



CENTRE FOR QUALITY ASSESSMENT IN HIGHER EDUCATION

EVALUATION REPORT
STUDY FIELD OF SOCIOLOGY
AT VILNIUS UNIVERSITY

Expert panel:

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Study Field Data*

Title of the study programme	Sociology	Sociology
State code	6121JX018	6211JX024
Type of studies	University studies	University studies
Cycle of studies	First cycle (undergraduate)	Second cycle (postgraduate)
Mode of study and duration (in years)	Full time	Full time
Credit volume	240	120
Qualification degree and (or) professional qualification	Bachelor's degree in Social Science	Master's degree in Social Science
Language of instruction	Lithuanian	Lithuanian
Minimum education required	Secondary education	Undergraduate education
Registration date of the study programme	19/05/1997	19/05/1997

Title of the study programme	Social Policy	Social Policy
State code	6121JX019	6211JX026
Type of studies	University studies	University studies
Cycle of studies	First cycle (undergraduate)	Second cycle (postgraduate)
Mode of study and duration (in years)	Full time	Full time
Credit volume	240	90
Qualification degree and (or) professional qualification	Bachelor's degree in Social Science	Master's degree in Social Science
Language of instruction	Lithuanian	Lithuanian
Minimum education required	Secondary education	Undergraduate education
Registration date of the study programme	11/06/2012	20/01/2009

Title of the study programme	Criminology	Sociology and Criminology
State code	6121JX029	6211JX025
Type of studies	University studies	University studies
Cycle of studies	First cycle (undergraduate)	Second cycle (postgraduate)
Mode of study and duration (in years)	Full time	Full time
Credit volume	240	120
Qualification degree and (or) professional qualification	Bachelor's degree in Social Science	Master's degree in Social Science
Language of instruction	Lithuanian	Lithuanian
Minimum education required	Secondary education	Undergraduate education
Registration date of the study programme	02/05/2017	23/04/1999

** if there are **joint / two-fields / interdisciplinary** study programmes in the study field, please designate it in the foot-note*

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I. INTRODUCTION

1.1. BACKGROUND OF THE EVALUATION PROCESS

The evaluation of study fields is based on the Methodology of External Evaluation of Study Fields approved by the Director of the Centre for Quality Assessment in Higher Education (hereafter – SKVC) 31 December 2019 Order [No.V-149](#).

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

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

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

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

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

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

1.2. EXPERT PANEL

The expert panel was assigned according to the Experts Selection Procedure (hereinafter referred to as the Procedure) as approved by the Director of Centre for Quality Assessment in Higher Education on 31 December 2019 [Order No. V-149](#). The site visit to the HEI was conducted by the panel on *26 and 27 April, 2021*.

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Ms. Jurgita Novosiolova, student of Mykolas Romeris University, Second Cycle Study Programme Education, Career Planning (Lithuania).

1.3. GENERAL INFORMATION

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

No.	Name of the document
1.	The list of publications of lecturers.
2.	

1.4. BACKGROUND OF THE STUDY FIELD/STUDY FIELD POSITION/STATUS AND SIGNIFICANCE IN THE HEI

Established in 1579 Vilnius University (VU) is the oldest HEI in Lithuania. VU is governed by the Senate, the Council, and the Rector. With 2,926 employees and 19,996 students (SER 2020) VU is the largest University in Lithuania. It is structured around 14 core academic units (CAUs) made up of 11 faculties, one institute, one centre and one business school and 12 core non-academic units. VU offers undergraduate, postgraduate and doctoral studies in the fields of the humanities, social sciences, natural sciences, medical and healthcare sciences, and technology.

Since 1989 sociology programmes and sociological research have been located in the Faculty of Philosophy. There are six study programmes in the Sociology. First cycle or undergraduate programmes are offered in Sociology, Criminology, and Social Policy. Second cycle or postgraduate programmes offered in Sociology, Sociology and Criminology, and Social Policy. All programmes are overseen by Study Programme Committees (SPCs). The Faculty administration is responsible for student admissions, who also oversees the organisation and maintenance of the study process.

In 2012 the first and second cycle sociology and criminology study programmes were subject to external evaluation and accredited for six years. In 2017 the first and second cycle social policy programmes were evaluated and accredited for three years.

This current external evaluation and this report was carried out in 2021. The expert evaluation panel reviewed the first and second cycle programmes in Sociology, Criminology and Social Policy. The expert panel reviewed documentation (the Self Evaluation Report and associated Appendices) which was prepared and submitted by the VU Self-Evaluation Group which comprised members of the academic and administrative staff in the Faculty of Philosophy, student representatives and social partner representatives. The expert panel conducted site visits (virtually due to the pandemic) over two days and met with representatives of the VU administration, support services, teaching staff, students and social partners.

II. GENERAL ASSESSMENT

Sociology study field and first cycle at Vilnius University is given **positive** evaluation.

Study field and cycle assessment in points by evaluation areas

No.	Evaluation Area	Evaluation of an Area in points*
1.	Intended and achieved learning outcomes and curriculum	3
2.	Links between science (art) and studies	3
3.	Student admission and support	3
4.	Teaching and learning, student performance and graduate employment	4
5.	Teaching staff	3
6.	Learning facilities and resources	4
7.	Study quality management and public information	3
	Total:	23

*1 (unsatisfactory) - there are essential shortcomings that must be eliminated;

2 (satisfactory) - meets the established minimum requirements, needs improvement;

3 (good) - the field is being developed systematically, has distinctive features;

4 (very good) - the field is evaluated very well in the national and international context, without any deficiencies;

5 (excellent) - the field is exceptionally good in the national and international context/environment.

Sociology study field and second cycle at Vilnius University is given **positive** evaluation.

Study field and cycle assessment in points by evaluation areas

No.	Evaluation Area	Evaluation of an Area in points*
1.	Intended and achieved learning outcomes and curriculum	3
2.	Links between science (art) and studies	3
3.	Student admission and support	3
4.	Teaching and learning, student performance and graduate employment	4
5.	Teaching staff	3
6.	Learning facilities and resources	4
7.	Study quality management and public information	3
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5 (excellent) - the field is exceptionally good in the national and international context/environment.

III. STUDY FIELD ANALYSIS

3.1. INTENDED AND ACHIEVED LEARNING OUTCOMES AND CURRICULUM

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

3.1.1. Evaluation of the conformity of the aims and outcomes of the field and cycle study programmes to the needs of the society and/or the labour market (not applicable to HEIs operating in exile conditions)

(1) Factual situation

The aims and outcomes of the study field – sociology and both first and second cycle programmes offered in sociology ensure that students graduate with a sound understanding of: social and economic transformations, the workings of social and political institutions, methodologies appropriate to the study and analysis of social, economic, political and cultural life, and the ability to think critically and analytically. The field of study is comprehensively addressed through the content and delivery of the all programmes offered which have learning outcomes which relate to the substantive areas outlined above. Second cycle programmes explore these issues in greater depth and enable specialisation and cultivate higher levels of independent scholarship than the first cycle degrees. In addition to these foundational areas the subject specific programmes have distinct aims which in turn are orientated towards labour market needs. Sociology degree programmes focus on socio-demographic, cultural and technological change in the context of globalisation. Graduates gain employment in marketing, public opinion agencies, advertising and public relations. Social Policy programmes focus on welfare and social justice at national and international levels. Graduates gain employment in social services and public administration. Criminology programmes ensure graduates are able to analyse emergent forms of crime in a global environment through applying critical theoretical approaches. They graduate with skills valuable for prison services, the police, the Ministry of the Interior, and Centres for Crime Prevention and Control.

The SER reports on how the study field of sociology at VU has been shaped by and so responds directly to the needs of the wider society. The substantive issues such as social justice, population transformations, emerging marketisations are addressed in teaching and research. For instance, this is evidence in the development of the first and second cycle programmes were developed in response to the needs of governmental agencies and institutions and commercial organisations to better understand socio-economic and demographic transformations in Lithuania. Consultations with stakeholders identified the labour market needs for these sectors in Lithuania. Sociology training is aligned to the needs of public and private sector organisations who work to understand and monitor social change, public opinion, the causes and consequences of social life relating to family, religion, politics, mass media and urban development. Social Policy training produces graduates who are able to be employed in predominately, though not wholly, the public sector where there is a demand for skills in the research methods and policy analysis of issues such as, poverty, social exclusion, migration and inequality. Criminology graduates are needed and work in the criminal justice system and the non-governmental sectors e.g. relating to international crime.

