VILNIAUS UNIVERSITETO
VEIKLOS VERTINIMO IŠVADOS

INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW REPORT OF
VILNIUS UNIVERSITY

Grupės vadovė:	
Panel chairperson:	Dr. Sybille Reichert
Vertinimo sekretorė:	
Review secretary:	Prof. Dr. Anu Toots
Grupės nariai (kategorija):	
Panel members (category):	Prof. Dr. Douwe D. Breimer (academic)
	Prof. Dr. Daire Keogh (academic)
	Mr. Rimas Varkulevičius (social partner)
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SKVC vertinimo koordinatorė	
Review coordinator at SKVC:	Ms. Jolanta Revaitienė

2022

Report language – English

CONTENT

I hereby certify that this is the final text of the institutional review report of Vilnius University.

Sybille Reichert

I. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

1. The purpose of the external review is to determine the quality of the performance of a higher education institution based on the findings of the external review, to create prerequisites for improvement of the performance of a higher education institution, to promote a culture of quality, and to inform founders, academic community and the society about the quality of higher education institutions.

2. This review report is based on the evidence given in the self-evaluation report, additional evidence requested by the panel, information provided by the Centre for Quality Assessment in Higher Education (hereinafter – Centre, SKVC) and a site visit, where meetings with a wide range of audiences were held.

3. The Panel was composed of the reviewers, following the Experts Selection Procedure approved by the Director of Centre for Quality Assessment in Higher Education on 31 December 2019 Order No. V-149 and included the following members:

    Dr. Sybille Reichert (Panel chairperson)

    Prof. Dr. Anu Toots (Review secretary)

    Prof. Dr. Douwe D. Breimer (academic)

    Prof. Dr. Daire Keogh (academic)

    Mr. Rimas Varkulevičius (social partner)

    Mr. Peter Levente Lakatos (student)

4. As a result of external review **Vilnius University** is given a **positive evaluation**.

5. Evaluation areas:

Area	Assessment with points*
MANAGEMENT	4
QUALITY ASSURANCE	4
STUDIES AND RESEARCH (ART)	4
IMPACT ON REGIONAL AND NATIONAL DEVELOPMENT	4

*5 points - **excellent**– the area is rated exceptionally well in the national context and internationally;

4 points – **very good** – the area is rated very well in the national context and internationally, without any drawbacks;

3 points – **good** – the area is being developed systematically, without any major drawbacks;

2 points – **satisfactory** – the area meets the minimum requirements, and there are drawbacks that must be addressed;

1 point - **unsatisfactory** – the area does not meet the minimum requirements, there are fundamental drawbacks.

6. **19** examples of good practices were found; **25** recommendations are made.

II. INTRODUCTION

2.1. Background of the review process

7. The external review of Vilnius University (hereafter referred to as 'VU' or 'the university') was organised by the Centre for Quality Assessment in Higher Education and carried out in 2022 by an Expert Panel of international experts (hereinafter – the Panel). It was conducted in accordance with the Procedure for the External Evaluation and Accreditation of Higher Education Institutions and Branches of Foreign Higher Education Institutions, Evaluation Areas and Indicators approved by the Minister of Education, Science and Sport of the Republic of Lithuania (hereinafter – the Procedure) on 19 of December 2019 Order No. V-1529 and the Methodology for Conducting an Institutional Review in Higher Education approved by of the Director of SKVC on 9 of March 2020 Order No V-32 (hereinafter – the Methodology).

8. According to the Procedure the external review consists of the following stages: submission of a self-evaluation report prepared by a higher education institution to the Centre; formation of an expert panel and analysis of the self-evaluation report; expert panel visit to the a higher education institution; the preparation of the external review report, decision-making on the external review as well as accreditation and publication thereof; follow-up activities aimed at improving the performance of the higher education institution, taking into account the external review report.

   The panel would like to stress that it sees their mandate primarily as one of a formative evaluation and accordingly would like to consider its final report as a contribution - and hopefully stimulus - to VU's own institutional reflection process.

9. At the preparatory stage of the external review, the Panel received the Self-Evaluation Report (hereinafter – SER) with annexes. SKVC provided to the Panel additional information about the University, as set in the Methodology (Chapter 26), including statistical data on students and staff; financial data; findings from the ex-ante and ex-post programme reviews, institutional reviews and evaluations of research and development activities; State-budget allocations for research activities; information on violations of academic ethics from the Office of the Ombudsperson for Academic Ethics and Procedures of the Republic of Lithuania. The Panel requested additional information, such as on the allocation of financial resources to the units, principles of research performance evaluation and promotion, a list of study programs taught in English.

10. The site visit was undertaken after a training session organised by SKVC staff and preparatory Panel meetings. The Panel visited the university on 10-12 May 2022 where they interviewed a wide variety of internal and external stakeholders. The Panel would like to express its gratitude for the openness and engagement of all interview partners at VU. The Panel was deeply impressed with the willingness of all university members, from institutional leaders and representatives in key governance structures to individual students or members of academic or administrative staff, to reflect on their experiences and on possible future developments of Vilnius University. Subsequently, the Panel met both in-person and virtually to review and agree conclusions and recommendations. The review report was finalised by correspondence and submitted to the SKVC.

11. In line with the Procedure the external review focused on four areas covered by the evaluation indicators and related criteria: **Management**, **Quality assurance**, **Studies and Research (Art)** and **Impact on Regional and National Development**. In analysing the evidence collected, the Panel also gave due consideration to the recommendations of the previous review of 2013.

12. The review of a higher education institution assesses each of the evaluation areas with one of five ratings: **excellent** – 5 points – the area is rated exceptionally well in the national context and internationally; **very good** – 4 points – the area is rated very well in the national context and internationally, without any drawbacks; **good** – 3 points – the area is being developed systematically, without any major drawbacks; **satisfactory** – 2 points – the area meets the minimum requirements, and there are drawbacks that must be addressed; **unsatisfactory** – 1 point – the area does not meet the minimum requirements, there are fundamental drawbacks.

The Panel would like to emphasise that it found the necessity of rating the different evaluation areas difficult, misleading and counterproductive: misleading as such ratings are unlikely to be understood appropriately outside of the university quality assurance community and counterproductive since ratings deter attention from the qualitative comments on recognised good practice and possible improvements. Moreover, the rating 4 - "very good - the area is rated very well in the national context and internationally, without any drawbacks" - suggests that no improvements can be made, which undermines the continuous quality development immanent to a robust quality culture. Hence, the Panel would like to underline that many recommendations for improvements are to be considered in the spirit of continuous quality development rather than as criticisms of serious drawbacks.

13. The decision on **positive** evaluation is made when none of the evaluation areas is evaluated unsatisfactorily (1 point). The decision on **negative** evaluation is made when at least one of the evaluation areas is evaluated unsatisfactory (1 point).

14. In line with the Methodology the review report, prepared by the Panel is reviewed by SKVC and sent to the higher education institution to submit comments on factual errors and the evaluations based thereon. The Panel revises the report in response to the comments from the higher education institution (if applicable) and submits it to SKVC.

15. The Panel received the VU comments and considered them. As a result 11 changes were made to the report.

16. After the Panel considers comments from the higher education institution (if applicable) and finalises it, the report is considered by the external Commission of the Higher Education Institutions' Review (hereinafter – the Commission), set up by SKVC. On the basis of the proposal, made by the Commission, provisioned in the Commission's regulations, approved by the order of the Director of SKVC on 8 of January, 2020 order No. V-5, SKVC takes one of the decisions:

- to evaluate the performance of the higher education institution positively;
- to evaluate the performance of the higher education institution negatively.

The higher education institution shall be entitled to lodge a reasoned complaint to the Commission for Appeals formed by the Centre.

The decisions of the Centre and the Commission for Appeals may be appealed against in accordance with the procedure established by the Law on Administrative Proceedings of the Republic of Lithuania.

17. On the basis of the external review decision SKVC takes one of the following decisions on the **accreditation** of the higher education institution:

- to **accredit for a period of seven years** if performance of the higher education institution is evaluated positively;

- to **accredit for a period of three years** if performance of the higher education institution is evaluated negatively;

- to **provide no accreditation** if the repeated external review results of the higher education institution are negative.

18. SKVC announces the decision on the external review together with the conclusions of the external review and the decision on the accreditation of the higher education institution on its website. The higher education subsequently announces the decision on the evaluation of the higher education institution together with the external review report on its website and maintains it until the next external review.

2.2. Background information about the institution

19. Vilnius University was founded in 1579 and is the oldest and largest public university in Lithuania. The University buildings are scattered all over the city on eight academic campuses including the historical premises in the old town (3 Universiteto Street, LT-01122). Two faculties are located in Kaunas and Šiauliai respectively. The University has 15 Core Academic Units (CAU) (faculties, research centres, schools and institutes) that deliver 299 study programmes at all levels (109 study programmes of first cycle (bachelor), 121 programmes of second cycle (master) and 4 integrated, 63 residency and 2 pedagogy study programmes). VU is a comprehensive university and study programmes are implemented in 62 study fields, doctoral studies are conducted in 29 science fields. VU is one of the largest employers in Lithuania, employing over 5.4 thousand people, of whom 3.342 are academic staff and 2.075 were non-academic staff. In 2021, the University had 22,414 students, of whom 60% were bachelor students, 17% master students, 15% students of integrated studies and professional pedagogy studies, and 7% doctoral students and MDs in residency. Foreign nationals compose 6,5% of the student body. In 2022, the total number of students has increased to 24,716 (https://www.vu.lt/en/about-vu/facts-and-figures), which demonstrates the attractiveness of the University. In total, more than a quarter of all students of the Lithuanian higher education institutions study at VU.

