



CENTRE FOR QUALITY ASSESSMENT IN HIGHER EDUCATION

EVALUATION REPORT
STUDY FIELD of Management
at Vytautas Magnus University

Expert panel:

1. **Prof. Dr. Douglas Gilbert (panel chairperson)**, *member of academic community;*
2. **Prof. Dr. Joanna Paliszkiewicz**, *member of academic community;*
3. **Prof. Dr. Inga Lapiņa**, *member of academic community;*
4. **Ms Lina Jankauskienė**, *representative of social partners;*
5. **Mr Eren Çanga**, *students' representative.*

Evaluation coordinator – Ms Austėja Pliupelytė

Report language – English

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Study Field Data

Title of the study programme	<i>Bioeconomy Business Management</i>	<i>Tourism Industries¹</i>
State code	6121LX077	6121LX038
Type of studies	Bachelor University Studies	Bachelor University Studies
Cycle of studies	First	First
Mode of study and duration (in years)	Full-time (4 years)	Full-time (3,5 years) Part-time (5 years)
Credit volume	240	210
Qualification degree and (or) professional qualification	Bachelor in Business Management	Bachelor in Business Management
Language of instruction	Lithuanian and English	Lithuanian and English
Minimum education required	Secondary education	Secondary education
Registration date of the study programme	2022 03 16	2014 03 14

Title of the study programme	<i>Corporate Strategic Management</i>	<i>International Executive MBA</i>
State code	6211LX046	6211LX047
Type of studies	Master University Studies	Master University Studies
Cycle of studies	Second	Second
Mode of study and duration (in years)	Full-time (2 years)	Full-time (1,5 years)
Credit volume	120	90
Qualification degree and (or) professional qualification	Master in Business Management	Master in Business Management
Language of instruction	Lithuanian	English
Minimum education required	Bachelor's degree	Bachelor's degree
Registration date of the study programme	1997 06 04	2006 11 16

¹ The programme Tourism Industries will be discontinued from 2024 01 31.

Title of the study programme	<i>Agricultural Business Management</i>	<i>Agri-Food Business Management</i>
State code	6211LX056	6281LX006
Type of studies	Master University Studies	Master University Studies
Cycle of studies	Second	Second
Mode of study and duration (in years)	Part-time (3 years)	Full-time (2 years)
Credit volume	120	120
Qualification degree and (or) professional qualification	Master in Business Management	Master in Business Management
Language of instruction	Lithuanian	English
Minimum education required	Bachelor's degree	Bachelor's degree
Registration date of the study programme	1997 05 19	2018 05 09

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I. INTRODUCTION

1.1. BACKGROUND OF THE EVALUATION PROCESS

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

1.2. EXPERT PANEL

The expert panel was assigned according to the Experts Selection Procedure as approved by the Director of SKVC on 31 December 2019, [Order No. V-149](#). The site visit to the HEI was conducted by the expert panel on 23 May 2023

1. Prof. Dr. Douglas Gilbert (USA), panel chair, CEO at Lone Tree Academics LLC, Visiting (Fulbright) Professor in Entrepreneurship at Vilnius University.
2. Prof. Dr. Joanna Paliszkievicz, (Poland), panel member – academic, Professor at the Warsaw University of Life Sciences, Visiting professor at ISM University of Management and Economics.
3. Prof. Dr. Inga Lapiņa (Latvia), panel member – academic, Professor and Vice Dean for Academic Affairs at Riga Technical University, Faculty of Engineering Economics and Management.
4. Ms Lina Jankauskienė (Lithuania), representative of social partners, President of Lithuanian Quality Management and Innovation Association, management lecturer and consultant LinaLEAN Ltd.
5. Mr Eren Canga (Türkiye), student's representative, fourth-year student of study programme Business Administration at Hacettepe University, member of ESU Quality Assurance Student Experts Pool.

1.3. GENERAL INFORMATION

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

No.	Name of document
1.	Examples of final theses
2.	Examples of course descriptions
3.	Slide and video presentation of the material base of the Vytautas Magnus University Agriculture Academy

1.4. BACKGROUND OF MANAGEMENT FIELD STUDIES AT VYTAUTAS MAGNUS UNIVERSITY

Vytautas Magnus University (hereinafter, VMU or the University) was established in 1922 and re-established in 1989. The University provides bachelor, master and doctoral (PhD) degree studies within a wide spectrum of fields. The University is structured into 14 academic divisions at VMU: Faculty of Arts, Faculty of Catholic Theology, Faculty of Economics and Management, Faculty of Humanities, Faculty of Informatics, Faculty of Law, Faculty of Natural Sciences, Faculty of Political Science and Diplomacy, Faculty of Social Sciences, Agriculture Academy, Education Academy, Music Academy, Institute of Foreign Languages, Botanical Garden.

During the years 2018-2022, the reorganisation of Aleksandras Stulginskis University (ASU) and the Lithuanian University of Educational Sciences (LEU) was executed by merger with Vytautas Magnus University (VMU). Upon the merger, the Education Academy and Agriculture Academy were established at the University. As of 1 September 2021, the former five faculties of the Agriculture Academy were replaced by the newly formed four faculties: Agronomy, Bioeconomy Development, Engineering, and Forest Sciences and Ecology.

Studies in the Management field are delivered in two faculties at VMU: the Faculty of Economics and Management (hereinafter, FEM) and the Faculty of Bioeconomy Development (hereinafter, FBD). Two first-cycle study programmes (hereinafter, SP) in the Management field are delivered at VMU: Bioeconomy Business Management (since 2022) and Tourism Industries. Four second-cycle study programmes are provided at VMU: Corporate Strategic Management (since 1997 and remodelled in 2015), International Executive MBA (since 2006), Agricultural Business Management (since 1997) and Agri-Food Business Management (since 2018).

Baltic Management Institute (BMI) administers the International Executive MBA programme which is designed and delivered by a consortium of 5 European higher education institutions: Paris School of Management based in France (HEC), IAG Louvain School of Management in Belgium (LSM), Copenhagen Business School in Denmark (CBS), Norwegian School of Economics in Norway (NHH) and VMU in Lithuania. Agri-Food Business Management is a joint study programme with Estonian University of Life Sciences in Tartu and Latvia University of Life Sciences and Technologies in Jelgava.

II. GENERAL ASSESSMENT

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

Study field and cycle assessment in points by evaluation areas

No.	Evaluation Area	Evaluation of an Area in points*
1.	Intended and achieved learning outcomes and curriculum	3
2.	Links between science (art) and studies	4
3.	Student admission and support	3
4.	Teaching and learning, student performance and graduate employment	3
5.	Teaching staff	4
6.	Learning facilities and resources	4
7.	Study quality management and public information	3
Total:		24

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

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

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

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

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

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

Study field and cycle assessment in points by evaluation areas

No.	Evaluation Area	Evaluation of an Area in points*
1.	Intended and achieved learning outcomes and curriculum	3
2.	Links between science (art) and studies	4
3.	Student admission and support	3
4.	Teaching and learning, student performance and graduate employment	3
5.	Teaching staff	4
6.	Learning facilities and resources	5
7.	Study quality management and public information	3
Total:		25

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

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

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

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

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

III. STUDY FIELD ANALYSIS

3.1. INTENDED AND ACHIEVED LEARNING OUTCOMES AND CURRICULUM

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

3.1.1. Evaluation of the conformity of the aims and outcomes of the field and cycle study programmes to the needs of the society and/or the labour market

The first cycle of the Management study field at Vytautas Magnus University: Bioeconomy Business Management (BBM)

(1) Factual situation

The aim of the BBM SP is “to prepare bioeconomy business management specialists who are able to perform management functions (...)” (SER 1-st cycle, p. 18). The uniqueness of the SP is based on the fact that there is no other programme like that in any other HEI in Lithuania, while in other European HEIs alike programmes are not in the management field. In the SER VMU describes in detail the needs and specificity of this industry sector, describes the general needs for management field employees or competencies, and also describes the SP itself but does not analyse the market needs for future employees and their possible employability specifically from the Bioeconomy business management perspective. The SP is based mainly on 1) the meeting with the social partners on 9 December 2020 (it is not clear how representative the meeting was); 2) the survey of Lithuanian employers (40 respondents), most of them claiming that the sector is increasing but not explicitly mentioning the demand of the employees or their possible employability or the needed competencies.

(2) Expert judgement

The expert panel does not find that to be a supportive market analysis nor a benchmark analysis of comparable programmes to demonstrate the market need for the programme (and its aims and outcomes) and highly recommends conducting additional market and social partners research. Also, the name of the programme “Bioeconomy” is rather vague and might be quite unclear for the market and for future students (which was expressed during the site visit consultations with students), therefore, the panel suggests evaluating more strategically how this programme is unique in the overall context of VMU study field portfolio.

The second cycle of the Management study field at Vytautas Magnus University: Corporate Strategic Management (CSM); International Executive MBA (IEMBA); Agricultural Business Management (ABM), Agri-Food Business Management (AFBM)

(1) Factual situation

The aim of the CSM SP is “to educate the business and management professionals of high qualification and wide profile (...)” (SER 2-nd cycle, p. 17). The aim of the IEMBA SP is “to prepare managers and entrepreneurs with the knowledge, skills and attitudes required to

successfully and responsibly lead organisations in a dynamic international marketplace, creating value for all stakeholders” (SER 2-nd cycle, p. 17).

(2) Expert judgement

VMU SER states some considerations regarding Lithuanian labour market needs for managerial positions (but very general, not specified to the SPs in the Management study Field) and quotes some international experts' insights or publications from local and international media. Also, there are some insights mentioned on the evolution and specifics of the markets themselves. While this definitely is worthy considering the insights from the market and society, it is not specific enough to prove the need for study programmes (with their aims and outcomes) in the Management field. While the basis for the programmes is focused on growing the future competencies applicable in management positions (which is a futuristic and very strategic approach for the long-term), this does not prove by itself the needs for the SPs of the society and in the market shorter-term.

(1) Factual situation

The aim of the ABM SP is “to prepare competitive specialists in agricultural business management able to develop, implement, and manage the innovative processes at the agricultural business and related organisations, develop businesses under the conditions of increasing uncertainty, globalisation, and climate change, perform economic and managerial assessment of the conditions, modes and forms of operation of business entities, of the developed structures, processes, and the measures employed, and to conduct research in the field of agricultural business” (SER 2-nd cycle, p. 17).

The aim of the international joint second cycle AFBM SP is “to prepare competitive specialists with good theoretical knowledge and practical skills in agri-food industry and entrepreneurship, as well as with leadership skills and critical thinking for a successful international career in leading agri-food companies and organisations, including the ability to carry out research, in order to pursue a career as a scientist” (SER 2-nd cycle, p. 18).

ABM and AFBM SPs are based on more complete analysis of the market needs:

- 1) 2020 research study commissioned by the Ministry of Agriculture of the Republic of Lithuania: “Estimated Demand for the Specialists and Qualified Staff in Agriculture and Rural Development”². Experts recommend focusing more on the managerial positions' needs and expected numbers, not the sector's needed specialists itself (and to exclude engineering and other positions from the analysis).
- 2) BOVA UN - the Baltic Forestry, Veterinary and Agricultural University Network - the year 2017 survey, which included 62 representatives of companies, cooperatives, and public organisations, potential employers out in Latvia, Lithuania, and Estonia.