The SER also reports that in developing the study field of sociology at VU colleagues VU were guided by the Government Strategic Analysis Centre (STRATA). Moreover, the SER includes STRATA data that indicates graduates in the sociology field have high levels of employability. The substantive and methodological skills of the students are especially welcomed by employers, evidence further substantiated in meetings with the expert panel's site visits. Labour market needs are consistently reviewed. For instance, the Sociology Department are to introduce a revised and updated programme in Criminology, with the Masters *Applied and Theoretical Criminology* replacing the existing MA *Sociology and Criminology* from 2021. This is in response to the needs of employers who require students to have the greater critical and theoretical knowledge and applied analytical skills.

(2) Expert judgement/indicator analysis

The expert panel judged the aims and outcomes of the study field overall and the first and second cycles programmes in particular to be consistent to the needs of Lithuania society and labour markets. The panel were impressed at the detailed consideration given to the labour market needs with the SER reporting how their programmes were designed to meet these needs. They were also pleased to see the contribution and engagement with employers. The focus on methodological training in quantitative skills was especially strong and valued by both private and public sector employers. The panel were also impressed how labour market and skills needs are consistently under review. For instance, the development of a new MA in Applied and Theoretical Criminology for 2021. Although the expert panel judged the programme aims and outcomes to fit labour market and societal needs, there was a view that they were solid and rigorous rather than innovative. What was missing from the SER and discussions was any sense of what is distinctive about the study field of sociology at VU and it was also felt that there is scope to update research and programmes to ensure aims and outcomes capture the theories and methods for contemporary social issues such as those relating to digital social media and welfare in the informatised social contexts. In addition, the focus on issues of diversity and difference, especially race, gender and sexuality needs to be foregrounded. In sum the expert panel were impressed by the study field but were of the view that more could be done to ensure the field engages with contemporary sociological theories, debates and issues.

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

(1) Factual situation

The mission of VU is to ensure that their graduates are able to 'find, systematise and evaluate information, apply one's knowledge in practice, solve problems, be able to work individually and as part of a team and cooperate in different cultural contexts both with experts and policymakers or the community at large,' (SER p.13). The sociology field and study programmes both at first and second cycles are designed to ensure the implementation of this mission. This is achieved by training students to become specialists in conceptual, analytical and practical methodological skills, in sociological and criminological theories, in policy analysis and to become adept in identifying and solving contemporary social problems. The levels and depth of knowledge and skills vary between first and second cycle studies, with the latter delving into knowledge at greater depth and skills building on those acquired at undergraduate levels.

A strategic priority of VU is to enhance internationalisation and ensure that the VU acts as a European University. The Sociological Department do this through activities such as attendance at international conferences, membership of international associations, hosting

international visitors and participating in international networks. Study exchanges programmes for students and staff are identified as an important means to achieving this strategy. Teaching modules in English and raising the profile of the research by publishing in international journals were also recognised as ways to enhance internationalisation. Nevertheless, the bulk of the teaching remains in Lithuania and outputs are predominantly written for national audiences. This did however vary between programmes with the Criminology courses and research being more international in orientation and staff embedded in networks and collaborations in the USA and Canada. The expert panel also heard during site visit meetings that the teaching staff are working in collaboration with colleagues in Utrecht University to develop an online module in ethnography.

Social Policy research and programmes too capitalised research and networks in throughout Europe. We return to these issues in more detail in the appropriate sections below in this report.

(2) Expert judgement/indicator analysis

The expert panel were persuaded that the field of sociology at VU makes a sound contribution to VU's mission and the University's strategic goals. This is evidenced in the first cycle programmes ensure students graduate with methodological, conceptual and analytical skills to be able to contribute to policy work and to have a grasp of social problems. Second cycle students in addition have advanced training in quantitative research skills and are able to work independently. Where there is scope for improvement in the sociology field is in relation to internationalisation. More modules could be taught in English and from the SER and discussion with both staff and students the expert panel gleaned that exchanges to study outside Lithuania were where the exception rather than the rule. International visitors to VU also needs to be better supported and encouraged.

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

(1) Factual situation

The sociology field meets the requirements recognised by international and professional bodies for sociology and social policy. All evaluated programmes on the first cycle (Criminology; Social Policy; Sociology) and second cycle (Social Policy; Sociology and Criminology; Sociology) are designed and implemented in line with the national legal requirements. First cycle programs are full time 4-year study programs with credit scope of 240 ECTS. The second cycle programs are 2-year study programmes with credit scope of 120 ECTS (Sociology and Criminology; Sociology) or 90 ECTS (Social Policy).

(2) Expert judgement/indicator analysis

All evaluated study programmes at the first and second cycles meet the legal requirements of first and second level programmes in Lithuania.

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

(1) Factual situations

The aims, learning outcomes and teaching/learning assessment methods are such they map on the knowledge and skills expected to ensure a full appreciation of the study field of sociology. For example, there is a diversity of assessment methods used across the first and second cycle programmes. The assessment content and structure are overseen and reviewed

by the Study Programme Committees (SPCs). There are separate SPCs for first and second cycles. SPC's terms of reference are to improve programmes by ensuring and monitoring the alignment of programme aims, competencies, content, methods and assessment of outcomes. SPCs analyse feedback from academic units, students, graduates, teaching staff and social partners.

Nevertheless, staff have the autonomy to design their own modes of assessment and are encouraged by the SPCs to be innovative. To ensure coherence of all programmes the SPCs scrutinise the programme documentation submitted by programme organisers. Programme documentation include a competency matrix, which the SPCs review to ensure all competences are covered. The expert panel heard during their site visits that essays, policy analysis, practical research assignments are amongst the range of assessments used to capture the learning outcomes. All students must also complete a final thesis. First cycle programmes are structured to ensure that year one modules provide a grounding in general competencies and knowledge, spanning a range of social science disciplines (e.g. psychology, philosophy, politics, social policy and sociology) and as they progress through their semesters and year groups the modules seek to foster higher-level skills, with assessment methods tailored to capture these competences. In addition, the modules are more focussed on sociology and social policy. Second cycle programmes assessments demand a higher level of independent scholarship from students. Assessment methods are reviewed and if necessary revised. For instance, courses in research methods training have been revised and updated for the new MA Theoretical and Applied Criminology.

Students at both BA and MA levels are assessed by a final thesis. The criteria and overall grade composition have been made more explicit and are available in written form for the students to read since the previous evaluation of the field.

Assessment methods include: essays, presentations, case study reports, research papers, evaluation of research evidence papers, practical assignments using software such as MAXQDA and SPSS. All are compatible with social science assessment methods.

Students may also personalise their studies through exchange programmes, studying for a language, choosing minor studies etc. Recognition of assessments from other Universities or courses contribute to the programme aims of diversification of skills.

(2) Expert judgement/indicator analysis

From their reading of the SER and meetings during the site visit, the expert panel judged that there is compatibility of aims, learning outcomes, teaching/learning and assessment methods and the study field of sociology. Administratively the SPC ensures the assessments map on to competencies and are structured to ensure progression. However, in site visit meetings it became apparent to the expert panel that not all staff were aware of the content and assessment methods used by their colleagues delivering modules throughout the programmes. The panel welcomed autonomy of staff to select their own assessment methods and course content but judged that staff should communicate more between the teaching group to explore how assessment methods could be both linked and complementary. This for both first and second cycle programmes.

Overall the expert panel were impressed by the monitoring of assessment by the SPCs and the SER includes specific examples of revisions made in response to students when the latter have queried the appropriateness of assessment methods. The panel were also impressed by the

way the assessments were adapted to virtual learning through the use of the VLE during the pandemic.

Importantly, the University has a good system in place to ensure compatibility, in which responsibility for coordination lies within the study programme committees that also coordinate among them. This is also enabled by the relatively small number of general and subject-specific competencies, which allows for easier operationalisation, implementation and control. Lecturers have to maintain a strong teaching load and communication between different teachers can be limited. The expert panel would like to see the implementation of regular and permanent cooperation and exchange forum to share teaching experience and to foster a possibility to learn by each other.

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

(1) Factual situation

To cover the totality of the field of sociology the teaching at VU moves from foundational to advanced knowledge and skills. In order to implement this and enable students to gain comprehensive understanding of the field programmes move from general to more specialised teaching of sociological theories, research methods and applied subfields such as health, welfare, technology and so on. Bachelor programmes start in the first year to develop more general competences and knowledge. This continues into the second year. This knowledge is developed in a relatively broad spectrum of subjects, thereby laying the foundation for development in the later studies. This includes not only sociology, but also knowledge of related disciplines such as philosophy, psychology, economics, and mathematics. In the second year, there is more specialisation in both classical and contemporary theories, as well as introductory courses in research design, and both quantitative and qualitative research methods. Later years provide a variety of courses offering deeper knowledge on subject specific topics or sub-disciplines. The final semester does not include any lectures; students are primarily focused on their thesis. Research methods are introduced throughout the studies, with increasing competencies towards the end of the studies. During their final year, students are encouraged towards working independently on their theses.