20. During the site visit, the Panel has experienced VU as an institution with a remarkable community that possesses a high degree of institutional identity, common values, and understanding the role in national development. As the oldest and only comprehensive research university of the country, VU plays a key role not only as a source of talents and research that will help innovate the country's society, economy, and polity, but also to provide long term foresight and serve as a think tank for addressing grand challenges that Lithuania, Europe and

the world are facing in next decades. The Panel has seen that Vilnius University's leaders, key external stakeholders and many of its members are aware of this role. The University has developed a medium-term strategy that clearly reflects this understanding. In the future, it will be crucial for the university - as well as for Lithuania as a country - to do justice to the ambitious aims which the university has set itself so as to play the role the country needs. In a world of global interdependence, in which no conflict or challenge at national scale can remain local, and in which no global challenges remain without repercussions at local level, internationally oriented research universities have become vitally important national institutions since they are the ones to address such interdependence via problem analysis, foresight, as well as via scientific, technological and socio-economic solutions. Since the new geopolitical situation has moved Lithuania and the Eastern border of Europe to the centre of the political stage, additional challenges and opportunities will arise with this role of being one the pillars of democratic Europe's stronghold. Vilnius University could rise to the number one think tank in the Baltic Sea region, a reflection platform and designer of its future.

21. VU's own strategic engagement and intellectual capability are clearly up to the task. VU has shown that it can be part of the most forward-looking international research groups in areas which have benefitted from longer-term investment and mobility of researchers. However, in order to be as internationally oriented as VU aims to be - and as the country needs it to be, VU has to be given more autonomy over its programmes and priorities, and more resources to play such a role. VU itself has to enhance its strategic capacity to respond to national and global needs and to take a more proactive role in the country's future, rather than just reacting to national plans, priorities, initiatives, and regulations. As yet, the Panel finds VU's strategic capacity to play a proactive role still hampered by an institutional governance structure that is highly decentralised, with largely autonomous faculties and overwhelming consensual decision-making processes, with very few central resources for large-scale institutional policies, incentives, or strategic priorities. The current world of fast and disruptive changes, of global challenges and competition will not wait for decisions and implementations that take years to occur. VU has to address this governance challenge to perform its mission. And the Government of Lithuania has to enable VU to do so, by setting resource priorities that recognise VU's vital role in international influx of talents, in long-term research and innovation, in fostering problem-solving competences and in enhancing public understanding of science.

III. ANALYSIS BY EVALUATION AREAS

3.1. Management

Management area is being analysed in accordance with the following indicators and criteria, set up in the Methodology.

1.1. Compliance of the higher education institution's strategic action plan with the mission, assurance of its implementation:
1.1.1. The strategic action plan is consistent with the mission of the higher education institution, legal acts regulating research and study activities and it takes into account the provisions of the national research and study policy, the European Higher Education Area and the European Research Area;

> *1.1.2. The parts of the strategic action plan (analysis of the current situation, priorities and aims, objectives of the activities, implementation means, resources, planned performance indicators) are appropriate and justified;*
>
> *1.1.3. Regular monitoring of the implementation of the strategic action plan is carried out and the results are used to improve performance management.*

22. VU's strategic action plan is consistent with the institution's mission and the national legal acts regulating research and studies. National strategic documents, such as national strategy "Lithuania 2030" and "Learning Lithuania 2030" serve as an overall framework that guides University's strategic actions. In the Strategic action plan 2021-2025, VU has set eight strategic objectives under three directions – "Creating the society and the state", "Collaborative" and "Sustainable".

23. VU is to a significant extent dependent on externally defined policies and therefore has limited flexibility to implement its own strategic priorities if different from the national policy framework. The latest strategic plan (2021-2025) has been developed with strong internal and external community involvement, and by taking national and international developments into account. The University is well aware of the European Higher Education Area and the European Research Area and actively participates in collaborative alliances, such as the Arqus Alliance. The SER demonstrates that VU is committed to realise the Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area (ESG) and has a clear vision on how to pursue this.

24. The individual parts of the strategic plan are appropriate and justified in terms of objectives and goals, but they lack a certain degree of specificity when it comes to setting priorities with respect to concrete implementation across the faculties, resource allocation and the definition of key performance indicators. This holds for both, the strategic plan for 2013 – 2020 (including medium-term plans) and the plan for 2021 – 2025. The interviews revealed detailed attention to the implementation of the strategy across the institution and a strong commitment of institutional leadership to engage in a continuous dialogue on its realisation with the leaders of faculties, Senate and Council. At the same time, there are clear constraints with respect to the overall institutional capacity to steer such strategic processes given the large degree of faculty autonomy, the high number of faculties and few incentives sofar to create trans-faculty initiatives.

25. With respect to the monitoring of the implementation of the strategic plan it is evident from SER that VU has put in recent years a lot of effort into this, including annual interim evaluations with a clear cycle of reporting and specific action plans. Based on lessons learned from the previous strategy cycle, the monitoring process has been simplified and streamlined with the long-term objectives of the VU. Interim reports and suggestions to revise action plans are discussed between the rectorate and different academic and non-academic units; annual progress on implementation of the action plan is presented to a joint meeting of Council, Senate, heads of core academic and non-academic units, and student representatives (the 'August meeting'). Moreover, each individual staff member discusses his or her individual aims with respect to the strategic aims of the institutions. Thus the implementation of the strategic plan reaches from the central level all the way down to the individual, and allows input into strategic development and adaptation from the individual all the way up to the central level, in a system that is rightly called

"cascading system" of implementation. The Panel considers this to be a very positive development, because it not only provides a good insight in the implementation of the strategic plan, but also offers opportunities for further improvement through dialogue and parties' engagement.

1.2. Effectiveness of process management of the higher education institution:
1.2.1. A clear structure for governance, decision making and distribution of responsibilities is defined; *1.2.2. Regular process management analysis is performed, preconditions for process improvement and risk management are planned;* *1.2.3. Stakeholders are involved in the management process at an adequate level.*

26. The structure of governance is defined in the Statute; it is clear, including the definition of distribution of the responsibilities in decision-making for different management layers. Interviews with various parties revealed that VU is strongly committed to a consensus-oriented decision-making culture. This holds for both key decision-making bodies - Council and Senate. The Senate is an elected body representing all academic units as well as students and operates through three committees. Considering the strong degree of autonomy that the Core Academic Units (CAUs) enjoy, reaching consensus on each topic may lead to delays in decision making due to the different opinions of the units that Senate members represent. The Council represents VU staff members as well as external stakeholders. Council members also reveal a strong commitment to reaching consensus-based decisions and to expecting previous consensus preparation on the part of the rectorate before addressing a decision. While this is good practice of democratic governing, the Panel finds that such practice may not always be appropriate in situations where swift responsiveness to external demands is still of paramount importance, but consensus is difficult to reach. The Rector should have the leverage to decide on important controversial issues where an absence of action or clear priority-setting may hamper the development of the institution. The need to advance interdisciplinarity of research and study programmes to enable university graduates and researchers to address external challenges could be mentioned as one of such important strategic areas. Based on the recommendations of Institutional Review 2013, the number of CAU has been reduced to streamline the management and to better integrate research and studies. The Panel endorses this positive development.

27. Regular process management is performed on an annual basis through VU's Annual Performance Report. Each year the Rectorate presents to the Council a set of reports including the risk management report in which risks that may affect VU's operational continuity are thoroughly examined. In 2020, the post of the Pro-Rector of Organisation Development and Community Affairs was established to oversee the entire internal process management, while the implementation functions were allocated to the Strategic Planning Department. VU also has an internal audit department that evaluates University's compliance with established requirements, assesses potential shortcomings in activities, and proposes measures to improve performance.

28. Representatives of society participate in various governing bodies of VU, like Council, study programme committees (alumni, employers) and faculty councils. They also participate in the academic staff recruitment representing a third of recruitment certification commission members. Employers (often alumni) are actively involved in monitoring and updating of studies as

members of the study programme committees and final theses defence committees. It is a good and widely distributed practice among alumni to provide internship places for VU students. One third of VU's core academic units have established an international advisory council or board of trustees that the Panel considers beneficial to implement the internationalisation agenda of VU. The Panel recommends that in the near future all units follow this good practice.

29. Within a short time period VU has successfully merged two formerly autonomous institutions, a state university - Šiauliai University and the International Business School, into the overall organisational structure of VU that demonstrates robustness of University's governance structure and decision making procedures. The merger was conducted with a methodical integration plan that included all administrative processes, on the basis of a SWOT analysis and offering a lot of support and training to the affected members of staff. The regular presence of VU leadership on campus also reflected the dedication to creating a common institutional identity.

> *1.3. Publicity of information on the performance of the higher education institution and its management effectiveness:*
>
> *1.3.1. Systematic collection and analysis of the performance data, results (including student employment and graduate career monitoring) is in place, data is used for the improvement of performance of the higher education institution;*
> *1.3.2. Information on the performance of the higher education institution is clear, accurate and accessible to the academic community and the public, and is provided regularly to the founders and members of the legal entity.*

30. The SER outlines how and what types of performance data are systematically collected and what the information is used for. Evidently, an impressive amount of data - including key performance indicators (KPI), is collected through various systems. However, the KPI are neither easy to find nor is it clear how they are applied for strategic development. If the number of research projects or international peer-reviewed publications is given without the number of researchers responsible for this output or if student-staff ratios cannot be calculated because the relevant staff category cannot be identified without double-counts then swift KPI analysis is made difficult.

