1.	Teaching staff is adequate to achieve learning outcomes

FACTUAL SITUATION

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

The teaching staff for the Ecology study programs at VMU consists of 18 professors, 12 associate professors, three assistant professors, and one teacher with a degree. This composition indicates a diverse faculty with a wide range of expertise and experience in the field of ecology. The university also invites teachers-practitioners to provide students with real-world insights and practical knowledge, ensuring that the curriculum remains relevant and up-to-date. All of the teachers in the Ecology study programs hold a Ph.D. degree, and 54% of them are professors. This high level of academic achievement demonstrates the faculty's deep understanding of ecological principles and their ability to conduct independent research. The teachers' competence is further evidenced by their active involvement in research, scientific publications, and participation in international and national research organizations. They also serve on the editorial boards of international journals and engage in expert work, indicating their recognition as leaders in the field. The faculty members' extensive knowledge and experience in ecology, combined with their commitment to research and professional development, ensure that students receive a high-quality education that prepares them for their future careers. The university also provides opportunities for teachers to improve their teaching skills and stay up-to-date with the development of science through professional development activities and participation in conferences and workshops.

ANALYSIS AND CONCLUSION (regarding 5.1.)

The teaching staff at VMU demonstrates adequacy in numbers, qualifications, and competence to effectively achieve the program's learning outcomes in the Ecology field of study. A high level of academic achievement underscores the teachers' understanding of ecological principles and their capability to conduct independent research. Their competence of the teachers is further evidenced by their engagement in research, scientific publications, and participation in international and national research societies, journal editorial boards etc. Additionally, the university enhances practical knowledge by inviting teachers-practitioners to provide students with real-world insights, ensuring the curriculum remains current and relevant. The adequacy of the teaching staff is reflected in their ability to achieve the expected learning outcomes. Their extensive knowledge, experience, and commitment to research and professional development ensure students receive a comprehensive, high-quality education that prepares them for successful professional life.
In conclusion, the teaching staff for the Ecology field of study at VMU is adequate in numbers, qualifications, and competence. Their expertise, experience, and dedication to teaching and research guarantee a comprehensive and high-quality education that equips students well for their future careers. By focusing on continuous improvement in pedagogical training and skills, the university can further enhance the educational experience and ensure the program's ongoing success.

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

FACTUAL SITUATION

5.2.1. Opportunities for academic mobility of teaching staff are ensured

Opportunities for the academic mobility of the teaching staff at VMU are ensured through a variety of mechanisms that support and encourage both national and international exchanges. One of the

primary ways VMU supports academic mobility is through funding opportunities. The university allocates resources to support faculty members who wish to participate in exchange programs, attend international conferences, or engage in collaborative research projects. These funds can cover travel expenses, accommodation, and other related costs, making it more feasible for faculty members to take advantage of mobility opportunities. Additionally, VMU has established partnerships with numerous universities and research institutions worldwide, which often include provisions for faculty exchanges. These partnerships provide funding and facilitate the logistical aspects of mobility, such as visa applications and housing arrangements. Furthermore, VMU recognizes the importance of flexibility in work arrangements to accommodate faculty members' mobility needs. The university offers various options, such as sabbatical leave, reduced teaching loads, and remote work arrangements, to enable faculty members to pursue mobility opportunities without undue disruption to their professional responsibilities. This flexibility is particularly beneficial for long-term exchanges or research projects that require extended periods away from the university. In addition to financial and logistical support, VMU also emphasizes the recognition of academic mobility as a valuable component of faculty members' career advancement. The university's evaluation and promotion criteria include consideration of international experience and collaborations, which incentivizes faculty members to engage in mobility activities.