² 2020 research study commissioned by the Ministry of Agriculture of the Republic of Lithuania: “Estimated Demand for the Specialists and Qualified Staff in Agriculture and Rural Development”, original report: https://zum.lrv.lt/uploads/zum/documents/files/PATIKSLINTA%20%C5%BDem%C4%97s%20%C5%ABkio%20ir%20kaimo%20pl%C4%97tros%20specialist%C5%B3%20poreikio%20tyrimo%20Ataskaita%20-%2020201109-galut-R_Dapkus-VDU_%C5%BD%C5%AAA.pdf

(2) Expert judgement

While the mentioned analyses prove market needs for agriculture sector managerial students, they do not explicitly explain if two SPs are needed and if they reflect different needs from society and/or the market. While AFMB is a joint international programme and ABM is a local second-cycle SP, their differences are rather obvious. However, having in mind the extent these programmes overlap on their subjects, also, how many “Food” related subjects there are in the AFMB SP, the expert panel suggests investigating strategically even more as to how these separate programmes are beneficial in the eyes of the society and the market needs, and also, how are they unique between themselves and in the overall context of VMU Management study field portfolio, especially, considering the number of students lately enrolled in these programmes (as per SER 2-nd cycle, p. 73, there were only 12 students in AMB and 13 in AFBM during 2022).

In order to have a full quality management cycle covered, the expert panel recommends focusing more on the market needs by representable market and employers research or surveys, and also by improving cooperation with social partners and alumni, as well as strengthening focus on graduates' employability or entrepreneurship rates and their satisfaction management and improvement.

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

(1) Factual situation

VMU Strategic Plan for 2021-2027³ states that “The mission of VMU is to be a community-based institution of science, arts and education that continues the mission of the University of Lithuania, founded in Kaunas in 1922, providing liberal educational conditions for individuals, developing partnerships, actively participating in the life of Lithuania, shaping its future, and contributing to the world's cultural and scientific development.” There are 5 areas of Strategic goals, objectives and initiatives: 1) Community in harmony and consolidation; 2) International research university; 3) Studies 360; 4) Integrity of self-governance and responsibility; 5) University impact on societal development (SER 1-st cycle, p. 13). Aims of the BBM SP, CSM SP, IEMBA SP, ABM SP and AFMB SP have already been provided in chapter 3.1.1.

(2) Expert judgement

The expert panel concludes that the documented (planned) aims and outcomes of the SPs in the Management study field formally meet and are in compliance with the mission and strategic activities of the HEI. It was not investigated during the study field evaluation process as of how VMU ensures those alignments in practice by executing strategic activities (as no evidence is provided in the SER).

³ Strategic plan, the years 2021-2027 <https://www.vdu.lt/wp-content/uploads/2020/11/VDU-Strateginis-veiklos-planas-2021-2027-1.pdf>

The current strategic planning of VMU could be improved even more: for example, few of the SPs aims explicitly mention “entrepreneurship”, however, the VMU Strategy implementation plan⁴ does not cover any related indicators such as the number/percent of students who enhanced their careers to upper positions or are in the top level or middle-level managerial positions or who have established their entities etc., though, during consultations, some examples were mentioned for the IEMBA KPIs. Another example is point 3.2.6. of the Strategy implementation plan states “>85% students are satisfied with the quality of studies”, while the 12-month graduate survey states “studies were of quality 3,15/4 points”. This shall not be treated as an exhaustive and limiting example, but only as an illustration of deeper strategic alignment.

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

The first cycle of the Management study field at Vytautas Magnus University: Bioeconomy Business Management (BBM)

(1) Factual situation

The first-cycle SP Bioeconomy Business Management is 240 ECTS credits in volume, with a duration of four years, eight semesters (15 weeks each semester, full-time study mode). In the BBM SP, 156 ECTS credits are allocated to study courses in the Management study field (16 ECTS credits are allocated to the practice and 16 ECTS credits are allocated to the Bachelor's final thesis), 84 ECTS credits are allocated to study courses of other fields of study (for general university, common for the Faculty and elective study courses).

Table No. 1. *Management study field compliance to general requirements for first cycle study programme (Bachelor).*

Criteria	General legal requirements	In the BBM Programme
Scope of the programme in ECTS	180, 210 or 240 ECTS	240 ECTS
ECTS for the study field	No less than 120 ECTS	156 ECTS
ECTS for studies specified by University or optional studies	No more than 120 ECTS	84 ECTS
ECTS for internship	No less than 15 ECTS	16 ECTS
ECTS for final thesis (project)	No less than 15 ECTS	16 ECTS
Contact hours	No less than 20 % of	38-45%

⁴ Strategy Implementation Plan, year 2021-2027 <https://www.vdu.lt/wp-content/uploads/2021/12/VDU-Strategijos-priemoniu-planas-2021-2027.pdf>

Criteria	General legal requirements	In the BBM Programme
	learning	

(2) Expert judgement

Based on the information provided in the SER p. 16 and Annex No.1, the first-cycle SP meets the legal requirements.

The second cycle of the Management study field at Vytautas Magnus University: Corporate Strategic Management (CSM); International Executive MBA (IEMBA); Agricultural Business Management (ABM), Agri-Food Business Management (AFBM)

(1) Factual situation

Table No. 2. *Management study field compliance to general requirements for second cycle study programmes (Master).*

Criteria	General* legal requirements	In the CSM	In the IEMBA	In the ABM	In the AFBM
Scope of the programme in ECTS	90 or 120 ECTS	120 ECTS	90 ECTS	120 ECTS	120 ECTS
ECTS for the study field Information Services	No less than 60 ECTS	102 ECTS	90 ECTS	102 ECTS	90 ECTS
ECTS for studies specified by University or optional studies	No more than 30 ECTS	18 ECTS	0 ECTS	18 ECTS	30 ECTS
ECTS for final thesis (project)	No less than 30 ECTS	30 ECTS	30 ECTS	30 ECTS	30 ECTS
Contact hours	No less than 10 % of learning	38 %	27%	38%	25%
Individual learning	No less than 50 % of learning	62 %	73 %	75 %	62 %

(2) Expert judgement

As per the numbers provided in the SER and stated in table No.2, VMU meets the legal requirements of the second-cycle SPs in the Management study field.

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

(1) Factual situation

The first cycle of the Management study field at Vytautas Magnus University: Bioeconomy Business Management (BBM)

The links of the study courses and learning outcomes of the study programmes are provided very detailed in the Annex No.3 of the SER 1-st cycle. There are links between the outcomes of the study courses and the outcomes of the BBM SP. Also, these links are recognised and explained explicitly in every Course programme.

Study methods and assessment methods are identified in each course programme. VMU also states in the SER on BBM SP that “The learning outcomes of the study programmes are achieved by application of diverse modern and active teaching techniques focused on analysing with the practical issues, situations, and cases” (SER 1-st cycle, p. 22).

The second cycle of the Management study field at Vytautas Magnus University: Corporate Strategic Management (CSM); International Executive MBA (IEMBA); Agricultural Business Management (ABM), Agri-Food Business Management (AFBM)

The links of the study courses and learning outcomes of the study programmes are provided explicitly in every Course description and are systematic.

VMU SER 2-nd cycle (SER, p. 35) mentions diverse learning and teaching methods applied. The learning and training methods are also mentioned explicitly in every Course description.

During the site visit, the management team and the teacher team concluded “changing generation with new needs” and “new methods of teaching and hybrid mode and digitalisation” to be some of the biggest strategic challenges in the study Field.

Both SERs mention numerous times the innovations in teaching, learning and assessment methods, as well as distant and hybrid teaching and learning and assessment as already applied. During the site visit the teachers provided some examples of such methods (e.g., problem-solving, gamification, hackathons, summer schools, international week of teachers for students) but could not prove their consistent and systematic application in the study Field, among the teachers and between the different courses. The same doubt was confirmed during the consultation with the students.

Students have expressly mentioned that inclusive hybrid learning options are among their first desires towards the HEI, as most of the second-cycle students are already working and the timing of the lectures or seminars is not always available for them. Some of the concerns they have expressed are that, still, a lot of teachers do not provide online options or video recording of the meetings (even though Moodle and digital tools in the classes would allow that) and that

some of the teachers teach only in live meetings, and also, that not attending the class means additional homework requirements for the students in some of the cases.

Moreover, during the site visit, the consultation with students revealed that there is still a lack of inter-site activities, even within the same study Field programmes (between FEM and Agriculture Academy). Therefore, the panel recommends focusing on this area as a possibility to improve alignment within the institution, the desired results of the SPs and also, improve (to some extent) interdisciplinarity by having common lectures and student events, including conferences, workshops, projects etc.

During the site visit consultations, it was apparent that assessment methods are still focusing on remembering rather than critical thinking. There was a lack of diversity of instrumentation or techniques of assessment beyond formal examinations. Given the internationality and interdisciplinarity aspirations of the University, and also the internationality and mobility of the students, this might not serve as a modern approach. The panel strongly suggests including such items as more online and open-book assessments, more practice field tasks or projects, and a focus on formative as well as summative assessment.

(2) Expert judgement

The expert panel recognises that VMU provides teaching, learning and assessment methods enough to ensure meeting the aims and outcomes of the SPs. Also, some of the teachers actually apply innovative approach in teaching and assessment methods (use online tools and feedback system, applies digital practices to ensure hybrid and online learning, open book exams etc.). Despite examples of excellence, the deployment of good practice assessment tools and techniques was uneven across the faculty community. The expert panel recommends implementing systematic knowledge and best practice sharing within the faculty community, as well as improving faculty competencies within digital tools and online learning tools.

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

(1) Factual situation

The first cycle of the Management study field at Vytautas Magnus University: Bioeconomy Business Management (BBM)

BBM SP's structure and its courses reflect the principles of consistent development of competencies and principles of Bloom's Taxonomy and also all the categories of the Bologna Qualifications Framework (knowledge and its application, research, special, social, and personal skills). Three areas of study courses are identified in the BBM SP 1) competencies of the bioeconomy sector; 2) management competencies; 3) competencies in biological resource technologies. These three areas reflect the interdisciplinary context of the Programme.

The way the SP is constructed should allow the first-cycle students to acquire the basic knowledge, abilities and independent work skills necessary for their studies through general

university study courses. Moreover, in the beginning, the study courses in the Management study field are introduced, and later on, followed by the courses in other study fields and professional practices. Also, students can build their study plan by choosing group A and group B (alternative free electives) study courses. The students have the freedom of choice, and integration of the students of all study fields and programmes is promoted by attending general university courses.

The second cycle of the Management study field at Vytautas Magnus University: Corporate Strategic Management (CSM); International Executive MBA (IEMBA); Agricultural Business Management (ABM), Agri-Food Business Management (AFBM)

The **CSM** SP's curriculum and course structure was based on the overview of graduate strategy-related programmes offered at some of the world's leading universities and business schools (e.g., Paris HEC and its "Strategic Management" Master programme; Copenhagen Business School and its "Strategy, Organisation and Leadership Master programme; Norwegian School of Economics (NHH) and its "Strategy and Management" Master programme). All the subjects of the SP are based on 3 main areas: 1) core knowledge and skills in business strategy and strategic analysis (first year); 2) organisation management and leadership in dynamic business environments (second and third semesters); 3) faculty-level elective graduate courses (SER 2nd-cycle, p. 40). During the fourth semester, students prepare their final Master's thesis, which is based on independent scientific/applied research.

IEMBA SP first covers and then integrates the main functional areas of a company, trains soft skills (executive and leadership), and leads with many practical applications during the studies (business simulations, projects) and more specific subjects. In the first semester, students choose two elective courses from a list. In the middle of the studies, there is an "International Study Module" to provide international and multicultural experiences for the students. The SP is organised in cycles, i.e., at one time students have only one course. Finally, students prepare and defend a final Master's thesis, building on current theory to solve a specific management problem faced by a company, organisation, or industry.