31. Regularly collected information includes graduates' employment and career monitoring and is used as feedback for quality improvement of studies, academic services, and personnel management, as well as for marketing purposes. However, the Panel did not find confirmation on efficiency of measures taken. According to the SER, feedback is used to update the study programmes, but the non-completion rate remains worryingly high (see par. 60 for detailed data). According to the VU Performance Report 2021, the unemployment rate among MA graduates has increased continuously from 14.5% in 2015 to 20% in 2020. The Panel recommends monitoring whether changes implemented based on feedback information bring the expected results and to analyse any absence of positive effects systematically. An important share of study feedback comes from student surveys. Interviewed students were satisfied with the way the University takes survey results into account in personnel policy and in study programmes revision. At the same time, the motivation of students to fill in the survey is not high, which may compromise the reliability of results. The university is aware of the need to improve the surveys and data analysis, particularly for graduate surveys, as self-critical notes in SER evidence.

32. Information on the performance of VU is accurate and accessible to the academic community and the public via various channels; intranet and public website being the main modes. The Lithuanian state as the founder of VU receives the Annual Performance Report, which is reviewed by the Seimas of the Lithuanian Republic.

33. An impressive amount of information is accessible via VU's website in Lithuanian and English. At the same time, key documents and performance indicators are not easy to find or are missing altogether (for example – data on key research international prizes and successes, number of academic staff, Quality manual in English). The website is not friendly to people with physical disabilities.

34. Internal communication within the University community has improved through the intranet and further optimization is ongoing. However, representatives of faculties and students indicated that the information management systems require faster updating and better user-friendliness in order to reduce the administrative burden on staff and ease navigation for students.

> *1.4. Effectiveness of human resource management:*
>
> *1.4.1. Clear and transparent principles and procedures for the formation, management, evaluation of academic and non-academic staff are established and applied;*
> *1.4.2. The higher education institution has sufficient academic (in-house academic staff) and non-academic staff to meet its operational objectives;*
> *1.4.3. The qualifications of the academic and non-academic staff are appropriate for the purposes of the higher education institution;*
> *1.4.4. Conditions are created for the academic staff to improve the knowledge and skills required for teaching and research activities;*
> *1.4.5. Conditions are created for non-academic staff to develop competencies.*

35. With respect to human resource (HR) management, VU has made considerable progress during the evaluation period in developing principles of formation and evaluation of all staff. By today, clear and transparent procedures for the selection and appointment of new staff as for promotion of existing staff have been implemented. The Panel was particularly impressed by the annual development interviews which have a bi-directional function in negotiating University's expectations towards the employee in contributing to the strategic goals of VU (teaching, research, administration) and VU's assistance to the employee to achieve those goals, as part of VU's "cascading system" of strategic development and implementation. The Panel endorses extension of this practice as well as VU's efforts in providing relevant training to the executive personnel. Training ensures that annual interviews are conducted professionally and benefit the university as well as its employees.

36. From 2016 to 2021 academic staff has increased from 2.279 to 3.342 persons while student numbers have increased from 19.379 to 22.607 during the same period. This suggests that the student - staff ratio has improved from 8.5 students per academic staff member to 6.8. While such data has to be viewed with caution since the complexity of the work contracts does not allow for transparent information on teaching duty distribution and on in-house/outsourced staff balance, it still suggests that the effective student-staff ratio allows for operational realisation of the institution's strategic aim to offer interactive and research-based teaching. This understanding was confirmed by the interviews, which did not reveal major shortcomings or

insufficiencies with respect to academic and non-academic staff to meet VU's operational objectives.

37. Qualifications of academic staff are at the level to serve the purposes of VU in the appropriate manner. However, fragmented data is scattered in various documents that make it difficult to obtain a holistic picture of key parameters and trends. Even just assessing how many FTE members of academic staff are working at VU is difficult to establish, since many seem to have several contracts and are counted in several staff categories. Based on the VU website, the staff structure seems overall well-balanced across senior and junior positions. Professors compose about 10% of academic staff. According to SER, the University employs more than two thousand lecturers, the number being slightly increased in the last five years. About half of them work half-time. The numbers for research staff vary in different sources; relying on the information provided by the VU after the visit, the correct number of researchers is 886 (919,8 FTE). About one fifth of them are in senior positions.

38. During the period under analysis, the number of foreign employees has increased and in 2021, VU employed lecturers and researchers from more than 46 countries. Though some units in VU have highly international academic staff and many others hardly have any foreign staff members. International experience is expected of all new staff members, however. As the Performance Report 2021 shows, the total volume of international peer-reviewed publications and those based on Clarivate Analytics Web of Science has increased, suggesting high potential of VU researchers to be visible in the international academic scene.

39. VU has a clear and transparent remuneration system that consists of a basic salary and a top-up bonus, which can be awarded annually based on high quality individual performance in research, teaching, or development of professional competencies. High quality is defined depending on the science fields of each faculty. For this bonus scheme, up to 15 % of the faculty's academic staff salary fund is retained. The Panel was convinced that staff members are well informed on the bonus system and appreciate this approach.

40. Since staff selection is based on research and teaching without sufficiently taking account of the third mission – social engagement and innovation activities, a diversification of academic careers to reflect the multi-dimensionality of academic achievements and do justice to diverse abilities and orientation, is a topic that requires attention in coming years.

41. In recent years VU has reviewed the need for further improvement of academic staff with respect to their knowledge and necessary skills; these activities are an integral part of the Strategic Action Plan. This has resulted in further improvement of managerial competencies, development of better generic skills, teaching competencies and more intense knowledge and good practice sharing within VU. In particular, training on teaching competence has received considerable attention and an increasing number of teachers participate in pedagogical training programmes and webinars (78 in 2017, versus 224 in 2021). However, the average length of training remains below 10 hrs. The system of professional development is implemented on a purely voluntary basis, and according to SER, the organisation of in-service training is scattered across various units. In this aspect, the situation has not improved since the previous external evaluation in 2013, which noted that "there is no university-wide policy on staff development, and it is up to the individual academic staff member to choose development courses".

42. Interviews with students and staff revealed that English language proficiency is not always sufficient for teaching international classes and this concern has not been addressed in staff development plans. Effective staffing policy does not require teaching staff to obtain the English language proficiency certificate before they are allowed to teach in English. This voluntary approach may harm the quality of teaching process and furthermore, does not motivate staff members to advance their language skills.

43. Several courses on managerial and generic skills are available for non-academic staff, organised by VU itself or external providers. SER does not provide participation data separately for academic and non-academic staff, therefore the Panel can conclude on the availability and relevance of offered courses only. One of the latest centrally developed personnel management processes is the induction training for new staff members, which is now being given special attention. The Panel greatly commends this initiative and encourages the Human Resources Manager to promote such opportunities for continuing professional development to all staff.

1.5. Efficiency of financial and learning resource management:

1.5.1. Financial resources are planned, allocated and used rationally;
1.5.2. Various financial resources for the implementation of higher education activities are attracted;
1.5.3. Learning resources for provision of studies and research (art) activities are planned and used rationally;
1.5.4. Learning resources for conducting studies and research (art) activities are appropriate, sufficient and available.

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44. A rational system for the allocation of resources to the different faculties, units and departments is in place. Additional information requested by the Panel on the parameters used to allocate finances to the CAU made it clear that the principles are fair and transparent. It combines different approaches such as the number of students, centrally approved research priorities and bottom-up incentives to raise research funds by academic units.

45. VU attracts various financial resources for its activities. The proportion of three main income resources - state funding, targeted funding and non-competitive external funding has largely been stable in 2016-2021. In 2021, state funding comprises about 60%, targeted funding of research grants about 25%, and external non-competitive funding about 15% of revenues. CAUs have become more competitive in obtaining external research funding. Income from research projects and commissioned projects rose 3,6 times in 2016-2021. The EU structural funds have contributed considerably to infrastructural investments, particularly to the building of the Sauletėkis and Santara campuses and Medical Faculty Research Centre in Santariškės, next to the University Hospital, and VU has used these funds in a very strategic and targeted manner, incesting into its strongest research areas. The participation in the activities of the European Strategy Forum on Research Infrastructures (ESFRI) and other outstanding international research infrastructures has greatly contributed to raising VU's international standing and competitiveness. Yet, it is important to remember that the EU funds are temporary and that finding sufficient resources for overall maintenance of infrastructure and activities must be a continuous priority of VU.

46. Learning resources for provision of studies and research activities are consciously planned and used rationally. The University's strategy envisages concentration of the University's infrastructure in larger and modern campuses. The Panel was pleased to see that this aim is being successfully implemented at the Saulėtekis and Santara campuses where students from different disciplines and study programmes can enjoy a collaborative environment in labs, library and open co-working spaces. Besides strong emphasis on developing natural and life sciences, funds have been earmarked separately for the development of teacher training infrastructure in order to support the University's enhanced role in the field of education.

47. To prevent the necessary experimental facilities from becoming outdated, a special reparation fund is established. VU is doing relatively well considering the limited resources that it has, and it could certainly do better if more financial resources were made available. The university's strategic fund is used to enhance specific strategic activities, but its size is rather limited and therefore major changes are difficult to implement.

48. Learning resources for conducting studies and research are available and appropriate to sustain the important academic concept of "research-based studies" in terms of labs, equipment, access to international research databases through University library, and qualified teaching staff. However, the Panel was not convinced that these are entirely sufficient to achieve the high international level that VU is aiming for. While it has clearly reached such standards of state-of-the-art physical infrastructure where substantial investments were made available through Structural Fund, more international staff and research funding would be necessary to engage in state-of-the-art research activities across the whole University.