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

Opportunities for the development of the teaching staff at VMU within the Ecology field of study are facilitated through a comprehensive framework designed to enhance their professional, pedagogical, and research capabilities. The university recognizes that continuous development is crucial for maintaining and improving the quality of its academic programs. To this end, VMU provides various avenues for its teaching staff to engage in activities that foster their growth and expertise. These opportunities encompass participation in international conferences, workshops, and seminars, both national and international, enabling faculty members to stay updated with the developments in their respective fields. VMU encourages and supports faculty members in pursuing research projects, publishing scientific articles, and engaging in collaborative research with national and international partners. These activities contribute to the advancement of knowledge but also enhance the faculty's research skills and visibility. VMU places a strong emphasis on pedagogical development, offering training programs and workshops on modern teaching methodologies, assessment techniques, and the use of educational technologies. These initiatives aim to equip faculty members with the necessary skills to deliver effective and engaging instruction to students. Additionally, the university provides opportunities for faculty members to participate in exchange programs with partner institutions, allowing them to gain international experience and broaden their perspectives. The university also supports teachers in their pursuit of pedagogical qualifications. This ensures that the teachers are equipped with the necessary pedagogical skills to deliver high-quality education. Finally, VMU fosters a culture of mentorship and peer learning, where experienced faculty members share their knowledge and expertise with junior colleagues. This collaborative environment promotes continuous learning and professional growth, ensuring that the teaching staff remains competent and up-to-date in their respective fields.

ANALYSIS AND CONCLUSION (regarding 5.2.)

VMU demonstrates a clear commitment to fostering a dynamic and progressive academic environment, as evidenced by the robust opportunities provided for both academic mobility and professional development of its teaching staff within the Ecology field of study. The university's proactive stance on facilitating international exchanges, research collaborations, and continuous learning initiatives underscores its dedication to maintaining high academic standards and promoting faculty excellence. Academic mobility is supported through funding, flexible work arrangements, and recognition of international experience, enabling faculty to expand their knowledge and establish global networks. Simultaneously, the university's comprehensive professional development programs, encompassing pedagogical training, research support, and mentorship, ensure that faculty members remain at the forefront of their fields. This dual focus on mobility and development not only enhances the individual capabilities of the teaching staff but also enriches the educational experience for students, ensuring they receive a well-rounded and up-to-date education. VMU’s

systematic approach to these crucial areas solidifies its position as a leading institution committed to academic advancement and global engagement.

AREA 5: CONCLUSIONS

AREA 5	Unsatisfactory - 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
Second cycle			x		

COMMENDATIONS

1. The faculty is diverse and highly qualified: all faculty members hold a Ph.D., with a significant percentage being professors, indicating a strong foundation of academic expertise and research experience.
2. The university actively invites teachers-practitioners to provide students with real-world insights and practical knowledge, ensuring the curriculum remains relevant and up-to-date.
3. VMU provides significant support for academic mobility through funding opportunities, established partnerships with international institutions, and flexible work arrangements.
4. VMU recognizes and incentivizes continuous improvement and development of teachers through the inclusion of international experience and collaborations in faculty evaluation and promotion criteria.

RECOMMENDATIONS

For further improvement

1. The dynamism in the turnover of teachers in the field of ecology can be improved as most of the lecturers have been already involved in the teaching for more than 10 years. From one side, it is good and means that they are experienced but from the other side some new blood in the system would be beneficial for VMU.
2. The utilization of exchange and research visits is still not optimal. Apart of short visits it is recommended to the teachers (especially those at the early stage of their career) to look for the post-doc opportunities.