In **ABM** SP, the first semester is dedicated to fundamental knowledge in the field (agriculture) and in the research methodology. The next semesters are dedicated to the skills in agricultural business strategy development and decision making and the main areas of activities of an agricultural business company and its management. In the second year, students choose the term paper - individual student's written work - which should reflect real agricultural business case analysis. The SP ends with the final Master's thesis.

AFBM SP is grouped into twelve successive study modules, which combine lectures in classrooms and practical application of theories and research findings of agri-business management during field trips to agri-food companies, as well as in practical classes in the university's scientific laboratories. The first-year compulsory subjects start at Estonian University and are focused on the basic knowledge of the field and soft competencies. The second semester is in VMU and focuses on compulsory managerial subjects (strategies,

planning, finances etc.). The third semester is at Latvian University and focuses on management skills in the subjects of operations and marketing. The fourth semester is dedicated to the final Master's thesis.

(2) Expert judgement

The expert panel concludes that all of these programmes definitely provide a thorough and systematic approach towards the development of competencies of the students and ensure principles of Bloom's Taxonomy and also all the categories of the Bologna Qualifications Framework (knowledge and its application, research, special, social, and personal skills). The panel also recognises that VMU has quite different approaches to the second cycle studies in the Management field. This might be because of the still rather recent merger of the HEIs and also because international studies are constructed and provided together with international partners. While there are definitely best practices used in some of these SPs, it is worth considering sharing these within the different SPs and also within different sites and respective teachers in order to further align the know-how and improve study quality.

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

(1) Factual situation

The first cycle of the Management study field at Vytautas Magnus University: Bioeconomy Business Management (BBM)

Acting on Artes liberales principles VMU enables students to personalise structure of studies in BBM SP with subjects from:

- *Group A*: major study courses and foreign language courses, mandatory for all students in the University (total volume of the study courses is 12–24 credits during year 1 and 2; while English is 12 credits during years 1-4).
- *Group B*: alternative free electives that are not in the student's field of study. There are five subgroups of these study courses: a) social sciences; b) humanities; c) natural, technology, and agricultural sciences; d) arts; e) foreign languages. The students are required to choose and complete four study courses (at least 16 ECTS credits) or one study course from each subgroup, except for the subgroup that belongs to the student's major study field.

Study courses of the field (group C) enable to achieve the aims and all learning outcomes of the study programme and are mandatory. Other means for students to personalise their study experience and learning outcomes are: 1) choosing a topic for the Bachelor's final thesis; 2) choosing the place of their practice (from the offered list of social partners or found by the students); 3) Erasmus+ exchange.

The second cycle of the Management study field at Vytautas Magnus University: Corporate Strategic Management (CSM); International Executive MBA (IEMBA); Agricultural Business Management (ABM), Agri-Food Business Management (AFBM)

VMU provides students with possibilities to study according to an individual study schedule in order to meet specific learning needs. Also, students have wide opportunities to choose different foreign languages for their studies. VMU provides opportunities for optional Minor studies (including subjects from the B category of the first cycle to the study plan), though there were no students who would have completed that.

In the final year, the **CSM** SP students choose faculty-level elective graduate courses (3 courses 6 ECTS each) from three different categories: a) Personal skills and abilities; b) Management skills and abilities; and c) Sustainable development. The same list of elective courses is provided to all students of FEM VMU second cycle programmes. This enables the students to have a mobility “window” in the third semester (for Erasmus+ exchange or double degree studies). During the fourth semester, students choose the topic and prepare the final master thesis, which is based on independent scientific/applied research.

IEMBA SP students can choose 2 subjects (6 ECTS in total) during the first semester. Also, they choose a topic and prepare and defend an International Executive MBA final master thesis during the final year.

ABM SP students choose elective courses of other study fields (1 course, 6 ECTS) in their third semester and one additional course of other study fields (1 course, 6 ECTS) in their fifth semester. Also, they can choose the topic for the term paper in the second year and the research project topic in the third year. In the final year, students choose a topic and prepare and defend a final Master’s thesis.

AFBM SP students do not have free electives in the SP. In the final year, students choose a topic and prepare and defend a final Master’s thesis.

(2) Expert judgement

The expert panel concludes that all of these programmes in the Management study field provide some options for students to personalise their study process and desired study outcomes and competencies. However, during the site visit the management team mentioned “personalisation options” as one of the main advantages of the programmes in the study Field. While this might be true for the first cycle SP, the feature seems lacking for the second cycle studies. Therefore, if the management team would actually like to have this as a strategic advantage of the second-cycle SPs, the panel would recommend including more personalisation options in the second-cycle studies and suggests carrying out discussions with the students themselves about what the desired personalisation options would be.

The expert panel noticed that most of the outcomes of the SPs mentioned social abilities including multicultural environment, however, the real possibilities to personalise studies in the international mobility area for the SPs that are not international, are currently underdeveloped (the number of mobile students represents that). Site visit and student consultations revealed the lack of integral communication from the University and its different administration personnel as to a) what are the options for mobility available for the students;

b) what are the destinations and courses available; c) organisational support and administration - how to fund, how to go, what documents are needed etc. Therefore, the experts strongly support improving the promotion of Erasmus or other mobility programmes, giving more information (including online, social media etc.) and support to the students.

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

(1) Factual situation

Preparation and defence of final theses is regulated by VMU Study Regulations and General Order on the Preparation and Defence of Final Theses of first and second study cycles. Students defend their final theses in the final year after completing the study programme courses. All the final theses are checked for plagiarism.

The first cycle of the Management study field at Vytautas Magnus University: Bioeconomy Business Management (BBM)

As the programme is still new, expert evaluations will not be provided on this indicator for this SP.

The second cycle of the Management study field at Vytautas Magnus University: Corporate Strategic Management (CSM); International Executive MBA (IEMBA); Agricultural Business Management (ABM), Agri-Food Business Management (AFBM)

Final thesis of each SP of Management study field is related with all learning outcomes of the particular study programme. Students have to choose not only the desired topic but also scientific research methods to collect, analyse and summarise data, and apply it to management problems.

The course matters of the final Master's thesis of study programmes are reviewed and published by the Study Programme Committee (hereinafter, SPC) on an annual basis one semester before the start of preparation of the final thesis. Students choose a course matter that matches their field of interest and then formulate a specific topic. Those topics are from the Management field but the students are encouraged to choose interdisciplinary topics as well. The students can also choose a topic as demanded by social partners. Helpful planning practices are implemented in the learning management system Moodle in order to support students during the final thesis process.

In order to be eligible to defend their final thesis, students of second-cycle study programmes have to present the results of their research at a conference or publish them in a scientific journal. VMU itself hosts annual conferences "Young Scientist" and "Processes and Tendencies in the EU Economics, Finance and Business".

During the years 2020-2022, the number of final theses for the SP and the number of final thesis based on the orders of social partners were: 1) CSM SP - 49 thesis in total, 11 ordered by the

social partners; 2) IEMBA SP - 83 thesis in total, 29 ordered by the social partners; 3) ABM - 21 thesis in total, 7 ordered by the social partners; 4) AFBM - 4 thesis in total, 0 ordered by the social partners.

During the site visit, the management team mentioned “relevant topics for the day, e.g., European Green Deal” as one of the main advantages of the programmes in the study Field. While this is definitely visible in the subjects of the SPs, the same could not be said about the topics of the final theses. The topics prepared and defended during 2020-2022 were provided in Annex No. 2 to the SER. Most of these topics and final theses in CSM, ABM, and AFBM SPs were very broad, represented only very high-level managerial problems or very soft topics, and lacked practical insights/value for the market, employers, and scientific innovativeness.

(2) Expert judgement

While the final theses meet legal requirements and study subjects of the field, the expert panel notes concerns on this criterion and concludes that additional inclusion of the social partners in the final study thesis process is desirable. Such inclusion would be beneficial at every step -- submission of topics, allowing to be research subjects, more representative participation in the defence committee etc.--to support more practical and innovative the final theses subjects. This would also potentially improve research and scientific attractiveness for future partnerships, which is a strategic initiative of VMU, with a focus on more practical business problem-solving and more real cases.

Strengths and weaknesses of this evaluation area:

(1) Strengths:

1. The links between the study courses and learning outcomes of the study programmes are provided explicitly in every Course description and are systematic. The learning and training methods are also mentioned explicitly in every Course description.
2. All SPs in the Management study field provide a thorough and systematic approach towards developing the competencies of the students.
3. The current strategic plan of VMU is very detailed, mentioning such KPIs as student dropout rates, student employability rates, student satisfaction with resources and study quality etc.

(2) Weaknesses:

1. The market and society needs of the programmes in the management study field lack a basis in market research and benchmarking comparable programmes. A more strategic and portfolio-based approach would benefit further decisions (not only identifying differences with external competing programmes but also within the programmes of the study field in the VMU). Also, the inclusion of social partners and employers from the market is recommended to validate the SPs in the study field.

2. The current VMU strategic planning approach could be improved by unifying student survey results with strategy implementation indicators (as per the implementation plan⁵).
3. Improving cooperation with social partners, employers and alumni, expanding participation in professional organisations for verification and development of SPs and their quality, improving work with final theses and employability of the students, creating Alumni community and improving international mobility options for the students etc.
4. Because of the merger of different HEIs, there is still a lack of inter-site activities, even within the same study Field programmes (between FEM and Agriculture academy).
5. Current teaching, learning and assessment methods enable to achieve the aims and outcomes of the SPs, however, could be reviewed and improved. While some of the teachers apply innovative approaches in teaching and assessment methods, these are not systematic and consistent among the different teachers and study programmes of the Field and also between the different sites of the University. It is recommended to implement systematic knowledge and best practice sharing and development and ensure their execution within teachers' community. Special focus should be put on IT and digital competencies.
6. The study personalisation options in the second cycle studies are provided, however, are quite limited, therefore, the panel suggests further discussions with the students themselves about what the desired personalisation options there could be.
7. International mobility of students is limited due to organisational reasons. It may be helpful to enhance focus on this area and improve the processes and communication.
8. While the final theses meet legal requirements and study subjects of the field, they could be improved by focusing on market and industry needs more by choosing more practical business problems.

3.2. LINKS BETWEEN SCIENCE (ART) AND STUDIES

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

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

(1) Factual situation⁶

The research conducted by VMU in the Management field encompasses various topics. These areas include strategic and operations management, entrepreneurship and innovation, marketing management, organisation studies, and human resource management, many studies are focusing on the agriculture and agri-food sectors.

⁵ Strategy implementation plan year 2021-2027 <https://www.vdu.lt/wp-content/uploads/2021/12/VDU-Strategijos-priemoniu-planas-2021-2027.pdf>

⁶ Based on the Self Report First cycle: pages 33-37 Second cycle: pages 52-61.

VMU's Management field is divided into two horizontal research clusters, namely "Management Transformation for the Development of a Socially Sustainable Society and a Competitive State" and "Research on Marketing Management in a Modern Environment." These clusters serve as focal points for research activities. The first cluster aims to integrate diverse disciplines, placing special emphasis on general management research. This includes studying research and innovation ecosystems, organisational culture, strategic management, entrepreneurial behaviour, and human resource management in knowledge-based business organisations. The second cluster brings together researchers who focus on marketing and marketing management solutions. Their research areas encompass topics such as neuromarketing, brand management, value dimensions, organisational reputation and social responsibility, consumer behaviour, and emerging trends in marketing communication. Researchers have the flexibility to engage in multiple clusters simultaneously, based on the nature of their research projects.