49. **In summary,** VU's institutional management presents leadership and processes that allow addressing its strategic awareness of long-term scientific and social developments, needs and challenges. Its institutional culture, governance structure and leaders' engagement emphasise wide participation in institutional decision-making and successful consensus building across diverse internal communities, making use of a wide set of instruments to develop competences among its students and staff. The large degree of decentralisation, however, also hampers VU's institutional ability to respond rapidly to frequently changing external needs and to develop larger-scale institutional initiatives. Currently, its ability to address outstanding institutional potential and build international visibility and competitiveness is strongly dependent on EU Structural Funds and large grants, while the analysis of long-term potential outside of such funding opportunities has remained unaddressed.

50. **Judgement:** the area is being developed very well in the national context and internationally, without any drawbacks, and is given 4 points.

51. **Recommendations for the area**:

   ● To enhance the strategic steering capacity, agility and responsiveness to external needs, the Panel recommends that the university increase its willingness to set institutional priorities, create critical mass, and increase resources at the central institutional level to enable larger efforts. More cross-faculty priorities with supporting resources and incentives to collaborate across faculties in larger clusters are needed to address national and global challenges, to create international visibility and competitiveness, and to enable VU to play a leading role in development of Lithuanian state, economy and society.

● The Panel recommends clearer selection and presentation of a small set of strategic performance data that are the key in strategic development and always at hand for decision making bodies. The challenge of identifying strengths and weaknesses that require prompt strategic attention by institutional decision-makers is still unsolved and should be given prioritised attention.

● The Panel suggests considering the appointment of a Chief Information Officer, or the establishment of an Institutional Research Office that would gather, analyse and present core information on strategic development and other key aspects of institutional development. Its key functions might include providing analyses and reports to support evidence-based approach to organisational planning, decision making and quality enhancement.

● To make the annual development interviews contribute maximally to the achieving strategic aims, the Panel commends the VU's plan to conduct these interviews at all levels of the organisation and with all individual employees. The Panel also recommends that prioritised strategic attention is given to leadership development and staff competence training to enable all responsible persons to conduct such interviews effectively and sensitively.

● With respect to website development, the Panel recommends making all key documents and performance indicators more easily accessible for institutional members and external partners. It also recommends enhancing the webpage accessibility for people with physical or mental disabilities.

52. **Good practice examples:**

● The principle of "cascading dialogue" between various layers and members of the VU is a good practice to achieve meaningful engagement of all University members in strategic and systemic development of the University.

● Annual developmental interviews with staff members have a mutually beneficial function in negotiating University's expectations towards the employee in contributing to the strategic institutional goals and VU's assistance to the employee to achieve those goals.

● Within a short time period VU has successfully merged two formerly autonomous institutions – state university - Šiauliai University and International Business School - into the overall organisational structure of VU. The efficiency with which these mergers were achieved is a testament to the University's leadership, its commitment to the education of the nation, its flexibility, and willingness to accommodate change. The merger appears to have been achieved to the satisfaction of the institutions involved. It should serve as a model of good practice for institutional responsiveness to internal and external challenges.

● EU structural funds large-scale investments, particularly in Saulėtekis and Santara campuses and Medical Faculty Research Centre in Santariškes, were made in a strategic and targeted manner in line with VU's mission and long-term objectives.

● The panel recognizes the strengths of VU in the institutional organisational development and suggests that the expertise in this regard could become an area of study within the university and valuable resource for nationwide dissemination.

3.2. Quality Assurance

Quality Assurance area is being analysed in accordance with the following indicators and criteria, set up in the Methodology.

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2.1. Implementation and effectiveness of the internal quality assurance system:

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2.1.1. The higher education institution has approved and made publicly available internal quality assurance documents that are consistent with the Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area;
2.1.2. Internal quality assurance measures of planning, implementation and improvement are appropriate, applied periodically and ensure the involvement of the whole institution and stakeholders;
2.1.3. Processes for planning, implementation, monitoring, periodic evaluation and development of activities are specified;
2.1.4. Students and academic and non-academic staff of the institution receive effective support;
2.1.5. Provisions and procedures for academic integrity, tolerance and non-discrimination, appeal and ethics are specified and applied;
2.1.6. The results of the external review are used to improve the performance of the higher education institution.

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53. The internal quality processes within the university are well documented and there is strong evidence of the university's commitment to creating a quality culture across all their activities. There are written regulations for study programmes' establishment and development, conduction of studies, organisation of feedback from stakeholders for improvement of the quality of studies, organisation of doctoral studies. Such a conscientious quality regulation portfolio of studies should be certainly credited. However, existing state of affairs does not fully align with the formal requirements of the Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area (ESG) insofar as the overall quality framework is still missing. Furthermore, the quality assurance documentation, as it exists, is not available publicly (on the website) as the ESG requires.

54. The university has quality assurance-related documents, including the Quality Assurance Manual and the "Implementation of Part I. of the ESG at Vilnius University". Both these documents have been approved only in 2022 and therefore their consistent application has still to prove itself. Neither do the documents contain relevant information on the whole organisational structure of quality assurance (QA) and the promotion of quality culture within the university. There are many relevant details inside, and the panel learned many working practices during the visit that show how the university conducts quality assurance activities, supported by specific regulations for all dimensions of university development (study programme development, teaching and programme evaluation, development of transferable competences, research ethics, intellectual property, staff recruitment, remuneration and evaluation, etc.).

55. Internal quality assurance measures of planning, implementation and improvement are appropriate, applied periodically and ensure the involvement of the whole institution and stakeholders. The Strategic Planning Department supports the rector, coordinates the annual reporting and discussions, and develops process management methods (like LEAN) with the

involvement of a wide range of internal and external stakeholders. The Panel appreciates these steps towards holistic quality culture and process management.

56. In addition to internal quality measurement, the VU has the obligation of extensive regular reporting to the external state agencies (SKVC, MOSTA/STRATA, Research Council of Lithuania, Seimas, National Audit Office) on the quality of studies and research, as well as overall institutional performance. According to the Panel, too frequent external reporting may cause "QA fatigue" and hamper development of internal QA process together with encompassing quality culture.

57. Processes for planning, implementation, monitoring, periodic evaluation and development of activities are specified at VU. Regular monitoring of the strategic aims regarding studies and research and their implementation is conducted through the cascading communication process that has been set up by the rector. Through the annual meetings at different levels (Rectorate with Senate, Council, faculty deans and heads of units, as well as meetings between faculty and CAU unit leaders with academic staff) the progress can be concretised for different subject cultures and programmes, including forms of research and other project work and programme assessment methods. Through the annual meetings between academic staff and their heads of departments or vice-deans, performance in studies and research is addressed. Monitoring over study quality also occurs in the study programme committees, which also include external stakeholders and students. Student representatives present their feedback and propose changes which, according to student representatives, are heard and often lead to the change in study programme or specific competence training of teaching staff. Analysis of study performance data (both individual and programme level) is performed annually and in a well-regulated manner.

58. VU collects an impressive amount of data on all aspects of university activities. However, the Panel was not convinced that the data are integrated into a single QA system across all units and fields of activities. There is a universal system evaluating the performance of academic staff, and staff members are well aware of it. There is a Study quality and development department, but according to the VU organisational structure there is neither a similar quality department for research and organisational development nor for evaluating administrative processes. A single (central) unit that bears the sole responsibility of all QA processes is needed in order to efficiently manage internal QA processes. The university's self-evaluation report is realistic and honest in this sense, acknowledging that the "internal quality assurance system is in the process of development ". The Panel admits that VU is looking for the appropriate process management method and is flexible enough to reject methods that have been tried but found inappropriate for university context.

59. Students and academic staff receive a broad range of support, such as academic counselling, scholarships, psychological services, sport and leisure facilities etc. In the interviews, students showed satisfaction with the support they get in their studies. Friendly and open attitude of the academic staff has been particularly mentioned by most of them.

60. In statistical terms, VU is performing well while the drop-out of students (around 9%) is compared with much higher figures in Europe. However, the timely study completion rate is rather low being on average 60% for bachelor and 65% for master students. Interviews suggest that the reason may be the high proportion of students who work part-time or even full-time to support their living expenses. Interviews confirmed this assumption and further revealed that

students encounter difficulties in combining work and study arrangements, and having work experience counted as part of their studies, which is clearly a concern to be addressed by all those institutional leaders or national policy makers who may affect or influence student funding.

61. Student support with respect to mental health and possible complaints deserves further attention and improvement. While the SER states that "an important part of academic support is the focus on students' well-being and mental health. <…> ensuring equal opportunities <…> and individual needs in the study process and supporting students in these areas" students did not seem satisfied with the effectiveness of the existing services.

62. Special attention should be paid to doctoral students who seem to be confused with requirements and feel insufficiently looked after with no clear process of solving possible problems about the study process, work contracts and career guidance. While participation at research conferences is supported and some transferable skills' training is provided, career counselling was seen by doctoral students as not helpful. Instead of basic training on work interviews and CV writing they are looking for career guidance that fits their qualifications. While PhD candidates struggle to find jobs, some key employers have difficulties in hiring employees with PhD qualifications as the interviews revealed. Thus, there is certainly room for VU to improve their student career services to take account of special assets and needs that doctoral candidates have.

63. Academic staff members are satisfied with the support they receive for research and innovation activities, including technology transfer and research spin-off creation. The university has expanded its intellectual property protection services and built up a wide range of start-up and spin-off support services that reflect institutional dedication and awareness of the importance of such support for regional and national innovation ecosystems.

64. The University has provisions and procedures for academic integrity and ethics. The Code of Ethics has been renewed in 2021; its implementation is overseen by the Central Academic Ethics Commission. Certain research projects need pre-approval of the ethics' committee, but this policy is well established only in some faculties (Life sciences, Medicine).