AREA 6: LEARNING FACILITIES AND RESOURCES

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

FACTUAL SITUATION

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

The Agricultural Academy shares the infrastructural resources with the other structural units at VMU. This allows optimization of University's infrastructural resources use for educational and research purposes. The site visit revealed that study programmes *Ecology and Climate Change* and *Agoecosystems* assigned facilities comply with the modern requirements for classrooms. Lecture rooms are equipped with the stationary computers for teachers and multimedia projectors as well as distant communication facilities. The study programmes are supported by computer classrooms equipped with the specialised software such as ArcGIS, STATISTICA, MAPLE, and other software such as SPSS, AutoCAD, LandARCH PRO, Sketchup, Visual Nature Studio (Forestry Edition), Canoco, PC-ORD etc.
The laboratory facilities combine equipment used for studies and research activities. The experimental part of the final thesis in the study programme *Ecology and Climate Change* is carried out at the Environmental Studies Laboratory. The laboratory is equipped with the up-to-date research facilities specifically oriented towards research in the fields of ecology and environmental science. The practical and research skills in the study programme *Agroecosystems* are obtained at the Joint Research Centre, equipped with the modern facilities financed by the EU financed Nemunas Valley Development Programme. The studies of soil and crop ecology are carried out at the Experimental Station of Agricultural Academy. Practical training of students is widely performed in collaboration with the public and private enterprises: State Crop Production Service, the State Food and Veterinary Service, the Institute of Agriculture of the Lithuanian Centre of Agrarian and Forestry Sciences, JSC "Linas Agro", SC "AUGA Group", JSC "Groward Group", JSC "Ariogalos grūdai", JSC "AGRA Corporation", JSC "Agroaves Group", JSC "Vilkaviškio grūdai", JSC "Vilkaviškio grūdai" and others.
A virtual learning environment *Moodle* is used for blended learning, distance education and other online learning projects. The study process management at VMU is based on the bilingual (Lithuanian-English) information system. The system comprises Student *Portal* and *Teachers Portal*, which are aimed to monitor study progress of each individual student and communicate feedback from students to teachers.
By 2023 the VMU Library Fund had accumulated over 1.7 million of information sources, The newest and most relevant information sources are available via VMU licensed databases, VMU Research Management System (CRIS) and VMU virtual library. In order to prevent plagiarism and copyright infringement, the library administrates text matching programmes *iThenticate* and *Identific*. The library regularly organises training for students to develop skills of effective information search, citation, avoidance of plagiarism and similar.

6.1.2. Evaluation of the continuous planning and upgrading of resources

The planning and upgrading of resources needed to carry out studies in the area of Ecology are based on annual resource development plans. VMU uses a centralized system for resource planning. An important part of resources is allocated for the maintenance and development of University IT network; each year about 20% of computers are renewed. Also, planning of information resources relevant for the study programmes are considered together with subject librarians. The principles, criteria and sources for the formation of the VMU fund are defined by the description of the fund procedures.
The up-grade of laboratory equipment combines central University study and research budgets as well as investments from the project. In the last period substantial financial support was received from the following projects: "Development of the Bioeconomy Research Excellence Centre"

(BioTEC)", "Diversification of intercrops and use of multifunctional properties to increase soil sustainability and carbon sequestration potential and reduce the need for fertilisers", "Support for the creation of EIP Action Groups and the development of their activities". Also, social partners contribute to the purchase of modern equipment as well as organisation of field study trips.

ANALYSIS AND CONCLUSION (regarding 6.1.)

The Agricultural Academy at Vytautas Magnus University (VMU) effectively utilizes shared infrastructural resources to optimize educational and research activities. The study programs in *Ecology and Climate Change* and *Agroecosystems* benefit from modern, well-equipped classrooms, specialized software, and advanced laboratory facilities, enhancing both theoretical and practical training. Collaboration with public and private sector enterprises provides students with hands-on experience, further strengthening their professional competencies. Additionally, the integration of digital tools such as Moodle, a bilingual study management system, and a well-resourced library with plagiarism detection software ensures a comprehensive and academically rigorous learning environment.
The planning and upgrading of resources for Ecology studies at VMU follow a structured, centralized approach, ensuring continuous development through annual resource plans. Significant investments are made in IT infrastructure, laboratory upgrades, and information resources. Funding comes from university budgets, external projects, and contributions from social partners, enabling the acquisition of modern equipment and the organization of field study trips. This comprehensive resource management strategy enhances the quality of education and research in Ecology.

AREA 6: CONCLUSIONS

AREA 6	Unsatisfactory - 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
Second cycle				x	

COMMENDATIONS

1. Facilities, informational and financial resources are adequate to meet successful implementation of MSc study programmes *Ecology and Climate Change* and *Agroecosystems*.
2. Continuous planning for and upgrading of resources at Agricultural Academy of VMU is well established.
3. VMU successfully utilizes the Moodle virtual learning environment for online and blended learning.