Master's programmes are designed to deepen theoretical, scientific and practical competencies, prioritising optional subjects that give students opportunity to enrich their knowledge in line with their needs and interests. A good range of optional modules offers choices students on both the sociology and the criminology masters programmes. Social Policy second cycle students have a shorter duration of study and so fewer options. Independent study and innovative research are required of Master's students most especially in their final semester where they undertake practical work in the form of an internship with associated assignments and work towards their final thesis.

Although MA assessments, practical assignments demanded more independent scholarship from students, the expert panel heard during their site visits that some students who had first degrees in the social sciences found there to be some overlap between the content of undergraduate and postgraduate modules. The panel also recognise that this can be a perennial issue when seeking to recruit a diversity of students on to Master's programmes.

(2) Expert judgement/indicator analysis

The expert panel found the study field is good – covering expected levels of theory, practice and social issues. First and second cycle programmes to be distinct – with second cycle students delivering training in research methods on a higher level than those at undergraduate level, and also providing specialisation in areas of knowledge, especially in relation to welfare, social policies, demography and crime. There remains the enduring challenge of how to accommodate the needs of master’s students who arrive to study programmes with limited prior knowledge of sociology. Nevertheless, the panel were impressed that the master’s students do have the opportunity through internships and through working with the research active teaching staff to undertake original empirical analysis.

Overall, on the first level of studies, programmes provide successive upgrades of the competencies from more foundational towards more focused. On the second level, the programmes allow further upgrading of competencies, more in line with their interests.

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

(1) Factual situation

A range of opportunities is offered to students to personalise studies according to their individual learning objectives and intended learning outcomes. They can devise an individual study plan, participate in academic exchange (e.g. Erasmus+ exchange), choose minor study modules, and use 15 credits for general university studies. The SER lists the possibility of studying foreign languages as an opportunity to personalise study experience. Because this is offered as a choice rather than language skills being core, it limits the scope for students wanting to study in other countries and so obstructs their potential to follow Erasmus+ exchange opportunities.

If a student seeks more significant changes to the planned study programme, their request needs to be approved by the Dean. Between 2017 and 2019, there were five such requests. Minor changes to personalised study plans are submitted to the Chair of the relevant SPC. Around 10% of students take up this opportunity each semester, and around 50% use individualisation measures during the study period as a whole. They are more frequently used at first cycle level.

Furthermore, there are possibilities to recognise competencies acquired through non-formal education or self-education in principles with lifelong learning. This procedure was recently authorised, no students have yet used this opportunity.

(2) Expert judgement/indicator analysis

The expert panel is judged that appropriate possibilities for personalisation of study experiences exist. However, the University could make steps to ensure that more students could take up on the possibility of Erasmus exchanges should be enhanced through, for instance ensuring English is taught more widely. The VU management and teaching staff should work with student representatives more closely to better understand the barriers to students taking up exchanges and then make changes to address them in order to enable more students to study abroad.

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

(1) Factual situation

The expert panel was provided with a sample of final theses from both first and second study cycles, which look to have a reasonable and adequate level of academic quality and are in line with the contents of the study programmes. Students are required to demonstrate their methodological and analytical skills. The number of master students is small compared to the number of students in the first cycle and as a result the second cycle students benefit from personalised supervision. The Faculty of Philosophy provides support to students in a module "Final Thesis Module" and generic documentation is available for students on writing papers and theses. Each study programme has its own approved procedures and guidelines dedicated to preparing a final thesis with associated documentation available on the VLE. Final theses are signed by students to guarantee of authenticity and non-plagiarism, as part of the submission process. The thesis defence committee comprise at least five members including specialists in sociology, both academics and professionals and representatives of social partners.

One member must be from a scientific or academic institution other than VU.

(2) Expert judgement/indicator analysis

The expert panel is agreed that final theses are compliant with the field and cycle requirements. The inclusion of external stakeholders are involved in proposing topics mainly for second cycle theses, their participation in the student's defence as part of the thesis assessment ensures that students learn to communicate their findings to a range of audiences, and that topics are relevant to contemporary social issues. The sample of thesis reviewed by the panel were judged to be adequate and reasonable but not exceptional and considered that given the small number of students, there was scope to work with students to extend their analysis and critical thinking by engaging in wider theoretical debates. The thesis are on well chosen topics, demonstrate solid technical skills in qualitative and quantitative methods but are less strong on critical thinking and theoretical and sociological imagination. This was especially so for second cycle theses.

Strengths and weaknesses of this evaluation area:

(1) Strengths:

1. The study field level learning outcomes are found to be well formulated and relevant for both cycles. The expected learning matches very well the demands from public and private organizations. The study programmes are up-to-date and of respectable standard.
2. The review of programmes to ensure they fit with labour market needs as demonstrated by the introduction of a new Masters in Theoretical and Applied Criminology demonstrates how the staff are vigilant to labour market needs.

(2) Weaknesses:

1. First and second cycle graduates have solid methodological and analytical skills but lack excellence in novel and creative theoretical thinking. Programmes are solid and traditional rather than cutting edge and challenging.
2. A minority of students take advantage of Erasmus and exchange programmes. The sociology team need to better understand the barriers to take up and implement procedures to increase uptake.
3. Lecturers' lacked collective ownership of whole programmes and tend to be module focussed.
4. Insufficient English skills can limit engagement with international scholarship.

3.2. LINKS BETWEEN SCIENCE (ART) AND STUDIES

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

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

(1) Factual situation

As demonstrated in the appendices and the SER, the Department conducts significant research into applied sociology and criminology and is developing fundamental research in other areas relevant for the sociology field, such as political sociology. The staff initiate and conduct research projects into public opinion, migration, punishment and rehabilitation, health and social enterprise. There is an expectation to publish in peer reviewed academic journals and with academic presses and, on average, the staff publish two academic publications annually. However, it was suggested by members of the expert panel during the visit that applied research does not always translate well into international publications. The SER shows that the internal research evaluation exercise in Lithuania evaluated the research quality as “good” while the impact of research was evaluated “very good”, there is an established record of policy impact at national and international (EU) level. Some members of the Faculty are very active in the public debate and regularly feed into policy processes. There is evidence of elements of a strong, publicly oriented academic research culture, but not all staff are equally engaged in it, however recently the University has implemented a formal requirement for lecturers to publish academic outputs, demonstrating that the Departmental research culture is developing. The meeting between the expert panel and the administration revealed that it is expected that the Institutes will consolidate their ongoing research which will then feed into teaching. However, it is too early to measure the impact of this reform.

During the visit it was clarified that research activities are included in the staff workload module and vary depending on the contract; staff have the option to work overtime to meet their research obligations where funding is available (up to 1.5 FTE). Sabbaticals are available for up to 12 months and examples of colleagues using sabbaticals to study abroad were cited in the SER and during site visit meetings.

However, as a result of staff taking their sabbaticals is an increased teaching load for colleagues or significantly more teaching over the following year for those who had been on sabbatical. There is good evidence of close link between the research activities of the staff and the field of study on both cycles. In the meeting lecturers clarified that their research activities feed directly into teaching particular modules, such as Social Policy, additional evidence is presented in SER.

(2) Expert judgement/indicator analysis

There is evidence of strong research conducted by some members of the staff, but it is less certain just how equally this is shared across the Department and to what extent it feeds into advanced research training, particularly at the postgraduate level. The sample of theses enclosed as part of the SER submission demonstrate that students obtain appropriate skills in designing a research study and analysis of a selected problem. As noted in Sections 3.1 of this External Evaluation Report (see above) – these theses however are less strong in the critical engagement with existing academic research.

The sabbatical policy can penalise some colleagues who are expected to pick up extra teaching or staff unable to increase their teaching load the year following the sabbatical, for instance, because of their health or family commitments. The opportunity to increase workloads from full-time to 1.5 FTE will also jeopardise the career trajectories of staff who have caring responsibilities.

The opportunities for the staff to network internally within the University and Lithuania and share their research expertise could be enhanced through internal seminar activities and conferences.