65. The regulations on tolerance and non-discrimination are in place and the Panel saw clear evidence that students endorse these principles in their everyday lives. Affirmation of human rights has been mentioned by alumni as a distinguished characteristic of VU graduates. Yet, site visit also revealed that not in all CAUs and by all employees is non-discrimination followed in every aspect.

66. Students are generally aware of the possibility to appeal; however, not all the actors are aware of the exact processes. Through the interviews when the Panel asked about the topic, no one mentioned the Helpline launched in 2018 as a confidential way to report discrimination. Thus, further promotion of these kinds of opportunities is necessary.

67. The results of the external review are thoroughly analysed to improve the performance of the higher education institution as evidenced in the SER.

68. Overall, progress is more visible in some areas than in others. As per recommendation of institutional review 2013, VU has decreased the number of academic units and continues to search for an optimal balance between the centralised decision making and CAU's autonomy. Compared to previous evaluation, students are today more actively engaged in study programs

development and quality improvement through their representation in study programme committees, in the Council and Senate.

69. Some initiatives were taken to extend student counselling services; psychologists have been employed and a one-stop-shop help-point launched. Yet, as the Panel revealed, the satisfaction with those services is low among students; partly because of bad experience, partly because of unawareness of the existence of those services.

70. With respect to the further development of the quality assurance system, the Panel notes a wide range of efforts to enhance quality and expand quality assurance detail and criteria to all aspects of university provision. A good recent example is the introduction of regulations for the organisation of competitions for the positions of lecturers and researchers and their certification demanding more detailed assessment of the pedagogical competencies of lecturers, aimed to improve teaching competences. However, with respect to integrating all aspects of quality assurance into a coherent system, there is still room for improvement. In 2013, the external review report had observed: "The Committee plans to develop the system further, an objective that it needs to accomplish as quickly as it can." Furthermore, it had emphasised the importance of raising awareness of the ESG: "Knowledge and awareness of the ESG among University staff, including the deans, is still rather limited, and there remains considerable work for the Quality Committee to do in this regard." Both aspects still require attention. The university has a Study Quality and Development Division that only addresses the study dimension as yet. SER 2022 still mentions in the section "Aspects to be improved" the plan to "develop an internal quality assurance system covering all areas of the University's activities" and that "The University should have a single unit with the function and authority to develop, maintain and modify an internal quality assurance system covering all activities of the University.". The Panel could not agree more upon the necessity of those measures, which unfortunately have not been fully implemented so far.

71. **In summary,** VU reflects a well-developed quality culture with a wide portfolio of quality assurance procedures and other strategic instruments that aim to develop quality, addressing all aspects of university provision. Quality assurance procedures and other quality development instruments, such as performance-based funding and remuneration, staff competence development and support services, work effectively. A comprehensive set of instruments in QA has been composed for the study dimension (coordinated by the Study Quality and Development Division). While all other aspects of university provision in research, technology transfer, recruitment and staff development have also been addressed with quality assurance-oriented regulations and procedures, an overall QA framework that encompasses all aspects of quality development is still being developed. As commitment to continuously develop quality is high all across the University, the Panel is confident that its realisation in a coherent system will be achieved shortly.

72. **Judgement:** The area is being developed very well in the national context and internationally, without any major drawbacks and is given 4 points.

73. **Recommendations for the area:**

- The Panel recommends that VU establishes a comprehensive quality assurance policy and framework that contains the quality assurance organisational structure – with the description of the actors' exact roles and tasks.

- The Panel also recommends that the quality assurance policy and system take full account of current practices, which reflect existing roots of the quality culture.

- The Panel recommends intensifying work on "institutional standards for staff development". This recommendation has been made already in the External Evaluation Report of 2013, but university-wide standards are not yet in place, though particularly important for institutional development.

- The Panel recommends that quality assurance documentation – including quality goals and the description of the quality assurance system – is made publicly available to anyone on the VU website in Lithuanian and English.

- The Panel recommends giving more personalised and effective support to foreign students in order to facilitate their integration into the VU community.

- The Panel recommends raising awareness among students about the concrete way of appeal processes, and organising staff training to raise awareness on non-discrimination practices and the capacity to notice critical situations.

74. **Good practice examples:**

- Regular discussions at the study programme committees and lively communication between stakeholders, including active participation of students and committed response to their concerns.

- Regular discussions between VU central leadership and CAUs about strategy development and implementation via annual action plan make strategic development rooted in everyday reality across the institution.

- A comprehensive set of instruments for developing teaching quality that includes assessment of teaching competences in staff recruitment process, continuous development of teaching competences with individualised feedback to teachers, awards to recognise outstanding teaching as well as a teaching innovation fund.

3.3. Studies and Research (Art)

Studies and Research (Art) area is being analysed in accordance with the following indicators and criteria, set up in the Methodology.

3.1. The level of research (art), compatibility of studies and research (art) and its compliance with the strategic aims of activities:
3.1.1. The study and research activities carried out and their results are consistent with the mission and strategic aims of the higher education institution; *3.1.2. The level of research activities is sufficient for the ongoing studies of the higher education institution;* *3.1.3. Studies are based on research;*

75. The study and research activities are consistent with the mission and strategic aims of the University; VU's research is internationally highly recognised, and the University is influential in Lithuanian society. Research is at internationally outstanding levels in life sciences, which also resulted in the establishment of an EMBL institute at VU. In 2020 VU professor Virginijus Šikšnys was awarded the prestigious Kavli prize for his discovery of the CRISPR-Cas9, a revolutionary DNA editing tool. Another internationally outstanding area is in chemical physics, ultrafast laser technologies, photonics, nanotechnology and applied electrodynamics with a wide range of international collaborators and international high-impact publications. Likewise, internationally influential research as revealed by MOSTA (currently STRATA) reports can be found in informatics and mathematics, history, philology and linguistics. VU goals in studies are in accordance with the competence-oriented focus promoted in the European Higher Education Area (EHEA). VU strategic plan 2021-2025 sets the aim of promoting problem solving competencies among all students as part of its long-term goal of building the society and state of Lithuania. Development of transferable skills is promoted actively from 2021 onwards when the Senate approved a "List of graduate attributes". As verified by interviews, social partners, graduates, students and academics were consulted in making the document. The List stipulates that every student develops competencies in cooperation, responsibility, interculturality, problem solving and openness to change. In the interviews, social partners and alumni stressed the importance of these competences for professional success, competitiveness, and innovation in their organisations. Since the strategic aim of fostering the above-mentioned graduate attributes has been set only recently for the Strategic Plan 2021-2025, it is too early to assess success in this regard.

76. The strategic goal to systematically promote competence orientation presupposes student-centred teaching and learning, as SER explicitly stresses. The interviews revealed that student-centeredness is clearly achieved in terms of students' engagement into course design and teaching methods. Feedback of students and alumni is being heard and addressed in the process of curriculum development. The new strategic aim to increase individual options and flexibility of individualised study plans can certainly contribute to the transferable and problem-solving competencies of students. However, such options are sometimes limited to just a few faculties or disciplines. Students, while overall pleased with their study programmes and teachers, still experience lack of flexibility in composing individual study plans or combining studies with work.

77. Research performance is addressed in annual University Performance Reports by indicating the value of research projects, number of projects, patents and publications. In 2021 VU ran 740 research projects, published 2174 research articles and managed a portfolio of 508 patents and patent applications. All these figures have increased substantially in recent years. Research competencies of staff are assured through the institutional hiring criteria and the criteria for academic staff evaluation, which all staff members have to undergo every five years. Furthermore, research and innovation initiatives are supported through in-house funding as well as supporting services by the recently established Department for Research and Innovation. While the total research output of VU is remarkable, it is unevenly distributed across the

institution, as shown in the external MOSTA review. VU addresses this concern of uneven research capability by providing competitive intramural funding for research groups with potential. These include two new schemes, firstly, grants which were submitted to the Research Council of Lithuania, but did not receive funding, and secondly, grants for the young researchers (including PhDs and MA students). To improve the quality and international attractiveness of research at PhD level, doctoral schools are set up in Medicine, following the excellent experience with the Doctoral School in Life Sciences.

78. Studies are based on research and include research projects all across the institution as evidenced by study programme descriptions and study regulations. The former external evaluation of the study fields has revealed a high level of integration of research results into studies as well as development of research skills in students. Interviews with students confirmed the research orientation of studies, most of them told about being informed about teachers research projects, involved in those and reading recent research publications of their teachers for seminars and course works. Graduate's surveys and interviews with alumni revealed a high degree of satisfaction with the studies in general and the research orientation of the studies in particular. Specifically, interviewed alumni mentioned the value of their studies in conveying critical thinking.

79. Recognition of foreign qualifications is assured within the framework of European Credits Transfer System (ECTS) and Erasmus exchanges.VU has been the first university in Lithuania that was granted by SKVC the right to make qualification recognition decisions. The recognition is compliant with EU policies as proved yearly by SKVC. There is evidence on regulation of prior non-formal and informal learning in the SER, but this is not the case for recognising work experience. Interviews confirmed difficulties that students experience while willing to get their work experience recognised as part of the studies.

3.2. Internationality of studies, research (art):

3.2.1. The higher education institution has a strategy for internationalisation of research and study activities (including indicators of internationalisation), means for its implementation, and measurements of the effectiveness of these activities are performed

3.2.2. The higher education institution integrates aspects of internationalisation into the content of studies and research activities.