RECOMMENDATIONS

For further improvement

1. Combined financial sources should be allocated for further laboratory equipment and specialised software acquisition.

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

The study quality assurance system at VMU incorporates planning, implementation, evaluation and feedback stages. Decisions regarding the quality of studies and their management are based on the Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area (2015), national and VMU legal acts. Study Quality Unit (SQU) develops and applies strategies and measures to ensure the quality of studies, monitors the quality of studies and provides recommendations for improvement. Institute of Innovative Studies (IIS) provides support for teachers in innovative learning/teaching methods and contributes to the study quality assurance on the study course level.
On the level of the Agricultural Academy the Council forms guidelines for study quality assurance and control. The role of Faculty and Department administrations is study programme implementation, i. e. registration of students, development of study schedule, dissemination of information, recording of teachers' workload and other. An important role in the process of study quality assurance is played by the Study Programme Committee (SPC). The study programmes *Agroecosystems* and *Ecology and Climate Change* have separate SPCs consisting of teachers, students and social partners. The SPCs perform periodic internal assessment of study programme content and organise surveys. The results of the surveys are discussed with the administration, academic staff and students. The study programme development and monitoring plan is elaborated and presented in the form approved by the VMU Senate. The progress of the plan implementation is assessed by SPC twice a year.

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

The involvement of stakeholders into the study quality assurance process is performed via target groups: students, teachers, representatives of social partners and alumni. To ensure student involvement into the study quality assurance VMU Student Representative Council (SRC) delegates student representatives to different levels of representation (VMU Council, Senate, commissions, student parliament, Councils of Faculties, Study Programme Committee (SPCs), and others). Students gain management experiences through the training organised by Study Quality Unit (SQU) and internally organised discussions. The opinions of teachers, social partners and alumni are collected during the formal and informal meetings; representatives from these groups are present within the Study Programme Committees (SPCs).
Regularly organized surveys serve as an important source of feedback from different target groups. The surveys of teaching/learning evaluation on each individual course level are organized at the end of each semester. The surveys for the first-year undergraduates are organized in order to identify reasoning choices and expectations of the students. The surveys of graduates are conducted before and after getting into the labour market. Each Spring term teachers also have the possibility to express their opinions. In order to meet specific needs the *ad hoc* surveys and discussions are organised. All surveys are organized in the electronic survey system; the results of the surveys from the previous years are collected in the electronic database. The VMU Study Quality Unit is in charge of organization, analysis and dissemination of the survey's results. The results are publicized in the VMU website, e-mailed as well as delivered via social media. The *ad hoc* surveys are initiated and organised by administrations of Agricultural Academy and Faculties.
Social partners and alumni actively participate in the SPCs, committees of final thesis defence, also together with University representatives deliver joint projects and contribute to the organization of

the site visits. The strong motivation and obligations for cooperation were evidently demonstrated during the meeting with the representatives of the social partners and alumni.

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

The annual analysis of the study programmes includes the following main issues: compatibility between the Programme and newest research trends, correspondence between the Programme and labour market needs, demand of the Programme, suitability and sufficiency of the programme resources, teachers' competence, students' progress, students' and teachers' mobility as well as other issues. Information about the studies is gathered, analysed and evaluated in order to assure regular self-assessment and implement improvements. Annual analysis of studies allows to identify shortcomings in time and to take necessary actions for improvement while a more comprehensive analysis of the Programme is done for external evaluation in more detail to cover various issues of studies.
The results of the evaluation (results of surveys, discussions with social stakeholders, statistical data, conclusions of external experts, etc.) are applied in the development of the curriculum improvement plans and their implementation.The Self Evaluation Report (SER) provides concrete examples of how collected information was used increase inter-linkages between research and studies, estimate satisfaction of students and award teachers with digital badge “For Teaching Quality”.

7.1.4. Student feedback is collected and analysed

The analysis of graduate opinions from both study programs indicates a high level of satisfaction, with an average rating of 3.6 out of 4.0. This suggests that the programs are well-structured and effectively meet students' academic and professional expectations. The consistently positive ratings reflect the university’s ability to maintain a strong standard of education, particularly in curriculum quality, teaching methodologies, and overall learning experience. Data from 2022-2024 (Table 11 of the SER) suggests that graduates generally perceive the university as contributing positively to their readiness for the labor market. However, the small sample size limits the ability to draw firm conclusions. The results in Table 12 regarding the most useful aspects of preparation for the labor market require clearer interpretation. Additionally, the limited number of respondents makes it difficult to establish definitive trends.