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

(1) Factual situation

The overall structure of the curriculum's content is presented in the module descriptors is in line with traditional courses in sociology, social policy and criminology (see Section 3.1 above). The Criminology Masters programme has an emphasis on Critical Criminology, where students study the social, political, and theoretical aspects of harm, criminal justice and policing. The reading lists contain important works of international scholars and key works of Lithuanian scholars. When asked what they consider missing from the taught curriculum, the staff referred to advanced mathematical methods and East Asian perspectives. However, these areas do not appear to be strongly represented in the previous and current research projects that are carried out by the Department. In the visit, we were told that students are familiarised with the international context in several modules, such as, for instance, Comparative Social Policy module and Criminology modules; however, it is not always clear to what extent these international and global issues are critically and theoretically addressed in Sociology modules. In the meeting with stakeholders, it was suggested that a greater knowledge of the EU policy context is desirable, particularly in the context of crime prevention, criminal justice and migration.

(2) Expert judgement/indicator analysis

The reading lists across all modules and programmes could include more recent scholarship on distinctive areas of social problems. For instance, the topics covered during modules could explicitly address issues that are of international relevance such as, institutional racism, gender equality, climate crisis, post-colonial and Southern theories. When probed, the staff indicated that these questions are addressed in individual seminars, in group discussions (e.g. topics such as MeToo, ecology protests are included in "Introduction to Social Policy," "Human Rights," "Labour Market Policies") but these topic based discussions are not always developed theoretically and are not visible at the programme level. The expert panel found there to be of lack of ownership of the programmes overall and as a result cross cutting issues and a critical stance is missing and needs to be more explicit addressed.

The balance of core and optional modules in Criminology MA could be improved; it appears that the student might be able to choose a pathway through options so that modules on prisons, policing and prevention might not be taken at all. It is crucial to address the questions of diversity and difference (e.g. gender, race, disability and sexuality) in a systematic way and at the programme level on all the masters degrees, as these are key factors that influence crime tendencies, sentencing decisions, the relation between the police and society and the internal organisation of criminal justice system.

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

(1) Factual situation

Students get engaged with the ongoing research undertaken by teaching staff and stakeholders through their modules (evidence from study visit) and some are given the opportunity to engage with the lecturers' applied research projects. These opportunities are greater in the second cycle programmes and lesser so for the first cycle students. But nevertheless are evident in both. For example, in 2019 on the BA Sociology and Social Policy it is reported in the SER (page 26) that circa 25 students participated in the project "Verslumo v.jas", during which they received training about social business and took part in applied research activities. The numbers involved of students involved in research activities is set in Table 3 on page 27 of the SER. In 2019 19% of first cycle students were involved and 36% of second cycle students. The numbers of students being involved has shown an increase year on year from 2017. The study visit revealed that students valued highly the methods skills that they obtained, particularly the quantitative methods. In their final thesis students design their own research study to explore a selected problem with the support of their supervisor. A research mentor programme is available. Internships are available where students are given an opportunity to do applied research. Some students participate in research conferences, the numbers are however small.

(2) Expert judgement/indicator analysis

Students benefit from consistent and solid training in research methods, which gives them scope to become involved with applied research. For second cycle students this can involve working closely with social partners to contribute to 'hands on' applied research. In addition, internships and placements provide excellent opportunities for real world research and study. First cycle students are also involved in applied research most especially when undertaking the research for their final thesis. These skills are in high demand, as suggested by stakeholders during the meeting, indicating graduates across all cycles are gaining experience of scientific work consistent with their study cycle.

Strengths and weaknesses of this evaluation area:

(1) Strengths:

1. Applied social research feeds into a number of modules and this is facilitated by the strong emphasis on quantitative methods research skills embedded in the curriculum.
3. Student engagement with applied research through internships and projects.
4. Presence of prominent scholars in their field among teaching staff.
5. Dedication to developing internationalisation through publication and networking.

(2) Weaknesses:

1. Not all staff are equally research active.
2. While internationalisation is being developed it is nascent as indicated by the limited number of high level international publications.
3. Emphasis on research methods training at the expense of critical analysis and evaluation.

3.3. STUDENT ADMISSION AND SUPPORT

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

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

(1) Factual situation

The admission procedure is described on VU website in both Lithuanian and English. It is easy to find all the information.

The admission of Lithuanian citizens for the first-cycle study programmes is centralised and takes place during the national admission period. The process is conducted by LAMA BPO (Association of Lithuanian Higher Education Institution). Applicants need at least 12 years of secondary education and those who apply for a state-funded position must pass following exams: Lithuanian language and literature, mathematics, foreign language (English, German, French). Applicants who apply for a non-state-funded place must have passed at least one state exam. The admission grades of at least 5.4 points are consistent all VU study programmes. There are no BA and MA programmes in English language so international students are not encouraged to apply.

The admission to the second-cycle studies is conducted in accordance with VU Admissions procedures. There is no requirement to have a BA in social science. The admission of the second-cycle studies grade consists of: average of the grades of the first-cycle subjects, score of the applicant's final BA thesis/ graduation exams, and extra points (given to students with BA in sociology study programmes (SER, Appendix 6)).

In 2017–2020, the most attractive programme for first-cycle students was Criminology (in 2020 – 79 students, in 2019 – 64 students), followed by Sociology (in 2020, 64 students enrolled after the funding for state-funded positions has increased, in 2019 – 28 students) and Social policy (no students enrolled in 2019, but 19 students enrolled in 2020). The number of students enrolled in the first-cycle programmes is strongly influenced by the availability of state-funded positions, even though the number of self-financed students have been increasing in the last few years. All second-cycle studies have maintained relatively stable enrolment trends (10–15 students per programme).

(2) Expert judgement/indicator analysis

The website of VU is very informative and accessible. The admission procedures are transparent and well-grounded. The numbers of students are quite stable, except for the Social policy programme. During the interviews, students and social partners indicated that Social policy is a new specialisation in Lithuania, therefore not much is known about it among the employers. More efforts could be taken to market the programme. The possibilities to study in English for international students should be considered.

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

(1) Factual situation

The SER states on page 33 that VU has procedures for the academic recognition of education and qualifications related to higher education gain in foreign countries and international organisations. Each foreign qualification is evaluated, with a decision made regarding its academic recognition on an individual basis. Applicants to sociology programmes can submit requests for the recognition of learning outcomes achieved formally or informally (through self-education), in accordance with the VU procedures – approved by the VU Senate in 2013.

Individuals who have studied in another country or at a HEI in Lithuania and wants to transfer or continue their studies at VU may be accepted to study on programmes in this field. In such cases, their results are recognised by evaluating their alignment with formal requirements (such as those of the study field, type of study programme and form of study) and course unit (module) requirements.

The subjects and learning outcomes achieved through non-formal activities are recognised and included in the study programmes and are described in the SER. A maximum of 50% of the programme can be credited through self-education, volunteering, employment, internships, trainings, seminars, projects etc. Final examinations, final thesis and other research papers done in other places than the Vilnius University or other study programmes are not eligible for crediting.

(2) Expert judgement/indicator analysis

The procedure for recognition is via the VU procedures as approved by Senate in 2013 – this is done on an individual basis to ensure their prior qualifications are consistent with the aims, and outcomes of training at VU in sociology. In 2017–2019, only one student applied for the recognition of units taken at another University (the outcome of the request was not specified at the SER). More attention the procedures for recognition should be clarified and better described and more needs to be given to making the recognition of qualifications more accessible and transparent to the students.

3.3.3. Evaluation of conditions for ensuring academic mobility of students.

(1) Factual situation

The international studies and internships are organized and administrated by the Careers Department and Student Services . All the information about mobility opportunities is available on the VU website and through emails sent directly to students. Students going abroad can apply for the scholarships. The Faculty of Philosophy has 24 Erasmus+ agreements with foreign universities and 38 agreements under COIMBRA network. In addition, students can take part in other international exchange programmes such as ISEP or bilateral exchange. Students can study part-time. Sociology students (both BA and MA) can spend a semester or a year studying abroad, either as part of, or distinct from their compulsory internship which is part of their personal study plan.

In 2017–2019, the number of outgoing students was not high: 3–8 BA students per year and 1–3 MA students (of all three programmes) took an opportunity to study abroad. In the meeting with the expert panel, the students listed several reasons why the opportunities to study abroad are rarely used. Amongst the reasons given where: difficulty in compatible modules; partner universities do not offer enough units in English language; difficulties in identifying suitable universities for their needs; and lack of proficiency in English to study abroad. Second cycle students are often combining their studies with paid employment and do not have the time to travel abroad.