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80. Internationalisation of studies and research is clearly declared a priority for Vilnius University. Strategic Action Plan 2021-2025 commits VU "ensuring the ability of University graduates to operate in a global environment", creating "conditions for all students to engage in global exchanges of scientific ideas through physical or virtual mobility, as well as to international subject content". It also commits to "increasing the internationality of the study environment and implementing internationalisation plans of each study program". Guidelines for Internationalisation of Teaching and Learning specify those strategic aims and point to areas in need of improvement, such as to increase enrolment of international students and enhance their integration, to enhance internationality of its academic staff and to create a bilingual environment of study information and services. This allows the Panel to conclude that VU is well aware of the importance of internationalisation challenges.

81. As one of the central means to achieve declared objectives, VU relies on the Arqus European University Alliance. The Arqus partnership is supposed to increase the number of VU community members exposed to international professional activities via joint science and study initiatives. In 2018, the university has set up a strategic fund to support visits of foreign academics, encourage academic mobility, attract foreign students, organise summer schools, support international memberships etc. In 2021 funding for further internationalisation of the curriculum, especially aimed at international study programmes, was added. Thus, the university is expanding its joint and double degree programmes and is systematically supporting the wide use of Arqus European University Alliance. VU sees this Arqus Alliance as a long-term strategic transformation agent rather than a set of singular projects.

82. Since the Strategic Action Plan 2015–2017, the University has been monitoring a range of performance indicators on internationalisation of research and studies: change in the volume of international scientific publications, international research projects, international patent applications, the number of scientists recruited from abroad, the development of external partnerships, as well as of the number of full-time international students. The progress reveals mixed results, although some important improvements can be noted based on SER and Annual Performance Report. The number of international research projects has increased slightly, so is the number of researchers recruited abroad. Still, the proportion of foreign employees remains extremely low - about 5%. The Panel is even more concerned about the declining share of academic staff who have lectured abroad - this number has declined in five years from 7% to 1%. In 2017, a scheme for attracting postdoctoral fellows was approved and a pilot call was announced. Based on experience of the pilot, the scheme was modified and extended in 2021 also to doctoral students and visiting researchers.

83. The data on internationalisation of the student body is somewhat more positive. The number of international students has increased substantially (from 638 in 2017 to 1509 in 2021). However, this international inflow is highly concentrated in three faculties (Faculty of Medicine (with 60% of students coming from one country), Faculty of Economics and Business Administration and Kaunas Faculty (Business and Information Systems). In relative terms, the Life Sciences Centre also has a significant proportion of international students (above 10%), whereas in all other faculties the proportion of international students is well below 5% , as stated in the Performance Report 2021, often reaching only 2% of the overall student population. The proportion of outgoing mobility has been stagnating above 5% before the COVID pandemic (and naturally declining since then).

84. The university integrates international aspects into the content of study and research activities by providing study programmes and separate courses in English. The degree, to which such international content and international staff experience characterise the programmes, varies across the University. The number of English-speaking study programmes has more than doubled (from 21 in 2016 to 58 in 2021). Nevertheless, the number of courses offered in English is still rather low, especially in Law, Political Science & International Relations, but even in Life Sciences where internationalisation thrives at doctoral level and beyond.

85. English-speaking programmes run in parallel with the same programme in Lithuanian so that foreign and local student populations remain separated. Panel received mixed explanations to that divide; some interviewees suggested students being hesitant to attend international classes,

some referred to the limited English proficiency of the teaching staff. International students also report challenges with social integration. Hence, the declared aim of providing an international studies or classroom experience is far from a reality for a vast majority of VU students, apart from some very international study "pockets", like the Life Science Centre. The existing policy of switching to English as soon as at least one foreign student is present, does not affect this overall scope of the learning experience. Only in terms of study and research content, the international orientation is effectively guaranteed as the academic staff has to show international experience to be hired.

86. The share of final theses written in a foreign language, while increasing, still reaches only 11% of all theses, even at Master level. Commendably, the University has introduced a requirement for doctoral candidates, who can only submit the thesis for defence if they have presented the results of their research in at least two international scientific events. In addition, it is recommended that the doctoral candidate has completed an internship of at least three months (cumulative duration) at a foreign research and study institution(s). The number of dissertations that include results of scientific publications produced in collaboration with foreign researchers is increasing and has reached around 40% in recent years. The Panel champions this as a very good standard.

87. **In summary,** the research conducted at VU is internationally oriented and its research and research-based studies are compatible with the University's mission and strategy. The university continuously develops the quality and quantity of international content of studies and research. Internationalisation is well positioned as the declared strategic objective in VU documents and regulations. There is a clear and appropriate set of indicators to measure and govern the process. Some practices are very well established, such as staff's international publications and participation at conferences, international exposure as a necessary condition of staff selection, up-to-date research knowledge used in study courses and requirements for PhD students/candidates to be exposed to the international science scene. However, CAUs demonstrate very different results in internationalisation and some indicators of internationalisation have stagnated at very low levels without any appropriate action plan to address this. Nevertheless, recent institutional initiatives to internationalise all curricula, to make sytematic use of the ARQUS Alliance to spread student-centered learning, to develop joint degrees and expand student mobility, reflect a strategic awareness, commendable transformative institutional leadership and international quality culture.

88. **Judgement:** the area is being developed very well in the national context and internationally, without any major drawbacks, and is given 4 points.

89. **Recommendations for the area:**

   ● The Panel recommends promptly establishing a robust method for assessing student and graduate competences since this strategic aim responds directly to the national skill demand and stakeholders needs. Special attention should be put on generic competences and transferable skills.

   ● The Panel recommends increasing flexibility (including inter- and multi-disciplinarity) of study programmes, expanding the individual study plan approach, and to consider part-time study options and blended learning between workplace and academia.

● In order to vitalise epistemic communities, to offer joint services to PhD students and make administration of postgraduate studies and research more efficient the Panel recommends extending the model of doctoral schools with greater speed to other parts of the VU, in particular in those, which have been evaluated as comparative research evaluation as internationally most competitive. The ARQUS alliance should be fully used for this purpose.

● The Panel recommends offering international master and doctoral programmes in all areas, which perform at a high international standard in research (as assessed by MOSTA).

● To allow for integrated communities and international classroom experiences, the Panel recommends to expand the number of joint modules of English-language and Lithuanian study programmes and to merge these programmes as much as possible.

● To address the uneven research performance across CAU, the Panel recommends not only helping weaker units develop initiatives, but also strengthening those which have already developed their potential – as a model and incentive for others.

● In order to achieve the ambitious internationalisation goals that the VU has set itself, the Panel recommends establishing stricter rules for staff language proficiency together with relevant training opportunities, such as language courses, international mobility and intercultural social networks among VU academic staff. English-language proficiency among all academic staff should be developed and certified according to the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR).

● The Panel recommends with utmost urgency to convey among all VU members the importance of international exposure for self-perception, civic and global understanding, intercultural sensitivity, leadership and competitiveness. Students and staff should be helped by mentors and leadership, to understand the value of leaving their comfort zones and familiar contexts, to disrupt the sense of self-understood attitudes, to enhance their creativity, ability to communicate and innovate. Outgoing mobility of students and staff should be promoted through additional stipends or fellowships, quality counselling and recently established VU endowment. The systematic assurance of mobility windows and of recognition of study credits obtained abroad must be achieved within the current strategic period.

● The Panel recommends the Rectorate, the Council, the Senate and all other multipliers, to exert influence on national government and agencies to provide additional funds for recruiting international staff in competition with other European research universities. Visiting professorship has been promoted via special schemes, but is still at a very low level due to non-competitive salaries.

90. **Good practice examples:**

● The Life Science Centre, an international research environment in line with leading European standards which attracts best researchers from Lithuania and abroad. The successes and standards of the Centre with international state-of-the-art infrastructure and global experience of the leading researcher should be expanded to other research areas where VU occupies a national leading position.

- The doctoral schools that have been set up in the Life Sciences, the Medical Faculty and Educational Sciences, and that will be established in other parts of VU, constitute a model of good practice of supportive and internationally competitive doctoral research environments.

- The number of doctoral dissertations that include results of scientific publications produced in collaboration with foreign researchers comprises about 40%. The Panel welcomes this as a very good standard and encourages the expansion of this practice.

- International cooperation of the Pharmacy department with similar departments in Copenhagen and Uppsala universities that are internationally known for their top level research is a good example of mutually productive relationships.

- Establishment of internal funds to enhance research capacity and enable successful application of external grants are an excellent example of good practice in capacity building and research quality development.

- A special scheme for attracting doctoral students, postdoctoral fellows and visiting researchers from abroad make an important contribution to the internationalisation efforts of the institution.

3.4. Impact on Regional and National Development

Impact on Regional and National Development area is being analysed in accordance with the following indicators and criteria, set up in the Methodology.

4.1. Effectiveness of the impact on regional and national development:
4.1.1. The higher education institution carries out an analysis of national and (or) regional demands, identifies the needs to be met and foresees the potential impact on national and (or) regional development;   *4.1.2. The monitoring, analysis and evaluation of the effectiveness of the measures on national and (or) regional development are performed.*

91. Vilnius University is a state university dedicated to the public good. Its mission commits it to the "development of Lithuania", and to 'creating society and the state'. The university aims to make a positive impact not only in the capital, but throughout Lithuania and beyond. The University representatives participate in the public debate through critical reflection on key issues and propose solutions. VU Strategic Plan 2021-25 is aligned with Lithuanian national strategy and with United Nations Sustainable Development Goals. The University was actively involved in the development of several national strategic plans, including "Lithuania 2030". Within this process, national and regional demands have been thoroughly analysed. The University has made significant impact on regions including contributions to a series of strategic development plans of Vilnius City 2020–30, Kaunas 2016–2022, and Šiauliai 2015–24. In this context, the University is to be commended for the successful integration of the University of Šiauliai to the VU and reprofiling it into Šiauliai Academy to respond to national educational and regional policy needs. In addition to delivering its founding purpose of advancing teacher education, the Academy has potential to make an impact on the economic development of the

northern region. "Regional resilience" has been positively noted by several interviewed stakeholders.