The Horizon 2020 project "Promoting a Sustainable Circular Bioeconomy in Central and Eastern Europe" (BIOEASTsUP) was successfully implemented by developers and educators. The primary goal of the project was to propel the BIOEAST initiative, serving as a catalyst for the Centre for Research and Innovation, Rural Development, and other Bioeconomic Development in Western Europe. This aimed to establish a favourable cross-sectoral framework for the sustainable utilisation of biomass potential. The outcomes of the project significantly enriched the study course "Agricultural Economics and Sustainable Development," particularly enhancing the topic of "Agricultural sustainability assessment methodology." Building upon this success, VMU FBD has already initiated two Horizon projects: "Accelerating circular bio-based solutions integration in European rural areas (BioRural)" and "Strengthening farm health and safety knowledge and innovation systems (SafeHabitus)." BioRural focuses on interdisciplinary research and aims to establish a pan-European Rural Bioeconomy Network. Through collaboration among relevant stakeholders, this network will promote the adoption of small-scale bio-based solutions in rural areas, aiming to enhance the bioeconomy's share and create added value in remote regions. The anticipated results of these projects are expected to contribute to the enhancement of Management study programmes at VMU.

Based on data from the European Commission regarding the intensity of Erasmus+ exchanges, VMU consistently ranks within the Top 40 European universities. Moreover, FEM holds the distinction of being the sole business school in Lithuania that is a part of the Campus European network. This recognition highlights VMU's commitment to international exchange programmes and its unique position within the European higher education landscape.

(2) Expert judgement

The Management field's research related to the analysed study programmes is effectively supported through several key actions. These actions primarily involve promoting the international mobility of researchers, allowing them to collaborate with peers from around the world and share their research findings globally. Additionally, there is a focus on strengthening international research cooperation and applied research by actively engaging with various stakeholders and realising the projects. These measures ensure that the research in the

Management field remains robust and facilitates valuable contributions to the academic community and beyond.

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

(1) Factual situation⁷

The study process benefits from the research projects implemented by VMU researchers, as well as from their publication of articles. These endeavours contribute to enhancing the quality and relevance of the study materials and curriculum. By actively conducting research and sharing their findings through publications, VMU researchers provide valuable insights and up-to-date knowledge that enriches the educational experience for students and helps them stay abreast of the latest advancements in their field of study.

(2) Expert judgement

During the site visit, the teaching staff demonstrated their dedication to involving students in the most up-to-date research findings through a range of assignments such as case studies, research projects, and collaborative initiatives. This pedagogical approach offers students valuable opportunities to familiarise themselves with the latest advancements in their field of study. The expert committee recognises and commends VMU's efforts to integrate research outcomes into its teaching practices. Furthermore, the collaboration with external partners contributes to further advancements in this domain, enhancing the educational experience for students.

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

(1) Factual situation⁸

In second-cycle study programmes, students are required to complete 1-2 research papers as part of their coursework within the Management field. These research papers involve both theoretical and empirical research, allowing students to explore topics of interest within their chosen field. Throughout this process, students are supervised by designated advisors who provide guidance and support. The research papers are specific to the respective programmes, with one research paper in ABM, one in AFBM, and one in CSM.

In addition to the research papers, students must also complete a final Master's thesis before they can be awarded their Master's degree. The final Master's thesis entails addressing management problems and providing solutions based on robust theoretical and methodological research. The presentation of research-based solutions in the final Master's thesis distinguishes it from undergraduate-level theses, emphasising the application of scholarly research to practical management challenges.

⁷ Based on the Self Report First cycle: pages 37-38; Second cycle: pages 61-64.

⁸ Based on the Self Report First cycle: pages 38-40; Second cycle: pages 64-68.

From 2019 to 2022, students enrolled in the Management field study programmes actively engaged in the annual conference organised by FEM86, which specifically caters to young researchers and students. The conference, which celebrated its 25th edition in 2022, provided an avenue for students to present their research findings and contribute to scholarly discussions. Notably, the students were also granted the opportunity to have their articles published in the conference journal further enhancing their academic exposure and recognition within the field.

Students of the second cycle study programmes ABM and AFBM took part in the “Young Scientist” conferences, providing a platform for them to present their research findings. Additionally, a few students participated in the “Modern Management - Part of Cultural Policy” conference organised by The Faculty of Bioeconomy Development (hereinafter, FBD). Furthermore, there was a biannual scientific-practical conference called “Strengthening the Competitiveness of Lithuanian Rural Areas,” in which students had the opportunity to present their research results. Importantly, these conferences also provided students with the opportunity to publish their research in the respective conference journals, facilitating wider dissemination of their work within the academic community.

(2) Expert judgement

During the site visit, it was confirmed that students have the opportunity to actively participate in different research activities consistent with their study cycle. However, some gaps were noted regarding the level of involvement of students in the Management field applied research projects.

Strengths and weaknesses of this evaluation area:

(1) Strengths:

1. Research groups are formed, and clear performance indicators are established as part of the annual activity planning.
2. The teaching staff affirmed their commitment to engage students in the most recent research findings through various projects and conferences.
3. VMU takes an active role in the participation in different projects.
4. The University has a strong emphasis on cross-disciplinary research.
5. The Management field research team is highly recognised for their expertise in applied research, with a specific focus on areas such as bioeconomy, rural development, and bio-based industries.

(2) Weaknesses:

1. Encouraging more consistent and active participation of students in the Management field in the projects of applied research.

3.3. STUDENT ADMISSION AND SUPPORT

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

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

(1) Factual situation

In partnership with LAMA BPO, the Association of Lithuanian Higher Education Institutions for Centralised Admissions, the University guarantees an efficient admission process. The Ministry of Education, Science and Sports of the Republic of Lithuania mandates standardised admission criteria for first-cycle studies across all universities based on established national regulations. The University uses several communication channels such as its website, faculty websites, printed booklets and participation in higher education fairs to share clear information about admission requirements for transparency and accessibility. Through these efforts, the University shows its commitment to conducting equal opportunity student selection and publicising it.

In the SER 1st cycle, the admission criteria are determined by the Ministry of Education, Science and Sports of the Republic of Lithuania and are common for all universities. The process of calculating the admission score typically involves an assessment of national and school exams, as well as school grades. As for the SER 2nd cycle, admission requirements may differ depending on the chosen study programme. This disparity stems from varying formulas utilised to calculate admission scores. These formulas take into account different factors such as bachelor study field and performance metrics like grades, thesis evaluation and additional studies, written application forms, personal references, employer recommendations, English language tests and performance during admissions interviews. The selection process may be managed by committees composed of faculty representatives and alumni.

(2) Expert judgement

The commitment demonstrated by VMU towards promoting fairness in both criteria used for choosing students as well as the procedures employed during admissions is noteworthy. Their partnership with LAMA BPO ensures compliance with national standards for admissions while maintaining clarity throughout all stages of the process. The endeavours towards utilising diverse methods of spreading pertinent information about admissions exhibit considerable attention given to ease of accessibility for everyone.

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

(1) Factual situation

To welcome its diverse student body, the University has developed an extensive approach to value foreign credentials, partial studies, as well as prior non-formal and informal learning. By doing so, they ensure that they thoroughly evaluate students' educational achievements and

skills acquired from their previous educational experiences or examinations. This step showcases their commitment to accommodating varying academic backgrounds effectively while promoting diversity through inclusivity across campus.

(2) Expert judgement

The University has taken strides to establish a thorough process for validating foreign qualifications, partial studies and previous non-formal or informal education. The process promotes inclusivity and respect the varied educational experiences of students. The University aims to foster a conducive learning atmosphere by enabling students' prior knowledge and experiences integration.

3.3.3. Evaluation of conditions for ensuring academic mobility of students

(1) Factual situation

The University places importance on its students' academic mobility in their education. To accomplish this objective efficiently and effectively entails having numerous alternatives available, which include global exchanges such as studying abroad or participating in conferences and internships worldwide. Moreover, the Department of International Relations manages these practices while simultaneously offering support services throughout all stages of student engagement. Beyond this supportive framework's scope lies potential financial assistance via scholarships or grants extended to eligible candidates trying to finance academic endeavours away from home turf seamlessly resulting in an overall environment that advocates broadening global perspectives significantly.

(2) Expert judgement

Although the Department of International Relations makes the effort to prioritise students' academic mobility by presenting various opportunities to enrich their experience globally, students during the review visit interview expressed that the options of mobility are not always clear and not many students apply for them. It may be helpful to improve information efforts to students regarding options for studying abroad and participating in internships and conferences

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

(1) Factual situation

The University shows a dedication to supporting students personally, academically, financially, socially, and psychologically. Through its range of academic resources such as didactic materials and specific library databases, the University upholds provides the basis for students to advance intellectually. Discussions during the site visit demonstrated that some gaps exist in the collection management of library resources.

Issues regarding accommodation of financial circumstances and effective counselling of students in the coming-of-age segment were alluded to in the SER and were evident from interviews during the site visit. These issues do not appear to be clearly or precisely defined to lend themselves to systematic responses.

(2) Expert judgement

Based on the SER and evidence gained during the site visit, several areas stand out as needing attention:

- It may helpful to focus more effort on addressing issues with students' financial circumstances and more support from sponsors and scholarships.
- Listening and learning methods to improve counselling support should be implemented to understand and address the diverse psychological and personal issues of students, particularly in the coming-of-age student segment. Among these issues, lowering dorm-related complaints should be a priority.
- Overall, the approach for resolution of student complaints is not fully defined or implemented.
- Enhancement of research resources, including research databases, should be considered. Improvements are required for the resolution of student complaints and the suggestion of research databases.

3.3.5 Evaluation of the sufficiency of study information and student counselling

(1) Factual situation

Students expressed concerns for more clear and comprehensive study information that highlights unique aspects of Tourism Industries (TI SP) studies. Among the areas identified were detailed workload management plans, course schedules and options for online classes are also crucial elements.

The University has demonstrated efficient use of social media platforms and their International Students Office as effective communication channels both domestically and globally. These communication channels improving opportunities to promote Erasmus programmes alongside enhancing information on foreign exchange studies should be prioritised further.

Strengthening critical thinking development in the education curriculum emerged as a priority from students. A greater focus on such competencies could constitute a meaningful addition towards providing excellent educational experiences for individuals who will evolve in their future careers.

(2) Expert judgement

Several areas are of note in the judgement of the expert panel:

- The significance of providing students with adequate study information and counselling services is satisfactory, however, improvements seem warranted.
- Even though the TI SP will be soon discontinued, when improving the other programmes enhancing clarity in programme descriptions, supplying advanced information and

promoting overseas educational opportunities vigorously is essential in improving overall study information.

- The University's commendable communication channels, social media platforms and International Students Office provide an opportunity to improvement and augment student counselling services.
- It would be prudent to deliver comprehensive guidance on Erasmus programmes and stress critical thinking skills development within the curriculum for better results in this regard.

Strengths and weaknesses of this evaluation area:

(1) Strengths:

1. The University, post-merger, has engaged in a series of initiative to improve process efficiency through approaches such as centralisation of support functions.

(2) Weaknesses:

1. Limited guidance to ensure participation in student mobility.
2. Insufficient inclusion of critical thinking skills elements in curriculum.
3. Need for additional focus to address the financial burdens faced by students; minimal support from sponsors and scholarships.
4. The need for continuous improvement to address diverse psychological and personal issues.
5. Complaints related to dormitories.
6. Inadequate systems for resolving student complaints.
7. Need for a more consistent and comprehensive collections management approach to deciding which research databases to use.

3.4. TEACHING AND LEARNING, STUDENT PERFORMANCE AND GRADUATE EMPLOYMENT

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

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

(1) Factual situation

VMU study programmes offer students a high degree of freedom and flexibility in the design and management of their learning process. Students can choose their independent study topics and degree of participation in discussions or case studies, adjust the timing and form of interim assessments, and attend lectures and seminars at their convenience. It allows them to balance their studies with work or other commitments, especially in the second cycle.