Furthermore, the University administration requires students submit all applications for study or internship abroad in Lithuanian, and the submission process incurs extra time and financial expense. The scholarships are not sufficient to cover the expenses of studying abroad, and not all students can afford it. The students prefer to take an internship in Lithuania, as it often lead to an employment offer. There were no incoming full-time students in the Sociology field in the period of 2017–2019.

(2) Expert judgement/indicator analysis

The academic mobility of students is low. Although there are explanations that Lithuanian students are not willing to go abroad because of work commitments or career opportunities, important obstacles to international mobility at both Faculty and University level should be addressed. At the Faculty level, more agreements should be signed with universities that offer programmes compatible with sociology programmes in Vilnius University (preferably in English language). This is especially relevant to the new programme of Criminology (both BA and MA). Opportunities to improve the level of English language for the students should be developed (either through language courses or through offering units in English language). At the university level, administrative obstacles for studying abroad should be minimized. The numbers of incoming students from abroad to study in the Sociology department should be increased.

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

(1) Factual situation

The University has a network of support procedures for students. All the information about the support is listed in the VU webpage in very informative way. Support for the financial, personal, social, psychological, religious, and spiritual aspects of student life is available. The university offers career consultations, cultural and leisure activities for students. All support is confidential.

Academic support is given on an individual, personal basis to students from their tutors – on matters such as choosing study programmes, financial matters, academic leave, internships, extra circular activities and other matters. Students also benefit from a mentorship programme dedicated to a holistic development of students' competencies and creativity, to enable them to learn from their mentor's experience and gain advice about planning their professional future. Mentors are from the University staff and also stakeholders and partners.

Financial support takes the form of scholarships. For instance, between 2017-2019 first-cycle students in the Sociology field received 210 scholarships, and second-cycle students 33; social policy scholarships. In 2017-2019, first-cycle students received 59 scholarships, and second cycle students 16. Other one off social grants are also offered as are targeted scholarships. In the case of the latter first cycle students received 20 scholarships and second-cycle students 13 between 2017-2019.

Psychological support is provided by the Faculty of Philosophy Counselling and Training Centre at which students can receive professional psychological counselling) on personal, family, study and social integration matters, as well as other issues. Individual, group and family consultations are offered. The Centre also has crisis psychologists who can help in times of crisis for students and staff (e.g. suicide situations). VU students are also eligible for 75% discount on other psychological services. There is also a health and medical centre dedicated to student's needs.

For leisure creative sport and other activities VU hosts the VU Cultural Centre which brings together a diversity of organisations and programmes.

The SER states that students with disabilities are included in the discussions for reviewing support services and so participate in the identification of needs and making recommendations for adapting infrastructures and teaching methods. Financial support for students with disabilities is granted by the Department for the Affairs of the Disabled under

the Ministry of Social Security and Labour. Students can have their payments reduced e.g. between 2017-2019 45 first-cycle and seven second-cycle students had their study support payments reduced. The SER (p.41) includes information on the VU Five-year *Strategy for Diversity and Equal Opportunities* (February 2020) with policies to be implemented by 2025 (see also Section 3.4 below). The University has a procedure for adapting studies to individual needs arising from disability, enabling the process to be tailored to the needs of such students. Students can contact an accessibility coordinator to agree recommendations about adapting the study process, the coordinator will inform lecturers about how to adapt their teaching and assessment methods for module.

Second cycle students mentioned during the site visit meetings that more attention could be given to the need for students who are in paid employment.

(2) Expert judgement/indicator analysis

The expert panel judged that the support for students' financial, academic, mental and physical health needs are well served, as are those of students with disabilities. This was the case over the whole study field and for both first and second cycle students. Students across all cycles felt very well supported by the teaching staff. However, the needs of second cycle students who are often combining paid employment in professional roles need to be closely monitored to ensure there is sufficiently flexibility to ensure they are able to maximise their study potential.

3.3.5 Evaluation of the sufficiency of study information and student counselling

(1) Factual situation

The University provided clear information for the students on all aspects of extra curricula activities and on counselling services. Information can be found in the VU website, all the students are introduced these in their first integration week. Information is provided centrally by the Student Services and Careers Centre, Studies Department at the faculty of Philosophy, as also students can receive an individual consultation. Details on the study process is provided in inside online system VUSIS, there they can found all the related information as (study plan, results, performs review and etc.).

Students are informed about career possibilities in few ways: during the lectures, meeting with alumni and potential employs, in some lectures teachers invite representatives from potential employers, as they inform students about their possibilities for volunteer or internships. Also, career seminars have been started organized during the 2019–2020 for the students in their final year.

(2) Expert judgement/indicator analysis

The University together with Philosophy Faculty and the student association provide an adequate level of information for students. The VU website is very informative and easily accessible. The teachers and administration can be reached easily.

Strengths and weaknesses of this evaluation area:

(1) Strengths:

1. Informative, clear and accessible webpage for both current and prospective students.
3. Transparent and clear admission procedures for first and second cycles.

(2) Weaknesses:

1. Academic mobility of both outgoing and incoming students is low, more support could be given from the University and Faculty administration and opportunities to study in English need to be increased.
2. Flexibility for the second-cycle study programmes could be enhanced for students combining paid employment and study.
3. The implementation of the VU Five-year Strategy for Diversity and Equal Opportunities (February 2025) to meet needs arising from disabilities (e.g. visual, audio, mobility) could be developed within Sociology.
4. No explicit policies or transparent procedures for dealing with instances of sexual harassment or for the needs of LGBT students.

3.4. TEACHING AND LEARNING, STUDENT PERFORMANCE AND GRADUATE EMPLOYMENT

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

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

(1) Factual situation

According to the SER sociology modules are underpinned by the student centric approach to learning, employment teaching methods of debate, problem solving, and project work. Lectures are staff-led designed to inform, whereas workshops, seminars and tutorials are student focussed and students are required to prepare for them in advance for them. A variety of assessment methods e.g. hands on data analysis, essays, situation analyses, report writing complement these teaching styles. These teaching methods are used in both the first and second cycles but in the latter the balance shifts to require more independent study and problem-based learning. Especially so for research methods and policy analysis. Meetings with students confirmed that these methods were used and appreciated. Positively students felt that they gained practical and transferable skills in their methods training. And, crucially for the social sciences, they had come to see the world differently and question their own ways of thinking. The expert panel were impressed by the University wide mentorship scheme described in the SER, for both first and second cycle students overseen, and were of the view that this enhanced careers.

There were divergent views about the amount of maths taught on both the first and second cycle. The panel learned that statistics teaching had previously been taught by colleagues from economics/maths departments, but the students had complained that it was not pitched at their level, nor sufficiently orientated to social science methods. Acting on student feedback, the maths/stats is now taught within the sociology staff group and is received positively by the students. Some staff and one student felt that on the both the first and second cycle there was not enough maths teaching and that more was needed. But this was not a unanimous view.

Some students felt that they lack an appreciation as to the ordering and structuring of their degree programmes – both in the first and second cycle. They would like to have more information as the pedagogic rationale for the programme structures.

The pedagogy and learning methods transferred to online teaching extremely well according to those the expert panel spoke to in meetings with both staff and students.

(2) Expert judgement/indicator analysis

The expert panel were impressed by the diversity of teaching methods and learning processes and were persuaded that these would ensure learning outcomes could be met (see also Section 3.1 of this Evaluation Report above). What was less evident to the expert panel – and indeed to the students – was the rationale for and the linkages between modules within the programmes. This applies to both first and second cycle. Greater ownership of programmes overall rather than just modules could help this (see Section 3.1 above). The expert panel also took seriously the concerns about maths teaching, but also took seriously the fact that this had previously been considered too high level and recognised the need to be able to meet needs of students who seek to have a grounding in quants but may also wish specialise in other research methods. One option to consider would be to offer those students, in the second cycle, who seek to specialise in higher level maths, the opportunity to take elective modules in these subjects beyond the Sociology Department. The VU mentorship programme is to be commended.

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

(1) Factual situation

In 2020, the University adopted a Strategy for diversity and equal opportunities for the period of 2020–2025, following an analysis performed in 2018–2019 (see Section 3.3. above). The strategic goals of the programme are listed as follows: (1) to aim for working conditions that ensure dignity, quality and meet the needs of people with disabilities (including students and employees); (2) to aim for gender equality at various areas of the University life; (3) to foster cultural diversity and aim for equal integration of students and employees from foreign countries in the community of the University; (4) to create better conditions for students that experience social exclusion and (5) to enhance work (study) and family balance for employees and students. There are no evidence yet on the changes implemented within the University in regards to this strategy.