ANALYSIS AND CONCLUSION (regarding 7.1.)

VMU ensures study quality through a structured assurance system that follows European standards, with the Study Quality Unit overseeing strategies, the Institute of Innovative Studies supporting teaching methods, and the Agricultural Academy’s Council, Faculty, and Study Programme Committees (SPCs) playing key roles in programme implementation, evaluation, and continuous improvement.
VMU ensures stakeholder involvement in study quality assurance through structured representation of students, teachers, social partners, and alumni, utilizing committees, surveys, and formal meetings to gather feedback.
The annual analysis of study programmes ensures continuous improvement by assessing research alignment, labor market relevance, resource adequacy, and student progress, with findings from surveys, stakeholder discussions, and external evaluations informing curriculum development and faculty recognition.
While the high average satisfaction score of 3.6 out of 4.0 suggests that the study programs are well-structured and effectively meet student expectations, the reliability of these findings is weakened by the small sample size. The limited number of respondents makes it difficult to draw definitive conclusions about labor market preparedness, and the unclear interpretation of key survey results (Table 12) further restricts the depth of analysis. To strengthen the validity of these insights, larger-scale surveys and clearer data presentation are necessary.

AREA 7: CONCLUSIONS

AREA 7	Unsatisfactory - 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
Second cycle				x	

COMMENDATIONS

1. Vytautas Magnus University (VMU) has implemented an effective internal system for study quality assurance.
2. VMU actively collects student feedback through multiple surveys, using the insights to enhance education quality, teaching methods, and student services.
3. Involvement of stakeholders in an internal study quality assurance system of MSc Study programmes *Ecology and Climate Change* and *Agroecosystems* is well organised.
4. Meeting with students, social partners and alumni revealed a positive attitude toward MSc Study programmes *Ecology and Climate Change* and *Agroecosystems.*

RECOMMENDATIONS

To address shortcomings

1. The limited number of respondents of surveys make it difficult to draw definitive conclusions.

For further improvement

1. Larger-scale and clearer data presentation are necessary to strengthen the validity of conducted surveys.

V. SUMMARY

The review panel conducted an evaluation of the Ecology field of study at Vytautas Magnus University (VMU), which includes the master's degree programs in Ecology and Climate Change, and Agroecosystems.

The evaluation process was based on the self-evaluation report (SER) provided by VMU, a site visit, and interviews with various stakeholders, including staff, students, alumni, and social partners.

Overall, the review panel found that both programs align well with the needs of society and the labour market, as well as with the university's mission and strategic goals. The programs are designed to address current environmental and climate change challenges, and there is a high demand for graduates in these fields.

Positive Aspects (Strengths):

1) Alignment with Societal and Labor Market Needs: Both programs focus on critical issues such as sustainability, nature protection, and agriculture, and are aligned with the country's economic and societal needs and the strategy of the HEI.
2) Curriculum Design and Implementation: The curriculum in both programs is well-structured and continuously updated to reflect the latest scientific, technological, and policy developments. It ensures the development of key competencies and provides a balance of theoretical knowledge and practical skills.
3) Research and Development: The teaching staff is actively involved in research, and the programs effectively integrate the latest scientific research and technology into the curriculum. Students are provided with ample opportunities to engage in research and develop research skills.
4) Student Support and Admission: The student admission process is transparent and aligned with program learning outcomes. The university provides a comprehensive support system for students, including academic, financial, social, and personal resources.
5) Quality Assurance and Stakeholder Involvement: VMU has implemented an effective internal system for study quality assurance, involving all stakeholders and continuous monitoring. The university actively collects and uses feedback from students, teachers, social partners, and alumni to enhance the quality of education.
6) Teaching Staff: The teaching staff is highly qualified and competent, with a strong emphasis on research and professional development. The university provides opportunities for teachers to improve their teaching skills and stay up-to-date with the latest developments in their fields.

VI. EXAMPLES OF EXCELLENCE