A balanced approach for assessing learning achievements and different assessment methods, including testing, written assignments, individual/group work, research paper writing, presentations etc., has been implemented. The choice of methods is related to the study programmes. While taking an exam is compulsory, the other assessments are optional, and students can decide their level of participation. The system motivates most students to take part in all assessments. The holistic assessment approach appears comprehensive and well-rounded. It goes beyond traditional exams to include other forms of assessment, facilitating a more accurate representation of students' understanding and capabilities.

VMU offers clear and transparent procedures for teaching and learning achievement evaluation. The assessment criteria and related information are accessible via the University's website and the course's Study Guide on Moodle. A ten-point criterion-based assessment system is used to evaluate learning achievements. Graduates from the first-cycle study programmes have opportunities to pursue second-cycle programmes, and graduates from the second-cycle study programmes have opportunities to pursue third-cycle study programmes in the Management field both in Lithuania and abroad.

(2) Expert judgement

Overall, VMU's teaching and learning process is forward-thinking, promoting student autonomy and uses diverse assessment methods. There is some lack of consistency in the use of teaching and learning methods. In particular, the expert team noted divergence of methods based on interviews of faculty during the site visit. It may be helpful to develop sharing approaches to assist faculty with developing consistent approaches.

The flexible learning structure encourages a level of autonomy in students, fostering the development of time management skills, self-discipline, and individual responsibility, which are highly desirable attributes in the professional world. At the same time, over use of the flexibility may lead to lower class attendance and engagement if students lack self-discipline or encounter difficulties managing their time. Students who struggle with self-motivation or prefer more structured learning might find this system challenging.

The transparent evaluation procedure promotes trust and fairness. The quick feedback process allows students to identify their strengths and weaknesses timely, which is beneficial for continuous learning and improvement. While the assessment criteria are transparent, there could be concerns about the students' thorough understanding, especially if they fail to access or review the information available on the website or Moodle.

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

(1) Factual situation

In 2021 VMU approved its disability policy – University of Inclusive Opportunities, which focuses on increasing the accessibility of studies and work by properly adapting study and working conditions for VMU community members with special needs and disabilities. During

the site visit, technologies and assistance for different types of special needs were recognised and discussed (visual, mobility and other aids available). The University's buildings (including the library), parking lot, dormitories and equipment are established to provide assistance for special needs students. Also, there is a disability coordinator, whose assistance is available. In 2022 there were 133 students with special needs in the University (not limited to the Field of Management studies). The information about the support of special needs students is available online for students to-be⁹. Also, during the site visit consultations with students, some special needs students' representatives expressly mentioned high satisfaction with engaging practices ensured by the University.

Socially vulnerable groups (orphans, people with disabilities, students from large families, families receiving social benefits and low-income families) and students with special needs are provided with the opportunity to study according to an individual study schedule. Moreover, they are eligible to receive different discounts for tuition or dormitory fees, and scholarships.

(2) Expert judgement

The expert panel concludes that the means provided by the University are satisfactory for special needs and socially vulnerable students.

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

(1) Factual situation

The monitoring of student learning progress is regulated by VMU Study Regulations and the Description of the Procedure of Monitoring of Student Learning Achievements and Providing Assistance at VMU. Monitoring includes the following: 1) An analysis of student enrolment in studies and learning situation in study courses; 2) An analysis of the reasons for the students' non-participation in interim and final examinations; 3) An analysis of intermediate and final evaluation of students; 4) Implementation of preventive measures to manage student failure and improvement of organisation of studies; 5) Students can perform self-monitoring in Moodle study course pages or use specific Moodle tools (Progress bar, Digital badges).

In the first cycle studies in the Management field, monitoring of students' progress and achievements is split among teachers, administrators (registrations to courses, results of assignments, information from teachers about non-participative students etc.) for undergraduate studies, and the Head of Department. In cases of missed assignments or absence from lectures, the administrators contact students to enquire about the reasons and offer some help.

The Moodle system automatically reminds teachers about students' progress and detailed information is available for them in the Teacher Portal.

⁹ <https://www.vdu.lt/lt/studijos/studiju-salygos-ir-aplinka/universitetas-ir-negalia/>

Student assessment results and related feedback are provided in various manners: during lectures and seminars, result announcements in intranet or Outlook, some teachers provide feedback in the Moodle environment, during the consultation time (face to face, MS Teams, Moodle chat, Facebook messenger) etc.

(2) Expert judgement

The range of possible ways and diversification of feedback and its provision tools is satisfactory, in case University manages to align all the best practices within different SPs and within the teachers' community.

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

(1) Factual situation

The first cycle of the Management study field at Vytautas Magnus University: Bioeconomy Business Management (BBM)

As the SP is new, there are no graduates yet, thus, the specific comments by the experts are not addressed on this SP for this indicator.

The second cycle of the Management study field at Vytautas Magnus University: Corporate Strategic Management (CSM); International Executive MBA (IEMBA); Agricultural Business Management (ABM), and Agri-Food Business Management (AFBM)

VMU has cooperation with the Lithuanian Employment Service bureau and gets statistical information about VMU graduates registered for a job search. Information is provided twice per year, i.e., 12 months and 15 months after their graduation.

The University also monitors students' readiness to work, employment and career by analysing employers' feedback about students while they are performing practice and after finding employment upon completion of the studies.

Each year VMU Career Centre performs an online exit survey of students and alumni, one year after their graduation. The focus of attention is their current work situation and satisfaction with the studies they have graduated from. Summarised survey results are published on the University website www.vdu.lt and on the Career Centre website (available only in Lithuanian and only for the whole VMU graduates of all cycles, not specific to management Field studies or study programmes; only the Faculty level (not the SP level) available for the alumni survey). These public reports^{10 11} are not treated by the expert panel as representative surveys neither for the quality management purposes of the study programmes nor the study Field. Also, the latest surveys (year 2021/2022) were not published yet. However, in the SER English version,

¹⁰ Results report for the EXIT survey 2020/2021. <https://karjera.vdu.lt/wp-content/uploads/2022/12/EXIT-sklaidai-2022-taisyta.pdf>

¹¹ Graduates (12 months after graduation) survey report year 2020/2021 https://karjera.vdu.lt/wp-content/uploads/2022/12/Absolventai_2022_sklaidai.pdf

the following numbers were provided for the Management Field studies and students: according to the EXIT survey, in 2020 96% of second-cycle graduating students were working; in 2021 85% of second-cycle graduating students. The majority of graduating students work in a field, related to the study programme they finished. BMI surveys for IEMBA count 90% of graduates working in the top and senior managers positions, 41% of graduates made progress in their career during their studies, and 31% had an increase in earnings. EXIT students of the Management Study field have rather high satisfaction with the preparation of the labour market - over 75-84% ("good" and "rather good" combined).

Collaboration with VMU alumni takes place mainly through alumni clubs and individual departments of the University. Graduates periodically receive newsletters with current information. VMU claims in their SER that Alumni organise club meetings, various events (lectures, discussions, informal meetings, field trips, excursions to various companies employing university alumni, etc.), and actively participate as consultants and experts in study programme committees and study quality assessment groups etc. However, during the site visit, the consultations with the social partners and Alumni did not prove that (at least not to the extent that could be satisfactory), therefore, the expert panel suggests improving partnerships and community work with Alumni. Especially, as the Alumni themselves identified a willingness to participate more on the basis of more productive and specific invitations from the University. As already mentioned, numerous times in this report, improvement of cooperation with social partners and Alumni could be a huge improvement for the study Field.

(2) Expert judgement

The University appears well positioned with rates of student performance and graduate employment. There is room for improvement, particularly in incorporating more practice-oriented learning and increasing industry involvement. Also, even though career tracking practices and results are enough, they could be improved by aligning with VMU's strategy even more (as already discussed in chapter No. 1). The work with the Alumni could be improved by engaging them to participate in the University activities more which would provide valuable insights into graduate experiences and outcomes.

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

(1) Factual situation

VMU has outlined academic integrity in its Statutes, Study Regulations, and the Code of Academic Ethics. Measures for non-discrimination are governed by the Code of Academic Ethics, which fosters principles such as academic freedom and responsibility, honesty, ethical personal relationships, equal rights and opportunities, respect for personal dignity and autonomy, etc. Both academic staff and students can appeal to the VMU Ethics Commission, which makes final decisions on academic integrity matters. All students are required to sign a Declaration of Integrity regarding the authenticity of their work.

The University uses several methods to prevent plagiarism in student-written works, and to detect and identify types of plagiarism. The tools and procedures used provide recommendations to faculty and students on how to avoid plagiarism. Both students and academic staff have access to specialised plagiarism detection software (Oxsico) to check written papers before submission/evaluation. Written assignments are screened for plagiarism prior to public defence, and if any suspicion arises, a detailed investigation is carried out by the Plagiarism Prevention Commission. In case of violations of the academic integrity procedures during final examinations or other assessments, a zero score is given and the behaviour is reported. A follow-up investigation is carried out and appropriate penalties are administered.

The University has a gender equality plan for 2021-2025 to promote cultural and systemic changes at an institutional and structural level to maintain gender balance. However, it is unclear how well-publicised this is within the University community. Greater awareness could encourage more participation and support.

(2) Expert judgement

Overall, VMU's measures to ensure academic integrity, encourage tolerance, and promote non-discrimination appear to be comprehensive and robust. While academic integrity is covered, providing more information on how VMU promotes tolerance would be beneficial. Educational programmes or workshops that promote acceptance and understanding of diverse perspectives could strengthen this aspect.

Implementing regular, structured feedback or survey mechanisms to gauge the effectiveness of the academic integrity, tolerance, and non-discrimination policies would help identify any gaps between policy and practice and could offer valuable insights for refining these measures over time. Furthermore, transparent disclosure of these results of the efforts can increase trust and engagement within the University community.

VMU has well-articulated policies in place to ensure academic integrity, tolerance, and non-discrimination. These policies serve as a clear guide for behaviour expectations. While the policies are in place, the effectiveness of these policies is contingent on the commitment to their implementation at all levels of the institution. It may be beneficial to gather data on the perceptions of students and staff to ensure these policies are creating the desired impact. Robust and effective plagiarism prevention mechanism, including the usage of specialised software and the requirement for an integrity declaration, minimises the chances of academic dishonesty. The provision for appealing to the Ethics Commission ensures a fair resolution of any academic integrity issues.

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

(1) Factual situation

VMU has set out regulations and procedures for appeals and complaints of the study process, as defined by multiple documents, including the VMU Regulations for Submission of Appeals

Regarding Evaluation of Learning Outcomes and/or Assessment Procedure, VMU Provisions on Prevention of Plagiarism in Student Written Works, and VMU Study Regulations. These procedures allow students to appeal to assessment results or procedures they disagree with. The University also provides a set time frame for lodging an appeal, which is considered by an appeal commission.

Assessment results are promptly shared and discussed with students. For example, in case of disagreement with the assessment, students can request a review of the grade. While the provision for requesting a grade review is commendable, a clear outline of the process and criteria for a successful grade review might be beneficial to ensure fairness and manage student expectations.

A Defence Committee evaluates the final theses, and students have the right to appeal about the procedure, not the evaluation. In the Management field, there have been no appeals regarding the evaluation of examinations, assignments, or thesis defence procedures during the self-evaluation period.

(2) Expert judgement

The system for the submission and examination of appeals and complaints at VMU appears to be well-structured and transparent, providing clear avenues for students to question or contest evaluation outcomes or processes. The absence of appeals may indicate that students find the assessment procedures fair, transparent, and consistent. The absence of complaints or appeals might also indicate a lack of encouragement or opportunities for students to voice their concerns.