92. VU has multiple ties to the business sector that allows it to understand and forecast the needs of the national economy and labour market. VU engages in close cooperation with leading global corporations such as DuPont Pioneer, Cisco System, IBM, Osram, Samsung, Huawei, BASF, Stora Enso, Symphogen, CERN, Femtika, Ernst & Young, Western Union, PricerwaterhouseCoopers, Brolis Semiconductors, Ekspla, Nord Security, Teltonika and many others. This partnership brings VU to a cutting edge position in contributing to the development of fintech solutions, laser and chip technologies, sustainable environment, and smart cities. Social partners and Council members that met the Panel gave affirmative evidence of the University's support to the Lithuanian innovation and entrepreneurship ecosystem through curricula renewal, education initiatives such as innovation workshops and hackathons, as well as through considerable expansion of valorisation, spin-offs and start-ups. In particular, stakeholders noted the impact of cooperation with the science and technology parks in Saulėtekis Valley and Visoriai, and the technological business incubators which advanced the small and medium size enterprises (SMEs) and start-ups. VU Life Science Centre's collaboration with Thermo Fisher has had a very significant impact on the country's reputation among international business circles. The success of this partnership is an illustration of the consistent implementation of the university's strategic plan to advance the talent pipeline and knowledge economy. The panel endorses VU plans to embed research, work placements, and challenge-based learning across the all curricula.

93. Besides strategic analyses and forecasts, the VU is committed to act fast to social or ecological crises. This was evidenced throughout the COVID-19 pandemic, when VU's intellectual and material resources were placed at the disposal of the society. Seven VU researchers served in the Government Council of Health Experts. A Life Science Centre (LSC) Laboratory was established on short notice to facilitate testing and the development of methodologies which were deployed nationally. University researchers led a multi-institutional SARS-Cov-2 sequencing consortium, and staff members from various disciplines were engaged in dissemination of public health information. That effectiveness of the University's interventions during the pandemic was built on decades of established practice of science valorization.

94. In sum, VU maintains a consistent dialogue with government, state institutions, and the business community. The Panel was convinced that the University has an extremely strong and positive impact on national planning and policy development. Yet, the analysis of national demands is currently split along separate areas ("silos") or occurs in the course of external contractual works (such as contributing to various strategies). There is no holistic and systemic forecast of national development not to mention clear positioning of the VU in this framework.

95. Monitoring, analysis and evaluation of the effectiveness of the measures on national and regional development is getting more attention. In 2015, the Pro-Rector for Partnerships was appointed with the responsibility to nurture opportunities for engagement with social, business, and civic partners. The Panel sees a good opportunity here to develop adequate instruments to systematically monitor and assess the effect of such partnerships. Stronger focus on political and economic factors that affect VU's societal impact was recommended by social partners and

alumni. However, as yet the University does not track such trends and needs systematically. The institutional strategic planning may want to analyse such trends more systematically on the basis of surveys or contracted studies.

4.2. Assurance of conditions for lifelong learning:

4.2.1. The higher education institution monitors and analyses the need for lifelong learning;
4.2.2. The higher education institution anticipates the diversity of forms and conditions of lifelong learning and ensures their implementation;
4.2.3. The higher education institution performs the evaluation of assurance of conditions for lifelong learning.

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96. VU has started to put more attention to the monitoring of the needs for lifelong learning. While the systematic process for the evaluation of LLL needs is still absent as the SER critically identifies, some positive institutional changes are evident. The university has a Research and Innovation department, and as the Panel learned on their site visit that one of the department's duties is matching researchers with the needs of the business sector, which may include LLL needs.

97. Obviously, monitoring the needs for LLL also implies updating the concept of the LLL. As the previous institutional evaluation in 2013 noted, "the concept is understood very narrowly, in terms simply of professional development courses, such as specialty courses for medical doctors." A wider notion should include adult education and public understanding of science, which VU is so actively engaged in, as well as reskilling individuals who are considering new professional and life paths, in addition to continuing professional development for established professionals.

98. The strategic plan of VU notes the aim to "foster the graduates who will create <…> future society". VU is committed to the concept of Life-Long-Learning by installing a culture of inquiry in its students and providing them opportunities to engage in quality learning whether by pursuing postgraduate qualifications or engaging in continuing professional development. VU is making impressive work with gifted children and students of general education who in the future will potentially enter the University.

99. Some measures have been put in place to facilitate formal Recognition of Prior Learning. The University has been crediting the learning outcomes achieved through partial studies for many years and it continues to expand the quality assurance measures which will be needed to maximise flexible learning opportunities. The panel commends the University for the creation of such enabling structures and endorses strengthening them, since students still experience difficulties in transferring credits.

100. The coordination of LLL activities is called out as a priority in the university's strategic plan including creation of the comprehensive LLL centre and update of the concept of the LLL. The Panel finds those initiatives highly relevant and urgent to implement. Current practice is CAUs centred, where units provide in-service training courses according to their disciplinary competence. While this approach has some advantages (such as high content quality) it misses the challenge of advancing generic skills and broader multi-disciplinary view.

101. Interviewed alumni also expressed the expectation that university could provide more flexible and interdisciplinary continuous learning opportunities. As one of the law graduates rightly pointed - "If you want to be successful in commercial law you need to understand the basics of business as well". Stronger emphasis on blended learning (e.g. Executive training week) was emphasised by alumni and employers who saw this as a good opportunity to secure a qualified workforce for their enterprises.

102. It is apparent from SER, and noted also by external stakeholders, that until recently the University was constrained by the funding environment which limited its ability to adopt LLL programs that potential learners would find attractive. Despite these constraints, the University has established a reputation for professional development in areas such as language learning, legal profession, and in the fields mandated within state regulations as health care and pharmacy professionals.

103. Today, the national legal and cultural environment has changed. The university can generate income from LLL and incentivise academic staff to teach in LLL programmes beyond their regular teaching and research activities. Moreover, the government and the social partners are united in their will to support the development of the talent pipeline. The University has embraced these opportunities and has charged the Business School with developing the LLL capacity of the University. This decision was based upon recognition of the expertise of the Business School in demand-oriented business training and its experience in executive and commercial engagements. The panel perceived a strong sense of satisfaction with these recent developments among alumni and social partners, and hopes that this change could enrich the LLL courses offered previously by the CAUs. Institutional merger of Šiauliai Academy to the VU has brought additional value and expertise in the area of LLL. The Panel was pleased to see that these opportunities were noticed and taken on board by VU management, employers and alumni. Recent developments in the national economic landscape present good opportunities for VU in the realm of LLL and there is an utmost urgency to get ready for taking a leading position in this area.

104. **In summary,** VU is a university with exceptional impact on national society, economy, policy design and public debates. Its active role in communication and knowledge transfer is not only part of its mission but also sustained by wide engagement of its members in external networks and public fora. VU networks of alumni and strategic partners are strong and allow for a privileged access to opportunities of influence, which the university uses consciously and proactively. In recent years, the University has substantially increased its impact on the national innovation capacity in the form of valorisation of research results, support to VU related spin-offs or building innovation hubs in key sectors of the national economy.

In its role as a key talent pipeline for the country, VU has prioritised transferable skills in its strategic plan, in particular problem-solving competences, and interdisciplinarity, so as to respond to stakeholders' explicit demand. However, the response has been slow, hampered by VU's decentralised and slow decision-making processes. It seems that the VU may not have understood the urgency of such demands (though very much stressed by alumni). With respect to lifelong learning, the university has been hampered for decades by adverse framework conditions, which have been removed only recently. As yet, VU acts reactively rather than proactively in setting the national policy agenda in LLL. Having a comprehensive plan for LLL will be a great opportunity for VU not merely to lead the national debate on the skills agenda, but

also to become a key provider of continuous professional development in the Baltic region. It may contribute to overcoming the absence of systemic analysis of the overall skills demands in Lithuania and in Baltic region.

105. **Judgment:** the area is being developed very well in the national context and internationally, without any major drawbacks and is given 4 points.

106. **Recommendations for the area:**

● The Panel recommends establishing an office that would gather and analyse information on regional and national needs to support strategic development in this regard. It is advisable to make a complete inventory in what areas University is or could be the strongest partner for national or regional development and to nominate CAUs responsible for particular areas.

● The Panel recommends establishing a systematic process for the evaluation of LLL needs that would allow VU proactively shape the national debate on the skills development agenda, and become a key provider of CPD in the Baltic region.

● The Panel recommends strengthening partnership in the areas which are crucial for the Economy 4.0 and where VU is particularly strong, such as fintech, laser and chip technologies, sustainable environment, smart cities etc.

● The Panel recommends putting more attention on the assessment of external factors that have profound impact on Lithuania's state, society and economy. This assessment must be both regular and agile in order to provide knowledge-based recommendations for the long-term and short-term challenges.

● In order to raise awareness of the University's reputation at national and international levels, the Panel recommends more actively disseminating achievements of the VU students, researchers and alumni to the broad public.

107. **Good practice examples:**

● VU demonstrates exceptional understanding of the importance of science communication, especially in the university's outreach to schools, through a variety of programmes including use of a mobile science lab.

● University's support to the Lithuanian innovation and entrepreneurship ecosystem via science and technology parks in Saulėtekis Valley and Visoriai, and mutual collaboration between science and businesses (as the Life Science Centre's collaboration with high tech companies). Such trans-sectoral collaboration makes a very significant impact on the country's reputation among international business circles.