In SER, only the situation of people with disabilities is presented (no other forms of social vulnerability discussed). The impact of the new Strategy for the management of the study programmes was not discussed.

(2) Expert judgement/indicator analysis

Although the adoption of the Strategy for diversity and equal opportunities by the University is truly praiseworthy, it is somewhat surprising that the issue of access to study for socially vulnerable groups was not reflected more critically within the sociology study field. The limited access to university level studies of students from low-income families, the ongoing societal and political debates on the partnership rights and visibility of LGBTQ+ community and the issues of work and life balance of working students (to name a few) could have been better reflected.

The conditions ensuring access to study for students with special needs appear to be fine. However, their visibility within the University and their involvement in the community affairs could be improved.

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

(1) Factual situation

The University monitors the progress of students on several levels: at the level of a course unit, across a given year and across a study programme. At the course level, the progress of students is evaluated by the lecturer – usually, a cumulative assessment is employed that allows the lecturer to monitor the progress and to provide feedback during the course of the semester. The level of progress of all students at a specific year is monitored at the University level – the ranking of best performing students is conducted (ensuring that distribution of grades in courses roughly follows a normal curve); the dropout rates are monitored and preventive measures are implemented; and the failing students are identified and contacted with provision of information for the support needed. The Study programme committee oversees the progress of students across the study program, identifying and evaluating potentially weak areas (i.e. progress in thesis defence, student failure rates in specific courses and dropout rates) and suggests improvements.

Mainly the lecturers within their courses provide feedback to the students. No other feedback forms were identified in the SER.

(2) Expert judgement/indicator analysis

The feedback provided to students by lecturers is in good standing – the numbers of students are not high in the study programmes and the students report on close relationships with teachers. However, the lack of office space for the staff might limit the possibilities to provide private and more in-depth consultations to students that could enhance their study quality.

The students suggested that a more comprehensive and clear study goals should be identified throughout the program, i.e. for each of the study year. In this case, it would be clearer to them what competences and knowledge they are supposed to achieve during the course of the year and to perform a more informed self-assessment if they achieved these goals or not.

There seems to be a lack of coordination and cooperation between lecturers, so it is unlikely that the progress of students is discussed comparing different course units.

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

(1) Factual situation

Data for monitoring the career of graduates are collected mainly through Career Tracking Information System karjera.lt, that includes (1) data from state information systems and registers and (2) data from sociological surveys of the graduates. Some data is also collected in meetings with employers – mainly through Study programme committee and internship placements, as well as informal communication during the University events. The University also conducts anonymous graduates' surveys to collect information on quality of studies and acquired competencies for the labour market. It is indicated that the most valuable information for the teaching staff and programme managers is collected by maintaining informal links with alumni.

According to the provided data, in the last 5 years, 71-80% of first-cycle students and 78-96% of second-cycle graduated in the sociology field are employed on contractual basis in Lithuania within 12 months of completion of their studies.

Alumni and social partners in the discussion with the evaluation team were content with the competencies of graduates and students. Independent work, good data collection and analysis skills, good understanding of policy documents were mentioned as the strengths of the students and graduates of the sociology programmes. Yet, some social partners noted that analytical skills (as opposed to descriptive analysis) and the skills of the quantitative analysis (including the knowledge of SPSS) need to be improved.

(2) Expert judgement/indicator analysis

The employability of the graduates is evidenced to be high. The Faculty has a wide network of social partners that is used for placement of student internships (which often leads to later employment of the students). The competence, skills and work attitudes of graduates from both study programmes corresponds fairly well to the expectations of the labour market (with some disagreement regarding the quantitative analytical skills of the graduates).

The relationship with the social partners is mainly limited to the provision of internships – both parties would benefit from a closer relationship.

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

(1) Factual situation

The University has clear and comprehensive policies to ensure academic integrity, tolerance and non-discrimination. An anonymous hotline is in place for reports of violations of academic ethics, tolerance or non-discrimination.

At the Faculty of Philosophy, complaints about breaches of academic integrity are handled by the Academic Ethical Commission, which includes both lecturers and students representatives. In the last 3 years, two students in the sociology field have been expelled from the University because of academic dishonesty (plagiarism). A person dismissed for such serious breaches can request to resume their studies no earlier than one year after the expulsion.

(2) Expert judgement/indicator analysis Policies to ensure academic integrity are in place and in action. However, there seems to be more attention given to the sphere of academic integrity rather than recognition and prevention of various forms of discrimination and intolerance. Special attention could be given for raising the awareness of staff and students regarding various forms of discrimination, intolerance or harassment, and for empowering of students to recognise and to stop the breaches of non-discrimination policies.

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

(1) Factual situation

The University has an anonymous hotline and email service for students and employees to report case of violation of equal opportunities. Complaints are considered confidential and the reporter is guaranteed the support from dedicated team of psychologists and lawyers.

There is a process for students to submit complaints regarding the study programme, or examination procedure. The complaint can be filed to the Appeals Commission of the Faculty of Philosophy, which includes both lecturers and students representatives. In the last 3 years,

two complaints from students of sociology study field were received. In both cases, the appeals by the students were found valid and the assessments improved.

(2) Expert judgement/indicator analysis

The procedures for the submission and examination of appeals and complaints regarding the study environment and processed are in place, accessible and used effectively.

Strengths and weaknesses of this evaluation area:

(1) Strengths:

1. Assessment methods are diverse and innovative - especially when linked to research projects carried out by the staff - ensuring the learning outcomes are met.
2. The employability of the graduates is evidenced to be high, internship placements often lead to employment of students.
3. Policies to ensure academic integrity and the procedures for the submission and examination of appeals and complaints are clear and comprehensive.

(2) Weaknesses:

N/A

3.5. TEACHING STAFF

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

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

(1) Factual situation

In terms of numbers, there are 51 Faculty academic staff teaching in the study field of sociology, social policy and criminology. Appendix 3 of the SER provides a list of Faculty members, modules taught, their research interests and for each member of staff 3 outputs published in the previous five years. Of the 51 staff only 3 do not have a PhD. The SER states that colleagues without PhD's are not eligible to teach at MA level but do contribute to BA teaching.

The teaching staff group draws on colleagues beyond the 51 core staff and comprises part-time colleagues who also work in other Universities and non HEIs (both public and private sectors). This makes a diverse portfolio of teaching staff and brings new ideas and insights to the department. In 2019-2020, a total 86 lecturers taught across the Faculty. Faculty staff are allocated 288 hours of contact time, and additional time can be factored in for the preparation, type of contact and so on. Indicating that there is a degree of transparency and parity of workloads, although it is not altogether clear what is included as contact time.

Data on staff student ratios (SSR) reveals a favourable SSR. At the first cycle/BA level it is 6 at the second cycle/MA the SSR reduces to 2.8. Although there is variation within – with the first cycle of Criminology having a higher SSR. Teaching staff described a diversity of teaching styles and were able to provide the expert panel with examples of how they deployed participatory approaches through debates, student projects and so on. The favourable SSR makes small group teaching possible and the feedback from students was very positive.

Few modules were taught in English. Although students and staff use sources written in English.

Competencies in terms of scientific merit are evidenced by the involvement of sociology staff in research. The SER indicates that their success rate of applications is 60% which is very high. Administrative support is available for the preparation of bids. Much of the research which is applied and evidences strong and established relationships with institutions beyond the University. Of note are projects undertaken in response to or in collaboration with government institutions, market research companies, NGOs and so on. This is also evidence of contribution to societal and economics needs. These collaborations also generate opportunity for student involvement in research and also internships.

However, the locally commissioned research does not always enhance internationalisation. Much of the research is limited to national relevance and the vast majority of publications are in the form of reports or placed in national journals. Publications by sociology staff were only very rarely placed in publications of international merit, most are in Lithuanian and very few were published in English limiting the reach to wider audiences.

(2) Expert judgement/indicator analysis

The evaluation panel judged that the numbers of teaching staff to be sufficient to comply with formal requirements and a favourable SSR. The staff are extremely dedicated as was evidenced by the panel's discussions with students and alumni who reported that that staff respond to their needs and work with them to personalise their study interests. The majority of staff are research active and publish to the benefit of national needs and the students' ability to be involved with research and stakeholders. However, the research profile of staff could be raised from national to international level. Research projects and evaluation commissioned by national based organisations require reports which are unlikely to be of interest to wider international audiences. The publication profile of sociology staff is relatively weak.