It could be beneficial to promote a culture where constructive feedback and open dialogue are encouraged, making students feel comfortable to bring up their concerns, whether formally or informally. While there have been no appeals or complaints, it's essential to continuously review and adapt these policies to ensure they remain relevant and effective in managing student concerns. Regular reviews can help identify any potential gaps or areas for improvement in the system. Although the appeal procedures are documented, it's essential to ensure that all students are aware of their rights to appeal and the procedure to do so. Regular reminders and clear guidelines about these processes could further enhance the transparency of the process.

Strengths and weaknesses of this evaluation area:

(1) Strengths:

1. The system for the submission and examination of appeals and complaints at VMU appears to be well-structured and transparent, providing clear avenues for students to question or contest evaluation outcomes or processes.
2. The University adequately supports the special needs and socially vulnerable students.
3. The approaches to feedback represent a well-diversified approach incorporating diverse methods of feedback and assessment tools.

4. VMU's measures to ensure academic integrity, tolerance, and non-discrimination appear to be comprehensive and robust.

(2) Weaknesses:

1. Graduate career tracking lacks clear definition in the VMU Strategy in terms of KPIs (as already pointed out in the recommendations of Chapter No. 1).
2. The engagement of Alumni could be improved by approaches to elicit their participation in more University activities.
3. Incorporating more practice-oriented learning and increasing industry involvement in the study process could be beneficial to programme quality.

3.5. TEACHING STAFF

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

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

(1) Factual situation¹²

The guidelines and procedures for the calculation and management of teachers' work time and workload at VMU are outlined in the Description of Procedure for Teachers' Work Accounting. This document, approved by Rector's Order No. 291 on July 4, 2022, governs the principles, implementation, and monitoring of teachers' work time.

According to the guidelines, the average annual workload for a full-time equivalent (FTE) teacher is set at 1584 hours, with a weekly workload of 36 hours. Teachers' workload encompasses various activities, including contact hours spent interacting with students, non-contact work dedicated to preparing for teaching, engagement in research and development activities, personal competence development, and organisational tasks related to their teaching responsibilities. These activities collectively contribute to the overall workload of the teachers and are accounted for within the framework defined by the procedure.

VMU has an adequate number of teachers to ensure the successful achievement of learning outcomes in the first-cycle SPs, namely BBM and TI, both falling under the Management field. The selection of teachers for these programmes takes into consideration their qualifications and practical experience in the relevant fields. The BBM SP is supported by a team of 23 teachers, while the TI SP is facilitated by 18 teachers. The criteria for selecting teachers include a minimum requirement of three years of work experience and dedicating more than half of their workday to VMU.

¹² Based on the Self Report First cycle: pages 62-64; Second cycle: pages 97-101

VMU has also an adequate number of faculty to ensure the successful achievement of learning outcomes in the second-cycle study programmes. Currently, there are a total of 21 faculty involved in teaching study courses within the second-cycle Management field studies at VMU. Among them, 17 teachers, or 80.9% of the total, hold permanent positions based on the established criteria (minimum of 3 years of experience and part-time employment at VMU).

In the second-cycle SP CSP, there are 9 members of the academic staff involved in teaching. Among them, 7 teachers, 77.8% of the total, are permanent staff members. For the IEMBA SP, faculty are directly recruited from partner universities for each study course. The supervision of the final Master's thesis is assigned to VMU faculty. In the ABM SP, there are currently 12 members of the academic staff teaching study courses. Among them, 10 teachers, accounting for 83.3% of the total, hold permanent positions.

Presently 12 members of academic staff teach study courses in Agricultural Business Management study programme with 10 (or 83.3 %) employed as permanent staff. Two faculty members who work in Agricultural Business Management study programme hold governmental positions outside the institution. A total of 4 VMU lecturers are involved in the international joint study programme Agri-Food Business Management.

All scientific publications prepared by the teachers are accessible through the VMU Library database. The activities and accomplishments of the teachers in terms of professional development are assessed every five years. This evaluation takes into consideration their ongoing research ensuring the recognition and monitoring of their contributions to their respective fields.

(2) Expert judgement

The staff members engaged in the Management programmes fulfil the requirements to conduct assessed SPs, encompassing didactic expertise and professional experience. The number of teachers is considered adequate, attesting to the institution's ability to provide a satisfactory level of qualified and competent instructors in the field of study. This ensures that the desired study outcomes can be effectively attained.

3.5.2. Evaluation of conditions for ensuring teaching staff academic mobility

(1) Factual situation¹³

Every teacher at VMU is provided with opportunities to take advantage of the Erasmus+ programme offerings. They can opt to participate in Erasmus+ teaching visits, which involve teaching at partner universities within the European Union (EU), European Economic Area (EEA), candidate countries (a total of 487 partner institutions), or even outside the EU (115 partner institutions). In a typical year, approximately 200 VMU teachers avail themselves of these teaching mobility opportunities, subject to normal conditions outside of pandemic periods.

¹³ Based on the Self Report First cycle: pages 64-65; Second cycle: pages 101-103.

Additionally, teachers have the option to engage in Erasmus+ training visits for professional development. These visits can be conducted at any institution or organisation, including other higher education institutions, within the EU, EEA, candidate countries, or even partner universities outside the EU. On average, around 180 VMU staff members participate in staff mobility for training purposes each year, again subject to normal conditions outside of pandemic periods.

Beyond teaching visits, faculty are offered various opportunities for mobility related to their research interests. This includes research internships, and active participation in conferences, seminars, and workshops. The Management field maintains a wide-ranging list of partner institutions, which is regularly reviewed and updated on an annual basis. This extensive network can be utilised by teachers to further their research endeavours.

Furthermore, there are university and state-level funds available for teachers to apply for financial support towards their research activities. These funding opportunities offer a continuous avenue for teachers to seek resources to facilitate and enhance their research projects.

During the 2019-2020 academic year, there were a total of 30 visits abroad by academic staff members in the Management field studies. These visits took place in various countries including Poland, Latvia, Spain, Italy, Belgium, Finland, Slovakia, United Kingdom, Netherlands, Portugal, Hungary, Albania, Morocco, and Thailand. On average, this translates to approximately 1.4 visits per permanent teacher in the Management field studies. The COVID-19 pandemic had a significant impact on the number of visits abroad during the 2020-2021 academic year, resulting in a smaller number of visits (9 in total). However, teachers adapted to the situation by utilising distance learning programmes for mobility instead. There were 5 such cases, with teachers participating in virtual mobility experiences in countries such as Turkey, Spain, Latvia, the Netherlands, and Poland. As the situation improved and pandemic restrictions eased, there was a notable increase in the number of visits during the 2021-2022 academic year. A total of 28 visits were implemented during this period, with teachers having the opportunity to travel to countries including Spain, Italy, Greece, Turkey, Denmark, Poland, Belgium, Germany, Austria, Ireland, Portugal, and the Netherlands.

(2) Expert judgement

The availability of numerous academic mobility opportunities highlights the active engagement of teachers in the Management field at VMU. These opportunities encompass various aspects such as teaching, learning, and scientific endeavours. Teachers in the Management field have a wide range of options to participate in international mobility programmes, enabling them to enhance their teaching methods, acquire new knowledge, and engage in collaborative research activities. Their active utilisation of these opportunities demonstrates their commitment to continuous professional development and the promotion of a globalised and enriched learning environment within the Management field at VMU. On the other hand, the incoming mobility could be higher and there could be more guest lecturers from HEIs and research institutions from abroad who would enrich the study process.

3.5.3. Evaluation of the conditions to improve the competencies of the teaching staff

(1) Factual situation¹⁴

The professional development activities of teachers at VMU are regulated by the Description of the Procedure for Professional Development of Academic and Non-Academic Staff. These activities are categorised into three competence groups: Group 1 focuses on general competencies such as foreign languages, intercultural communication, and managerial skills. Group 2 emphasises professional activities including didactic skills, digital proficiency, research capabilities, and professional growth. Group 3 focuses on personal development and includes competencies such as time management and personal growth. These organised professional development activities ensure that teachers at VMU have access to diverse opportunities for enhancing their skills and knowledge in various areas, ultimately benefiting their teaching effectiveness and overall professional growth.

In recent years, VMU has placed significant emphasis on enhancing the didactic abilities of its teachers, particularly in areas related to student engagement, distance teaching and learning, and effective feedback provision. Special attention has been given to providing training and support to teachers in order to promote more active student involvement in the educational process. This includes equipping teachers with the necessary skills and strategies to create engaging learning environments, facilitate interactive discussions, and foster collaborative learning experiences. Additionally, training initiatives have been designed to help teachers adapt to the challenges and opportunities associated with distance education, including the effective use of online platforms, digital tools, and multimedia resources. Furthermore, teachers have been encouraged to enhance their feedback-giving abilities, enabling them to provide constructive and timely feedback to students that support their learning and development. Through these focused training efforts, VMU aims to continuously improve the teaching practices of its faculty and enhance the overall educational experience for students.

Teachers enhance their competencies by engaging in professional development activities organised by VMU as well as other HEIs in Lithuania and abroad. These activities provide teachers with valuable opportunities to broaden their knowledge, improve their skills, and stay up-to-date with the latest developments in their respective fields. Through participation in workshops, seminars, conferences, training programmes, and other educational initiatives, teachers continuously enhance their professional competencies, ensuring that they remain well-equipped to deliver high-quality education and meet the evolving needs of their students. The diverse range of professional development opportunities allows teachers to engage in continuous learning and contribute to their own professional growth and the overall enhancement of the teaching environment at VMU. For example, there was a possibility to take part in the following courses: English language, training for developing didactic skills, and digital skills.

¹⁴ Based on the Self Report First cycle: pages 65-69; Second cycle: pages 103-105.

At VMU, the feedback provided by participants at the conclusion of each training session plays a crucial role in shaping and refining the content of future training programmes. Additionally, the professional development needs of the academic staff are identified through various channels, including the VMU teacher survey and the Professional Competence Development Centre's website. Teachers are encouraged to share their suggestions and preferences for future training topics, allowing the University to align its offerings with the specific needs and interests of its faculty members. Furthermore, the administration of faculties and SPCs actively contribute to the formulation of professional development plans, ensuring that the training programmes address the specific requirements and goals of each academic unit. By considering feedback, suggestions, and input from various stakeholders, VMU strives to provide targeted and relevant professional development opportunities that support the continuous growth and enhancement of its teaching staff.

(2) Expert judgement

The continuous development of teaching staff competencies, especially digital competencies, is vital to ensure the quality of modern education and to meet the evolving needs of students and the educational landscape. The panel were persuaded that the teachers are taking part in the different trainings and that these opportunities exist.

Strengths and weaknesses of this evaluation area:

(1) Strengths:

1. The staff members involved in the Management SPs meet the overall requirements, including didactic and professional experience.
2. Dedicated and enthusiastic teachers who are valued by current students and Alumni.
3. VMU promotes academic mobility among lecturers.
4. Teachers have the possibility to take part in different trainings adjusted to their needs.

(2) Weaknesses:

1. In the future more guest lecturers from foreign higher education and research institutions should be involved in the study process.

3.6. LEARNING FACILITIES AND RESOURCES

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

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

(1) Factual situation

Upon the review during the site visit, the expert panel acknowledges the positive strides made by the University in ensuring adequate and appropriate physical, informational, and financial

resources for the Management field studies. Notably, with immense pride is how well-designed and impeccably maintained facilities have created an optimal learning environment.

The condition of critical physical facilities such as classrooms, laboratories, and study spaces at the University was analysed in detail. It was discerned that all these amenities were tended with great care. Additionally, the institution's administration demonstrates unfaltering dedication towards cultivating a dynamic atmosphere for collaborative learning aided by advanced technology and interactive tools accessibility. To complement this approach further, comfortable seating arrangements alongside requisite audio-visual aids have been thoughtfully provided throughout the classrooms.