● VU's support services for academic staff in innovation and valorisation initiatives, including Intellectual Property Protection procedures and patent protection, in creating spin-offs and start-ups have expanded substantially over recent years, are widely appreciated in their effectiveness by staff and external stakeholders and have already led to a rapid increase in patents and spin-offs created by VU researchers.

● VU researchers were important actors and participants in tackling the COVID-19 pandemic and securing public health protection.

- Šiauliai Academy has been successfully incorporated into VU and has now enhanced capacity to pursue provision of pedagogy of the 21st century for the Northern region of Lithuania and for the nation as a whole.

IV. EXAMPLES OF GOOD PRACTICE

The Panel identifies the following examples of good practice in:

Management:

• The principle of 'cascading dialogue' between various layers and members of the VU is a good practice to achieve meaningful engagement of all University members in strategic and systemic development of the University.

• Annual developmental interviews with staff members have a mutually beneficial function in negotiating University's expectations towards the employee in contributing to the strategic institutional goals and VU's assistance to the employee to achieve those goals.

• Within a short time period VU has successfully merged two formerly autonomous institutions – state university - Šiauliai University and International Business School - into the overall organisational structure of VU. The efficiency with which these mergers were achieved is a testament to the University's leadership, its commitment to the education of the nation, its flexibility, and willingness to accommodate change. The merger appears to have been achieved to the satisfaction of the institutions involved. It should serve as a model of good practice for institutional responsiveness to internal and external challenges.

• EU structural funds large-scale investments, particularly in Sauletekis and Santara campuses and Medical Faculty Research Centre in Santariškes, were made in a strategic and targeted manner in line with VU's mission and long-term objectives.

• The panel recognizes the strengths of VU in the institutional organisational development and suggests that the expertise in this regard could become an area of study within the university and valuable resource for nationwide dissemination.

Quality Assurance:

• Regular discussions at the study programme committees and lively communication between stakeholders, including active participation of students and committed response to their concerns.

• Regular discussions between VU central leadership and CAUs about strategy development and implementation via annual action plan make strategic development rooted in everyday reality across the institution.

• A comprehensive set of instruments for developing teaching quality that includes assessment of teaching competences in staff recruitment process, continuous development of teaching competences with individualised feedback to teachers, awards to recognise outstanding teaching as well as a teaching innovation fund.

Studies and Research (Art):

- VU has built up a global research environment in line with leading European standards in the Life Sciences Centre, which attracts top researchers from Lithuania and abroad. The successes and standards of the Centre with international state-of-the-art infrastructure and recognised researchers should be expanded to other research areas where VU occupies a national leading position.

- The doctoral schools that have been set up in the Life Sciences, the Medical Faculty and Educational Sciences, and that will be established in other parts of VU, constitute a model of good practice of supportive and internationally competitive doctoral research environments.

- The number of doctoral dissertations that include results of scientific publications produced in collaboration with foreign researchers comprises about 40%. The Panel welcomes this as a very good standard and encourages expanding this practice.

- International cooperation of the Pharmacy department with departments in Copenhagen and Uppsala universities is a good example of mutually productive relationships.

- Establishment of internal funds to enhance research capacity and enable successful application of external grants are an excellent example of good practice in capacity building and research quality development.

- A special scheme for attracting doctoral students, postdoctoral fellows and visiting researchers from abroad make an important contribution to the internationalisation efforts of the institution.

Impact on Regional and National Development:

- VU demonstrates exceptional understanding of the importance of science communication, especially in the university's outreach to schools, through a variety of programmes including use of a mobile science lab.

- University's support to the Lithuanian innovation and entrepreneurship ecosystem via science and technology parks in Saulėtekis Valley and Visoriai, and mutual collaboration between science and businesses (as the Life Science Centre's collaboration with high tech companies). Such trans-sectoral collaboration makes a very significant impact on the country's reputation among international business circles.

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- VU researchers were important actors and participants in tackling the COVID-19 pandemic and securing public health protection.

- Šiauliai Academy has been successfully incorporated into VU and has now enhanced capacity to pursue provision of pedagogy of the 21st century for the Northern region of Lithuania and for the nation as a whole.

V. RECOMMENDATIONS FOR ENHANCEMENT

The Panel's recommendations for further enhancement are:

Management:

- To enhance the strategic steering capacity, agility and responsiveness to external needs, the Panel recommends that the university increase its willingness to set institutional priorities, create critical mass, and increase resources at the central institutional level to enable larger efforts. More cross-faculty priorities with supporting resources and incentives to collaborate across faculties in larger clusters are needed to address national and global challenges, to create international visibility and competitiveness, and to enable VU to play a leading role in development of Lithuanian state, economy and society.

- The Panel recommends clearer selection and presentation of a small set of strategic performance data that are the key in strategic development and always at hand for decision making bodies. The challenge of identifying strengths and weaknesses that require prompt strategic attention by institutional decision-makers is still unsolved and should be given prioritised attention.

- The Panel suggests considering the appointment of a Chief Information Officer, or the establishment of an Institutional Research Office that would gather, analyse and present core information on strategic development and other key aspects of institutional development. Its key functions might include providing analyses and reports to support evidence-based approach to organisational planning, decision making and quality enhancement.

- To make the annual development interviews contribute maximally to the achieving strategic aims, the Panel commends the VU's plan to conduct these interviews at all levels of the organisation and with all individual employees. The Panel also recommends that prioritised strategic attention is given to leadership development and staff competence training to enable all responsible persons to conduct such interviews effectively and sensitively.

- With respect to website development, the Panel recommends making all key documents and performance indicators more easily accessible for institutional members and external partners. It also recommends enhancing the webpage accessibility for people with physical or mental disabilities.

Quality Assurance:

- The Panel recommends that VU establishes a comprehensive quality assurance policy and framework that contains the quality assurance organisational structure – with the description of the actors' exact roles and tasks.

- The Panel also recommends that the quality assurance policy and system take full account of current practices, which reflect existing roots of the quality culture.

- The Panel recommends intensifying work on "institutional standards for staff development". This recommendation has been made already in the External Evaluation Report of 2013, but university-wide standards are not yet in place, though particularly important for institutional development.

- The Panel recommends that quality assurance documentation – including quality goals and the description of the quality assurance system – is made publicly available to anyone on the VU website in Lithuanian and English.

- The Panel recommends giving more personalised and effective support to foreign students in order to facilitate their integration into the VU community.

- The Panel recommends raising awareness among students about the concrete way of appeal processes, and organising staff training to raise awareness on non-discrimination practices and the capacity to notice critical situations.

Studies and Research (Art):

- The Panel recommends promptly establishing a robust method for assessing student and graduate competences since this strategic aim responds directly to the national skill demand and stakeholders needs. Special attention should be put on generic competences and transferable skills.

- The Panel recommends increasing flexibility (including inter- and multi-disciplinarity) of study programmes, expanding the individual study plan approach, and to consider part-time study options and blended learning between workplace and academia.

- In order to vitalise epistemic communities, to offer joint services to PhD students and make administration of postgraduate studies and research more efficient the Panel recommends extending the model of doctoral schools with greater speed to other parts of the VU, in particular in those, which have been evaluated as comparative research evaluation as internationally most competitive. The ARQUS alliance should be fully used for this purpose.

- The Panel recommends offering international master and doctoral programmes in all areas, which perform at a high international standard in research (as assessed by MOSTA).

- To allow for integrated communities and international classroom experiences, the Panel recommends to expand the number of joint modules of English-language and Lithuanian study programmes and to merge these programmes as much as possible.

- To address the uneven research performance across CAU, the Panel recommends not only helping weaker units develop initiatives, but also strengthening those which have already developed their potential – as a model and incentive for others.

- In order to achieve the ambitious internationalisation goals that the VU has set itself, the Panel recommends establishing stricter rules for staff language proficiency together with relevant training opportunities, such as language courses, international mobility and intercultural social networks among VU academic staff. English-language proficiency among all academic staff should be developed and certified according to the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR).

- The Panel recommends with utmost urgency to convey among all VU members the importance of international exposure for self-perception, civic and global understanding, intercultural sensitivity, leadership and competitiveness. Students and staff should be helped by mentors and leadership, to understand the value of leaving their comfort zones and familiar contexts, to disrupt the sense of self-understood attitudes, to enhance their creativity, ability to communicate and innovate. Outgoing mobility of students and staff should be promoted through additional stipends or fellowships, quality counselling and recently established VU endowment. The systematic assurance of mobility windows and of recognition of study credits obtained abroad must be achieved within the current strategic period.

- The Panel recommends the Rectorate, the Council, the Senate and all other multipliers, to exert influence on national government and agencies to provide additional funds for recruiting international staff in competition with other European research universities. Visiting professorship has been promoted via special schemes, but is still at a very low level due to non-competitive salaries.

Impact on Regional and National Development:

- The Panel recommends establishing an office that would gather and analyse information on regional and national needs to support strategic development in this regard. It is advisable to make a complete inventory in what areas the University is, or could be the strongest partner for national or regional development and to nominate CAUs to take responsibility for particular areas.

- The Panel recommends establishing a systematic process for the evaluation of LLL needs that would allow VU proactively shape the national debate on the skills development agenda, and become a key provider of continuous professional development in the Baltic region.

- The Panel recommends strengthening partnership in the areas which are crucial for the Economy 4.0 and where VU is particularly strong, such as fin-tech, laser and chip technologies, sustainable environment, smart cities etc.

- The Panel recommends putting more attention on the assessment of external factors that have profound impact on Lithuania's state, society and economy. This assessment must be both regular and agile in order to provide knowledge-based recommendations for the long-term and short-term challenges.

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