Teachers have handled the move to virtual/online and hybrid teaching impressively and the provision of, and their participation in training in VLE has evidently paid dividends. Students' reported satisfaction with the transition to online teaching during the Covid-19 pandemic and the panel were impressed by the examples of teaching innovations to bring in external teachers, experts etc to enhance their pedagogy.

Staff turnover is limited making for a stable environment and strong relationships with research, business, and public institutions which brings research and enhances students' employability. However, there was no clear evidence of a recruitment strategy to support the hiring of international researchers – which areas, levels of seniority and expertise would be prioritised.

3.5.2. Evaluation of conditions for ensuring teaching staffs' academic mobility (not applicable to studies carried out by HEIs operating under the conditions of exile)

(1) Factual situation

Scope for professional development and research is limited. Very few staff have research sabbaticals and still fewer have spent time as visiting scholars beyond Lithuania. Moreover, the limited numbers of sabbatical indicate this is a matter that warrants attention.

Many staff are members of international professional associations and have led on and hosted conferences. Thereby extended their research networks and this has also translated into participation in international, and often interdisciplinary research projects.

Over the period 2021 to 2019 all core faculty staff attended at least one international conference or participated in a research fellowship, summer school, ERASMUS visit, or short and/or long-term research visit. Teachers can access funding from the VU Foundation and Research Council of Lithuania and between 2017–2019 the VU supported 16 lecturers to who attended 14 international conferences through the EU and also as far afield as Hong Kong and Singapore. The Research Council of Lithuania financed three lecturers and two doctoral students to participate in conferences in Canada and the UK.

(2) Expert judgement/indicator analysis

There is scope to support and Faculty staff are actively encouraged to participate in international research exchanges, visits, conferences and so on. Research time is factored into workloads, sabbaticals are available, and staff can apply for funding for conferences, and exchange programmes.

Procedures for accessing and securing research sabbaticals and systematic ways of managing the workload of staff while they are on research sabbatical – needs greater consideration and could be developed to enhance professional development and enhance the research profiles of the staff.

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

(1) Factual situation

VU provides training in teaching skills and staff participated in these to varying degrees. Training covers aspects of communication, new technologies, assessment and so on. In 2020 lecturers participated in webinars on working with Virtual Learning Environments.

Faculty members are assessed every five years – and the VU assessment committee reviews their peer review publications, conference attendance, teach performance, student feedback. There is no data in the SER as to the outcomes of the reviews. Staff turnover is limited with few staff leaving VU and few new appointments. Very few scholars appointed from beyond Lithuania.

(2) Expert judgement/indicator analysis

The panel were persuaded that the teaching group have developed their competencies to innovate in teaching methods, and especially to embrace new online teaching technologies. The staff are subject to assessment – but only every five years which is a long gap, most especially when there is such a limited turnover of staff. Ways to mitigate compliancy would be helpful. The panel also judged that the important of staff from other institutions and countries would be a fillip for new ideas, and this is currently hampered by a lack of any coherent recruitment strategy.

Strengths and weaknesses of this evaluation area:

(1) Strengths:

1. Involvement in commissioned and applied research contributing to national societal and economic needs and impact.

2. Dedicated and enthusiastic teachers who are valued by current students and alumni.
3. Embracing on-line technologies and adapting and innovating teaching methods using these tools.
4. Explicit workload models.
5. Strong ties with external stakeholders – especially so in Lithuania.

(2) Weaknesses:

1. The balance between applied national focused research and international research should be addressed to ensure more investment in the latter. In particular the publication profile of staff needs to improve by increasing the numbers of outputs in international journals with high impact factors.
2. Few modules taught in English which can be an obstacle to staff and students who may want to take advantage of Erasmus programmes, participation in conferences and international collaborations.
3. Lack of a clear recruitment strategy and very few new staff and only a very few from beyond Lithuania to enhance internationalisation.
4. Lack of effective means to support research sabbaticals and time for a larger number of staff to invest in development of international collaborations and research projects.

3.6. LEARNING FACILITIES AND RESOURCES

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

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

(1) Factual situation

Old and new buildings at the University campus house a great variety of classrooms and lecture halls. Computer rooms are well equipped and are supported by a strong team of IT staff. IT services are excellent for both staff and students. This has ensured that the shift to virtual learning has been successful during the pandemic. As well as good hardware facilities, software is available for virtual meetings, teaching, and research. Packages such as SPSS and MAXQDA are available for all staff and students, with licences that allow students to use these from remote settings and from home.

Library seems to be reasonably equipped and concentrates increasingly on access to electronic sources. Shared access to electronic libraries and their e-book stocks and journal subscriptions which is commonly shared by all Lithuanian universities increases access options to electronic journals. This service appears was appreciated by the staff and students. Teaching schedules are planned to minimise students having to commute back and forth between campus locations.

Although office space has increased in recent years, some staff still share office and there are not enough space for meetings. Efforts are being made to provide less restricted office environments to the teaching staff.

Senior management and Faculty administration expressed several times that they like to increase the ratio of external visiting professors and further staff from abroad. To fulfil this aspiration Vilnius University has guest flats within reasonable walking distance to the campus at reasonable rent prices.

The expert panel were informed by the staff that an English proof-reading service is available to them which can be used for drafting outputs for publication.

Scholarships which help to fund students to are valuable for students and the expert panel were pleased to see these available for those eligible.

(2) Expert judgement/indicator analysis

The expert panel were persuaded that the learning facilities and resources are very good. The facilities and resources for IT and computing were especially strong and supported by an efficient IT staff group. Office space and teaching rooms have been improved in recent years but it needs further improvements, especially for staff office space.

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

(1) Factual situation

The labs and IT centres are routinely upgraded. Extensive purchases of new equipment have taken place over the past three years. State of the art equipment in terms of computers and software packages are in a permanent process of getting installed and updated. In addition, several classrooms for seminars and lecture halls are equipped with necessary electronic teaching tools.

(2) Expert judgement/indicator analysis

The expert panel found that the Faculty administration, teaching and technical staff were aware of and pleased with the upgrading of resources and learning facilities. Library and IT resources are especially strong. Investment in buildings are leading to improvements in spaces for teaching and offices, but this remains work in progress. These are University wide developments and it is important to ensure the space for sociology programmes and all teaching staff improved.

Strengths and weaknesses of this evaluation area:

(1) Strengths:

1. The IT and library facilities are seemingly very good equipped. The Sociology unit has a clear knowledge of needs for ongoing infrastructure indicating there is good communication between the VU management and staff.

(2) Weaknesses:

N/A

3.7. STUDY QUALITY MANAGEMENT AND PUBLIC INFORMATION

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

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

(1) Factual situation

Vilnius University is implementing the quality assurance system created in 2013. These procedures are in line with the international standards and the rules set by the Lithuanian

accreditation body. Set of procedures and mechanisms are introduced to all new faculty members, to ensure they all follow the quality assurance culture at the institution. Data for the quality assurance system are collected from students, teaching staff, employers and social partners. This information is disseminated.

The main responsibility for the implementation of study programmes is with the Study Programme Committee, which includes teaching staff, student representatives and the social partners. Self-evaluation is conducted annually.

There is a quality loop in operation in the quality assurance system. The various formal and informal data collected and the results of the self-evaluation are used to improve the programme by aligning its aims, competencies, contents, method and assessment of outcomes. This process is one of the main objectives of the work of Programme Study Committee.

The students contribute to the quality assessment, also through collection and publication of independent report. They also provide general recommendations for their improvement. Other mechanisms are in place as well.

(2) Expert judgement/indicator analysis

The study management system and publicity of results are in line with the European standards of quality assurance in higher education. The system has a clear structure with clear responsibilities at different levels. The main role is with the Study Programme Committee, which includes all relevant stakeholders. The internal quality system is well defined and systematically and periodically (every year) put in practise. This creates good conditions for improvement.

However, in the opinion of the expert panel, the system is underutilised. The report, as well as the interviews during the visits, do not reveal very concrete examples of efficiency of the system, or how it contributes to improvement of study programmes. As a result, self-evaluation reports give the impression of annual formality and failure of sufficient empirical evidence to back up the vocabulary of quality assurance. The extent and regularity of the application of self-evaluation in improvement of study programmes.

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

(1) Factual situation

The University makes a strong formal effort to include students and social partners in the internal quality assurance process. There are several mechanisms in place to include students. The most important is their representation in the Study Programme Committee, which is the main body responsible for implementation of the internal quality assurance system and is the key component of the quality loop. Other mechanisms exist, also to resolve administrative issues.