Libraries and online databases were discovered to be thorough and simple for pupils to access as informational resources. The institution has made significant investments in a large array of scholarly materials, including books, journals and computerised databases, to make sure that students have access to current and pertinent knowledge. The librarians were informed and helpful as well as supporting students' research efforts and encouraging information literacy.

(2) Expert judgement

Upon evaluation, it was disclosed that the physical resources available at the institution, which include spacious classrooms, well-equipped laboratories and reliable study areas are all conducive to effective learning. Students continue to benefit from an updated technological infrastructure combined with interactive materials that further enhance their skills. Remarkably enough the University has created an ideal space for cultivating cooperation among students via ergonomic seating rigs and intuitive audio-visual aids.

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

(1) Factual situation

VMU has engaged in extensive efforts at upgrading facilities and resources. Efforts documents in the SER and observed by the site visit team include numerous modernisations of buildings, improving accessibility, and technology upgrades. Some reports during the site visit indicated that the improvement efforts at the agricultural campus have lagged behind the main campus in Kaunas.

(2) Expert judgement

VMU offers modern, state-of-the-art facilities and has engaged in recent projects to upgrade and modernise those facilities. Efforts have also been undertaken to enhance and upgrade technologies supportive of teaching and learning. However, the agricultural campus is yet to be modernised to meet the high standard the central campus holds.

Strengths and weaknesses of this evaluation area:

(1) Strengths:

1. VMU operates from two modern campuses with state-of-the-art facilities and technologies.
2. The upgrades to facilities and technologies are the result of a well-deployed and systematic approach to the learning environment.

(2) Weaknesses:

1. The deployment and timing of facility upgrades seems to lag at the remote, agricultural campus.
2. Several aspects of planning and improvements have lagged due to gaps in merger planning or post-merger integration between the two universities.

3.7. STUDY QUALITY MANAGEMENT AND PUBLIC INFORMATION

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

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

(1) Factual situation

The VMU SER has a comprehensive internal study quality assurance system description that aligns with the Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area. The system includes several governing and operational entities such as the Senate and Rector's Council of VMU, VMU Study Quality Unit, various Academic Councils, Faculties' Councils, and the Deans of the Faculties and Heads of the Departments. VMU utilises a range of documents, including VMU Statute, VMU Quality Manual, VMU Study Regulations, Description of Procedure for Study Quality Assurance at VMU, Description of Procedure of Feedback for Improvement of Quality of Studies at VMU, and Description of Procedure for Study Course Attestation at VMU, to guide the quality assurance process. The use of various documents to guide the quality assurance process denotes a high level of institutional commitment to quality education. These documents' continuous revision and improvement show a dedication to keeping up with changing requirements and trends in higher education.

The system's quality assurance practices are both formal and informal, with a significant focus on stakeholder engagement. Improvement measures are undertaken based on regular evaluations and feedback, and SPs are managed and updated by the SPC. According to the SER, the system seems open to continuous improvement and development, as indicated by the institution's preparedness for adapting and managing changes.

The University's focus on stakeholder engagement in quality assurance is commendable. This participatory approach ensures that the programmes offered are relevant and meet the needs of the labour market. It is essential that this stakeholder feedback is taken seriously and acted upon to maintain the relevance and quality of the programmes offered. As noted elsewhere,

there are opportunities to enhance the level of input from external stakeholders and social partners.

(2) Expert judgement

According to SER, the VMU's internal quality assurance system's elements seem robust, well-defined, and compliant with European standards. The structure is characterised by high stakeholder involvement.

During the visit, the experts noted that the merger of universities has negatively impacted the quality system due, apparently, to gaps in post-merger integration. Obviously, the change process takes time and is not over yet. Focused attention to the change management processes could help close gaps in understanding of several issues and processes for the VMU staff involved in the study field of Management.

The SER is extensive, comprehensive, and includes considerable factual information and description. The great degree of faculty information is not matched with the similar level of critical self-analysis and self-reflection, particularly analysing the weaknesses and challenges. During the interviews with the SER team, representatives mentioned three areas in which VMU focuses - Internationalisation, Interdisciplinarity, and Impact, which have to be admitted as very positive and essential. However, the connection between these areas, VMU strategy and quality indicators are not visible in the quality assurance processes and activities.

A systematic approach to change management and internal review (not just writing reports), analysis and critical self-evaluation could provide further assurance and validation of effectiveness. Although a robust set of procedures is in place, continuous re-evaluation and updating of the quality assurance process will ensure it remains effective and relevant over time, and a clear division of responsibilities among different parties is needed. This includes keeping abreast of quality indicators.

Overall, VMU's internal quality assurance system has been implemented although there are gaps in deployment, particularly in the validation of the system's effectiveness in practice. Continuous monitoring and adjustments in line with evolving higher education trends and standards should be maintained.

The University demonstrates strong performance in teaching quality and student participation but can focus more on enhancing continuous improvement, practical exposure, feedback processes, and change management.

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

(1) Factual situation

The University employs a multi-faceted approach to engaging stakeholders in its internal quality assurance processes. Key stakeholders include academic staff, students, social partners,

employers (business and industry connections), and Alumni. Their input is collected and evaluated in a variety of ways:

- Faculty actively participate in study quality assurance at both the course and programme levels. They also contribute to their own professional development and share best practices with colleagues.
- Students provide feedback through a representative in SPC via surveys, group discussions, and direct communication with teachers.
- Social partners and employers (business and industry connections) offer input on the relevance of programmes to market needs, practical skills requirements, potential joint projects, and student internships.
- Alumni provide valuable insights via surveys and meetings, focusing on study quality improvement recommendations.

According to the SER, results from these surveys are accessible to the University administration and SPC and are shared with relevant stakeholders. It ensures a constant flow of relevant, actionable information from various stakeholders.

The University has established cooperation with numerous companies to provide practical learning opportunities and internships for students, further enhancing their readiness for the labour market. Stakeholders, including alumni and business representatives, are actively involved in various committees and improvement initiatives, participating in events and offering their expertise during thesis defences.

(2) Expert judgement

Overall, the University's approach to involving stakeholders in internal quality assurance appears comprehensive and effective. The active engagement of all key stakeholders (academic staff, students, social partners and alumni) is commendable, as it offers multiple perspectives to improve study quality. The collaboration with social partners, particularly businesses and industry bodies, offers valuable real-world relevance to the University's study programmes. This prepares students more effectively for the labour market and ensures that the university's offerings stay up-to-date with industry trends and needs.

According to SER, the use of frequent, targeted surveys to gather feedback is a key strength of the VMU approach. However, during the students' interviews, they were not aware of the surveys' results and their usage.

The open access to survey results promotes transparency and allows for the shared responsibility of quality assurance. The reliance on direct feedback, regular communication, and data-driven decision-making is consistent with best practices in quality assurance. However, the effectiveness of the University's stakeholder involvement has to be further enhanced by setting measurable goals, reviewing response rates and representativeness of surveys, and regularly reviewing and updating the process. Regular evaluation of the quality assurance process can identify further improvement areas, however, in the SER and during the interviews, sufficient evidence of a completed quality loop in VMU was not found.

In conclusion, the University demonstrates the quite effective involvement of stakeholders in its internal quality assurance. Further enhancements could be made by setting measurable goals and continually reviewing the effectiveness of its processes.

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

(1) Factual situation

The University collects feedback through various channels like surveys, interviews, or discussions. These activities are organised systematically, and results from the feedback data are analysed and presented to stakeholders. Various University divisions are responsible for this feedback collection, analysis, and summarisation of the results. Centralised study quality surveys are the responsibility of the VMU Study Quality Unit, while other surveys are handled by the administration of faculties, SPC, Student representation, Career Centre, and other units.

According to SER (SER 2-nd cycle, p. 126), SPC discusses the progress of quality improvement in its meetings at least twice a year to monitor the improvement actions. For instance, in BMI for IEMBA debriefing sessions roughly every 6 months, for open discussion with the full class regarding the course questionnaire results, exams, and any other issues; ad hoc focus groups to address specific issues or to get students' reactions to changes which are being considered; quarterly meetings with class representatives for summaries of attitudes, comments and any potential problems; participation of class representatives in meetings of BMI Academic Council, grades assigned to the students ("pass rate") and faculty comments regarding students' work; thesis progress and completion rate ("on-time graduation").

Information related to the evaluation and improvements in studies is communicated through different channels. Teachers, social partners, and other stakeholders receive information from the Head of the SPC, and student representatives disseminate the same to other study programme students. This information is also published on the VMU website, emailed to students and teachers, stored in Outlook public folders, shared via social media, and through other channels such as the Annual Report of Faculty Activities.

Study programmes in the Management field aim and intended learning outcomes are announced and periodically updated in AIKOS, the VMU website, the FEM and FBD websites, and on Facebook (SER 1-st cycle, p. 85; 2-nd cycle, p. 131).

This section of the SER shows successful examples demonstrating a high level of achievement in the evaluation area.

(2) Expert judgement

VMU has established a well-defined process for gathering, analysing, and disseminating feedback data related to studies, which involves different units across the University. A feedback collection mechanism seems streamlined, centralised and standardised around all

University divisions, which ensures the consistency of the data collected, thereby improving the accuracy of the analysis and the applicability of results.

The existence of multiple channels for disseminating information ensures widespread availability and accessibility of feedback results, and this transparency helps build trust among stakeholders. The VMU should ensure that the feedback is easy to understand and actionable for all parties. While the University disseminates information via multiple channels, it may be beneficial to assess the effectiveness of each channel periodically and make adjustments as needed to improve reach and engagement.

The periodic updating of aims, learning outcomes, and study plans signifies the University's commitment to staying current and responsive to changes in academic fields. Regular reviews of feedback presentation methods and communication channels could help ensure that these are still effective and meet stakeholders' evolving needs and preferences.

To strengthen further assurance about the quality and objectivity of its processes, the VMU might also consider introducing the valuable experience of BMI as a whole study field of Management perspective and lend further credibility to the quality control efforts.

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

(1) Factual situation

Surveys are a crucial tool in collecting stakeholder feedback in the range from teaching and learning evaluations conducted at the end of each semester to assessments of graduate preparation for the labour market and alumni career progression. Employer surveys are also carried out to gauge the readiness of alumni in the workforce. This data informs decisions regarding study programmes, including updates and improvements based on industry requirements and graduate feedback.

In Management field studies, a qualitative approach is used to gather students' opinions. It includes open questions in a questionnaire about all courses and the study programme. Identified strengths include a suitable schedule for working professionals, youthfulness and involvement of the staff, and friendly, respectful communication. Areas of improvement include a call for less theory, more practical tasks, and more guidance for preparing final theses.

The quality of teaching in all programmes is regularly monitored through online student surveys, with an average rating of relatively high. This holds true even for beginner teachers. When ratings fall at or below 4 (out of 5), a remediation process is initiated, potentially leading to teacher replacement.

Students of IEMBA SP are also surveyed if the cost of the programme is compared to the quality of education they have received so far. On a scale of 10, students rated the overall value for money of this programme as 8.2 to 8.4 over the past three years, with a high likelihood of recommending the programme to peers.

The VMU has implemented valuable recommendations from different external evaluations. For example, improvements in the CSM SP included increased interaction with industry and local organisations. For the IEMBA, it was the establishment of a formal Alumni-Social Partners Committee and improved advertising. For the AFBM SP, closer collaboration between partner universities was established. For the BBM SP, broader and more active dissemination of quality assessment results.

(2) Expert judgement

The VMU's system for monitoring and improving the quality of teaching appears robust, with clear evaluation and feedback procedures. Comprehensive analysis and valuable examples are presented in the SER. The student ratings suggest high satisfaction with the programmes and indicate effective teaching quality, especially with the IEMBA programme scoring consistently high ratings.

According to the SER, the Management field studies seem to adopt a balanced approach of theoretical knowledge and practical applications. However, students' and Alumni' feedback points towards a need for further emphasis on practical tasks and more comprehensive guidance in thesis preparation. The VMU appears receptive to this feedback, as indicated by changes made to address identified shortcomings. To fully complete the quality improvement cycle, tracking and analysing the results after the changes have been made is essential to assess their usefulness and effectiveness.

The proactive approach to adopting expert recommendations and a structured engagement process with stakeholders, such as alumni and social partners, indicates a strong commitment to continuous improvement and alignment with industry practices. However, the VMU might need to focus on increasing student participation in feedback mechanisms to ensure more comprehensive input for decision-making and improvements. The value of survey data depends on the response rate and how representative respondents are of the stakeholder group.

The practices of regular evaluation, use of feedback for improvement, and study programmes' management and updates indicate the existence of the system elements. However, in some cases, the level of formalisation may lead to potential bureaucratic hindrances, and it has to be periodically reviewed and streamlined for more efficiency.

Strengths and weaknesses of this evaluation area:

(1) Strengths:

1. VMU has comprehensive internal quality assurance procedures aligned with European standards. It involves various entities and utilises a range of documents to guide the quality assurance process, ensuring well-defined parameters for the system.
2. VMU actively engages stakeholders, including academic staff, students, social partners, employers and Alumni in the quality assurance process. The involvement of multiple perspectives ensures relevance and continuous improvement of study programmes.

3. VMU employs various channels and surveys to collect feedback from stakeholders, enabling a continuous flow of actionable information. The open access to survey results promotes transparency and shared responsibility for quality assurance.
4. VMU demonstrates a strong commitment to continuous improvement of the study process, as evidenced by its responsiveness to feedback, implementation of recommendations, and proactive engagement with stakeholders.
5. The Baltic Management Institute programme quality assurance activities as a valuable benchmark for the Management study field development perspective and further credibility to the quality assurance efforts.

(2) Weaknesses:

1. The merger of universities has impacted the quality system, and insufficient attention to the change management process leads to differences in understanding of several issues and processes for the VMU staff involved in the study field of Management. Thus, the quality of implementation of programmes in the study area of Management is inconsistent.
2. A lack of systematic approach to post-merger integration planning, change management, internal review, analysis and critical self-evaluation is observed in the study field of Management.
3. There is a need to validate the effectiveness of the system's internal quality assurance in practice. The system's effectiveness should be gauged not only on its structures and procedures but also on its outcomes.
4. Students' and Alumni' feedback points towards a need for further emphasis on practical tasks and learning opportunities in the study programmes of the Management (not related to BMI).

IV. RECOMMENDATIONS

Evaluation Area	Recommendations for the Evaluation Area (study cycle)
Intended and achieved learning outcomes and curriculum	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Market and societal needs research. Perform additional market and society needs research and benchmark of the programmes in the study Field. The more strategic and SP portfolio approaches are suggested for further decisions. Also, the inclusion of social partners and employers from the market is recommended to validate the SPs in the study field. 2. Strategic planning. Current Strategic planning of VMU could be improved by including and aligning KPIs. 3. Enhanced cooperation with social partners. Improving cooperation with social partners, employers and Alumni and expanding participation in professional organisations - for verification and development of study programmes and their quality, improving work with final thesis and employability of the students, creating Alumni community and improving international mobility options for the students etc. 4. Post-merger integration of activities. Because of the merger of different HEI, there is still a lack of inter-site activities, even within the same study field programmes (between FEM and Agriculture academy) and the panel recommends improving this area. 5. Continuous improvement for teaching, learning, and assessment. Current teaching, learning and assessment methods enable to achieve the aims and outcomes of the SPs, however, could be reviewed and improved. While some of the teachers apply innovative approaches in teaching and assessment methods, these are not systematic and consistent among the different teachers and study programmes of the Field and also between the different sites of the University, thus, it is recommended to implement systematic knowledge and best practice sharing and development and ensure their execution within teachers' community. Special focus should be put on IT and digital competencies. 6. Study personalisation. The study personalisation options in the second cycle studies are provided, but quite limited, therefore the panel suggests further discussions with the students themselves about what the desired personalisation options could be. 7. Student international mobility. International mobility of students is rather limited due to organisational reasons and it

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	<p>is recommended to ensure focus for this area and improve the processes and communication.</p> <p>8. Thesis topic selection. While the final theses meet legal requirements and study subjects of the field, they could be improved by focusing on market and industry needs more by choosing more practical business problems.</p>
Links between science (art) and studies	<p>1. Research Group Formation and Clear Performance Indicators. The formation of research groups and the establishment of clear performance indicators as part of annual activity planning are commendable practices. To further strengthen this, the University should periodically review and update these indicators to ensure they remain relevant and aligned with the evolving goals of research activities.</p> <p>2. Engagement of teaching staff with students. The commitment of the teaching staff to engage students with the most recent research findings through various projects and conferences is a valuable strength. To enhance this further, the University can:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. Promote student research: Create programmes that encourage and fund student involvement in research projects, fostering a culture of student participation in applied research. b. Mentorship: Establish mentorship programmes where faculty members guide and mentor students in their research endeavours, providing valuable guidance and support. <p>3. Active participation in different projects. VMU's active role in participating in various projects demonstrates its commitment to interdisciplinary research. To capitalise on this strength the school can:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. Collaborative partnerships: Seek more collaboration with other institutions, both domestically and internationally, to diversify project opportunities and leverage collective expertise. b. Project management training: Provide project management training for faculty and students involved in projects to enhance their skills in planning, executing, and evaluating research initiatives. <p>4. Emphasis on cross-disciplinary research. The University's strong emphasis on cross-disciplinary research is highly valuable. To further bolster this strength:</p>

Evaluation Area	Recommendations for the Evaluation Area (study cycle)
	<p>a. Interdisciplinary initiatives: Create platforms or centres that specifically promote interdisciplinary collaboration and research, encouraging faculty from various disciplines to work together on common goals.</p> <p>5. Expertise in applied research. The recognition of the management field research team for their expertise in applied research, particularly in areas such as bioeconomy, rural development, and bio-based industries, is a significant asset. To build upon this strength:</p> <p>a. Knowledge transfer: Establish channels for sharing the team's research findings and expertise with a wider audience, including industry partners, policymakers, and the public.</p> <p>b. Research grants: Actively pursue research grants and funding opportunities that align with the team's expertise, enabling them to conduct more impactful research projects.</p> <p>6. Student participation in applied research projects. Encouraging more active participation of students in the Management field in applied research projects is a recognised weakness. To address this:</p> <p>a. Student research opportunities: Develop clear pathways and incentives for students to engage in applied research, such as offering research internships, scholarships, or credits for research involvement.</p> <p>b. Faculty-student collaboration: Encourage closer collaboration between faculty and students in identifying and working on research projects, allowing students to contribute meaningfully to ongoing research initiatives.</p>
Student admission and support	<p>1. External funding. The institution needs to seek more external funding opportunities as a part of effort of greater financial assistance to students.</p> <p>2. Addressing student concerns. The institution should work on improving the process and speed of addressing student concerns.</p>
Teaching and learning, student performance and graduate employment	<p>1. Tracing graduates and alumni. Graduate career tracking could be performed by including more KPIs in the Strategy of VMU and in the career tracking process (as already pointed out in the recommendations of Criteria No. 1) and by having more accurate data and/or KPIs based on each programme or</p>

Evaluation Area	Recommendations for the Evaluation Area (study cycle)
	<p>at least the study Field (not the faculty in general), also by making them available for the students (with different languages available) on a timely manner.</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 2. Alumni engagement. The work with the Alumni could be improved by engaging them to participate in the University activities and study process more. 3. Practice-oriented learning. Incorporating more practice-oriented learning and increasing industry involvement in the study process.
Teaching staff	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Qualified staff. The fact that staff members involved in the Management programmes meet the overall requirements, including didactic and professional experience, is a solid strength. To further enhance this, the University should continue to emphasise rigorous hiring practices and regularly update programme requirements to align with industry standards and evolving academic needs. 2. Dedicated and enthusiastic teachers. Having dedicated and enthusiastic teachers who are valued by current students and alumni is a crucial asset. To sustain and maximise this strength, the University should establish recognition and reward mechanisms for outstanding teaching, encourage continuous professional development, and provide opportunities for teachers to receive feedback from students and peers. 3. Promotion of academic mobility. VMU's promotion of academic mobility among lecturers is commendable. To further capitalise on this strength, the University should continue to foster a culture of academic exchange, exploring opportunities for both incoming and outgoing faculty mobility. This can contribute to diversity and fresh perspectives in the teaching and learning environment. 4. Tailored training opportunities. Providing teachers with the possibility to take part in different training programmes adjusted to their needs is a proactive practice. To enhance this strength, the University should regularly assess the training needs of teaching staff and offer a variety of professional development opportunities, including pedagogical training, technology integration, and research skills enhancement. 5. Lack of guest lecturers from foreign institutions. The need for more guest lecturers from foreign higher education and research institutions is a valid concern. To address this weakness:

Evaluation Area	Recommendations for the Evaluation Area (study cycle)
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. International partnerships. Strengthen and expand partnerships with foreign universities and research institutions to facilitate the exchange of guest lecturers. b. Visiting scholar programmes. Establish structured visiting scholar programmes that invite experts and scholars from abroad to teach, collaborate, and share their knowledge and experiences with both faculty and students. c. Faculty exchange programmes. Develop faculty exchange programmes that allow lecturers to spend time teaching or conducting research at partner institutions abroad, fostering cross-cultural academic experiences.
Learning facilities and resources	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Remediate gaps in post-merger planning and improvements. Close gaps in planning and implementation of improvements at the remote campus.
Study quality management and public information	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Broaden the QA system. Broadening the quality assurance system by including strategic and change management perspectives, enabling the linkage between strategic development and quality system and assuring consistent understanding of study quality in the study area of Management. 2. Critical self-evaluation. Improvement of the quality system by critical self-evaluation (not just reporting), particularly analysing the weaknesses and challenges and setting and assessing clear quality indicators. 3. Closing the loop. Completion of the quality loop and improvement of the monitoring system by setting measurable goals and continually reviewing the effectiveness of processes. To fully complete the quality improvement cycle, tracking and analysing the results after the changes have been made is essential to assess their usefulness and effectiveness. 4. Practical learning opportunities. Enhancing and further emphasising practical learning opportunities for students to enhance the relevance of the labour market, readiness for the job market, and the programmes' quality.

V. SUMMARY

VMU presents a case example of handling change in the present-day higher education environment. The university has joined two institutions together in what often can be a challenging process. Many of the challenges, such as change management and post-merger integration, were plainly evident to the expert team. Despite the challenges, the resolve to move forward with successful programmes was evident.

Faculty and staff exhibited an engaged and dedicated approach to serving students and other stakeholders. The enthusiasm of the faculty was evidenced in many comments and reactions of students. Among faculty members there were many examples of excellence in teaching and learning. Ensuring that those examples of excellence are consistently used by all faculty remains a gap in the institution's realising its full potential.

VMU has embraced an approach to continuous quality improvement. There are opportunities to further implement the approach through the use of a broader set of performance indicators, applied consistently across the two merged entities.

The expert panel wishes to express its sincere appreciation for the welcoming nature of the staff, faculty and students at VMU and the engagement with the field of study accreditation process.

Expert panel chairperson signature:

Dr. Douglas Gilbert