Social partners are involved through their participation in the Study Programme Committee (at least one social partner in each committee), and through the final thesis defence commissions. These include representatives of various sectors: business, the public sector, NGOs. Another tool for them to contribute to quality assurance is their participation in the final thesis defence commissions. This is intended to also ensure the visibility of social partners to the students.

(2) Expert judgement/indicator analysis

Although the system is in place, the social partners seem not to be very engaged in the quality assurance system. While this is to some extent understandable, since their main professional responsibility lies with other organisations, it is the responsibility of the Department to engage and motivate stakeholders to assume “ownership” of the programme. During the interview with expert panel the stakeholders did not name any specific improvements in the more recent period (2017–2019), although some changes in the study programme have been substantial.

There is a feeling among the stakeholders that the University does not have a systematic way to communicate with them and mainly approaches them when arranging internship placement for their students.

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

(1) Factual situation

The University employs a standard approach to the collection of data. The main tool is the student survey, conducted at the end of each semester. The University conducts a centralised survey database, which in principle allows comparison of different study programmes, with the purpose to improve internal exchange of experience. It is not clear whether this is really the case.

Additionally, it is possible for students to leave anonymous feedback during the semester. The data can be seen by the teachers about their courses and the chair of the study programme can see the entire data. This allows the Chair of the Study Programme Committee to have an overall impression and act accordingly. The administration can see the feedback across all programs.

This in principle enables all participants to have a good overview and act accordingly even during the semester.

(2) Expert judgement/indicator analysis

The system for collection, use and publication of data is a rather formalistic annual responsibility. Nevertheless, this is also complemented by feedback procedures within sociology. During the visits, the expert panel heard examples of how the students’ feedback was considered and acted upon (e.g. the changes to maths teaching) which are also documented in the SER.

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

(1) Factual situation

The data as presented in the SER in show a level of satisfaction with the studies of over 60% reporting that they are very satisfied and, the proportion of students who have not been satisfied is 12-14%. On this basis, as well as some other indicators, the Faculty assumes that programmes have achieved balance between study content and needs, teaching quality, and administrative support. The feedback is generally satisfactory, on both BA and MA levels of study.

The SER does not distinguish between different study programmes, nor does it provide comparison with other study programmes at the University.

(2) Expert judgement/indicator analysis

The SER does not provide any kind of in-depth analysis or comparative perspective, which would allow us to conclude on how realistic the positive interpretation of results is.

Strengths and weaknesses of this evaluation area:

(1) Strengths:

1. Formal procedures and quality feedback loops are well formulated.

(2) Weaknesses:

1. Insufficient opportunities and examples of involvement with stakeholders in the design and delivery study programmes.

2. Insufficient analysis of data collected through student surveys.

IV. EXAMPLES OF EXCELLENCE

Core definition: Excellence means exhibiting exceptional characteristics that are, implicitly, not achievable by all.

If, according to the expert panel, there are no such exceptional characteristics demonstrated by the HEI in this particular study field, this section should be skipped / left empty.

1. Employability rates for Sociology first and second graduates is high and are the types of jobs they secure them to use their knowledge and skills acquired during their studies.
2. The Library and related IT learning resources are excellent

V. RECOMMENDATIONS*

Evaluation Area	Recommendations for the Evaluation Area (study cycle)
Intended and achieved learning outcomes and curriculum	<p>The expert panel recommends:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - enhancing internationalisation by setting up mechanisms to increase student uptake of Erasmus programmes, and by offering more courses taught in English both for local and international students; - reviewing the content of all sociology programmes to stretch students intellectually by updating material to include recent scholarship which moves beyond classical theories and conventional research methods, to ensure the content is cutting edge rather than traditional.
Links between science (art) and studies	<p>The expert panel recommends that research led teaching which is strong is further enhanced by:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - ensuring staff are more equally research active; - enhancing internationalisation by increasing the numbers staff outputs in international publications; - complementing the current emphasis on research methods training with greater attention to critical analysis and evaluation skills.
Student admission and support	<p>The expert panel recommends that the University and Faculty administration work with the sociology staff:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - to improve support and find ways to increase student exchanges to study abroad in first and second cycle; - monitor needs of second-cycle students to ensure they are able to combine study their paid employment; - to develop the VU Five-year <i>Strategy for Diversity and Equal Opportunities</i> (February 2020- 2025) to foreground gender and race disparities and to foster cultural diversity; - to make procedures for dealing with instances of sexual harassment and for the needs of LGBT students to be more transparent. - to seek that the number of state funded places for the sociology field at the Vilnius university is increased to enable more students to benefit from the excellent first and second cycle programmes on offer.
Teaching and learning, student performance and graduate employment	<p>The expert panel recommends that the sociology staff work together to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - communicate about content of modules so that staff are familiar with the content of programmes beyond their own and enhance ownership across whole programmes.
Teaching staff	<p>The expert panel recommends that sociology teaching staff as a group:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - shift the balance between applied national focused research to increase international research, especially through the publication of more outputs in international journals with high impact factors.

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - increase numbers of staff who are able to deliver modules in English. - review and develop a clear staff recruitment strategy to enhance internationalisation. - Review and improve procedures and support for research sabbaticals to contribute to the development of international collaborations and research projects.
Learning facilities and resources	<p>The expert panel recommends that</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - staff have more office space and that the numbers of teaching staff who are sharing offices should be reduced.
Study quality management and public information	<p>The expert panel recommends that the sociology staff and management:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - are proactive to increase the involvement of stakeholders in the design and delivery study programmes. - carry out more in-depth analysis of data collected through student surveys.

*If the study field is going to be given negative evaluation (non-accreditation) instead of RECOMMENDATIONS main **arguments for negative evaluation** (non-accreditation) must be provided together with a **list of “must do” actions** in order to assure that students admitted before study field’s non-accreditation will gain knowledge and skills at least on minimum level.

VI. SUMMARY

Main positive and negative quality aspects of each evaluation area of the study field *Sociology* at Vilnius University:

Having reviewed the SER, conducted site visits (virtual) and carried out interviews with VU management, faculty administration, student and stakeholder representatives (alumni, social partners, employers) the evaluation team were assured by the quality of teaching and student experience on the Sociology programmes offered at VU. The team were impressed by the library and IT resources and employability data. The first cycle and second cycle sociology field programmes are well organised and comprehensive, and all dimensions of the evaluation criteria were judged to be either good or very good.

The first and second cycle study programmes in Sociology are rigorous, highly relevant to the societal needs and labour market requirements. The rates of employability are high indicating that importance and quality of this study field. The links between study programmes and social partners is especially strong. Students graduate with methodological skills which are highly transferable both within and beyond Lithuania. While the content of modules is solid, the expert panel also found it to be traditional rather than innovative or cutting edge. The panel identified the lack of modules taught in English as a weakness as well as, relatedly the limited number of international students studying first and second cycle programmes. The limited English teaching also contributed to the small numbers of the students and graduates who study and/or work abroad.

While the content of modules is solid, and the programmes attract strong students there is scope to review the content of degree programmes to bring about a step change from being traditional and solid to cutting edge. This has been done in Criminology as evidence by the new Master's programme starting in 2021 and is an excellent example of how the programmes can be updated.

The teachers are experienced, dedicated and skilled. They are valued by students and alumni. There are good relations between teachers and students. At second cycle level the relations are especially mutually respectful and facilitated by the fact the many of the second cycle students are combining their studies with their careers and working in settings that are relevant to social policy, welfare, and other public departments or commercial organisations who conduct social related research.

The management structure and organisation of study programmes is clear. Each programme has its dedicated SPCs who in turn oversee the content and structure of degrees. The involvement of social partners in the management and quality audits of programmes is adequate. Student experience is monitored through formal processes such as the student survey and this is complemented by more informal feedback processes at programme level. The panel saw instances of students raising concerning and these been addressed by changes made to teaching methods or content.

The expert panel were very impressed by the library and IT resources and the dedication and commitment of staff who provide these services. Office space is being addressed by University level developments which are ongoing, and the panel would like reassurance the sociology staff benefit from these new infrastructure in particular with more office space and teaching rooms dedicated for sociology students.

Expert panel signatures:

- 1. Prof. dr. Dieter Bögenhold (panel chairperson), member of academic community;**
- 2. Prof. Borut Roncevič , member of academic community;**
- 3. Prof. Sarah Joan Nettleton, member of academic community;**
- 4. Associate Professor Eglė Rindzevičiūtė , member of academic community;**
- 5. Dr. Vita Kontvainė, representative of social partners;**
- 6. Ms Jurgita Novosiolova, students' representative.**