



CENTRE FOR QUALITY ASSESSMENT IN HIGHER EDUCATION

EVALUATION REPORT
STUDY FIELD of JOURNALISM
at Vilnius University

Expert panel:

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2. Dr. Penelope H. Sheets Thibaut, *academic*;
3. Prof. dr. Adrian Hadland, *academic*;
4. Ms Vaiva Žukienė, *representative of social partners*;
5. Mr Matthew Kitching, *students' representative*.

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Report language – English

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Study Field Data*

Title of the study programme	<i>JOURNALISM</i>	<i>ANALYTICAL JOURNALISM</i>
State code	6121JX025	6211JX032
Type of studies	University	University
Cycle of studies	First	Second
Mode of study and duration (in years)	Full time, 4 years	Full time, 2 years
Credit volume	240 ECTS	120 ECTS
Qualification degree and (or) professional qualification	Bachelor of Social Sciences	Master of Social Sciences
Language of instruction	N/A	N/A
Minimum education required	N/A	N/A
Registration date of the study programme	14 June 2002	29 May 2012

** if there are joint / two-fields / interdisciplinary study programs 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 29 April, 2021.

Prof. dr. Jörg Matthes (panel chairperson) *Head of Dep. Of Communication, University of Vienna, Austria;*

Dr. Penelope H. Sheets Thibaut, *Senior lecturer at Dep. of Communication Sciences, University of Amsterdam, Netherlands;*

Prof. dr. Adrian Hadland, *Deputy Dean of Faculty of Arts and Humanities, University of Stirling, U.K.*

Ms. Vaiva Žukienė, *Chair of the Lithuanian Ethics Commission of Journalists and Publishers, Lithuania;*

Mr. Matthew Kitching, *PhD student in Higher Education: Research, Evaluation and Enhancement at Lancaster University, U.K.*

1.3. GENERAL INFORMATION

The documentation submitted by the HEI follows the outline recommended by SKVC. No additional documents have been provided by the HEI before, during and/or after the site visit.

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

Vilnius University, established in 1579, is the oldest and largest higher education institution in Lithuania. The Faculty of Communication is the “Core Academic Unit” (CAU) which oversees the two journalism programs under review; it was established in 1991. This CAU also operates programs in communication, information services and publishing. Across the CAU there are 95 teaching, research, and administrative staff and more than 1000 students, 217 of whom are enrolled in the two journalism programs. While journalism has been studied at Vilnius in some form since 1949, the two-cycled system was introduced in 1997. The first-cycle (bachelor) study programme in journalism was registered in 2002; the second-cycle programs have gone through some changes over the past ten years, with the current second-cycle (master) programme in Analytical Journalism having been established in 2012. The previous evaluations (in 2014 and 2015) accredited the first-cycle Journalism programme for 3 years, and the second-cycle Analytical Journalism programme for 6 years. Speaking to panelists, it’s clear that Vilnius University has long been considered the pre-eminent journalism programme in the country, with the strongest reputation for training the nation’s journalists. It also seems to be respected within the university, with structural support for the faculty and programs on an institutional level.

That said, journalism is a dynamic field with increasingly blurry boundaries. Not all students at the programme want to become journalists—some go on to public relations, advertising, public communications, research, and other professions. The extent to which programs are able to maintain relevant practical and theoretical training in core journalistic skills and topics, while simultaneously training students to adapt to and thrive in the ever-changing, technologically dependent world of journalism, lies at the core of the evaluation task. Students need training for the jobs they want in the short term, but also for uncertain future changes and trends in journalism and media. Additionally, part of the core function of journalism education is to imbue students with an urgent sense of the social responsibilities and democratic imperatives of journalism. Balancing these broader theoretical goals with concrete learning outcomes is also a challenge in our field.

II. GENERAL ASSESSMENT

Journalism 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	2
2.	Links between science (art) and studies	3
3.	Student admission and support	4
4.	Teaching and learning, student performance and graduate employment	3
5.	Teaching staff	3
6.	Learning facilities and resources	4
7.	Study quality management and public information	3
Total:		22

*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.

Journalism 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	2
2.	Links between science (art) and studies	3
3.	Student admission and support	4
4.	Teaching and learning, student performance and graduate employment	3
5.	Teaching staff	3
6.	Learning facilities and resources	4
7.	Study quality management and public information	3
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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 programs to the needs of the society and/or the labour market (not applicable to HEIs operating in exile conditions)

(1) Factual situation

Vilnius University operates the first-cycle Journalism study program and the second-cycle Analytical Journalism study program in the Journalism study field. The first-cycle Journalism study program offers different specialisations, e.g., TV, radio, and written journalism. The second-cycle Analytical Journalism study program focuses on the development of analytical skills while applying the knowledge gained during the bachelor studies, after having worked for a few years or after having studied something else at the bachelor level.

The study programs, in terms of their content and orientation, satisfy the Lithuanian society's need for new broad-profile journalists, who can further advance their analytical journalism skills by continuing their studies in the second cycle.

Both the first and second-cycle programs hire experienced academics and well-known mass media professionals, therefore not only theoretical knowledge is ensured, but the development of subject-practical skills as well.

The practical part of the first-cycle study program has been improved by inviting practitioners as lecturers, improving the infrastructure for practical studies, and increasing the time for internship. However, it is important for staff teaching journalism to be able to oversee relevant practical work and bringing in external people is not necessarily a remedy for staff shortcomings.

Graduates of the first-cycle journalism study field programs can work in media institutions, various media and public relation agencies, as well as in state-run and other institutions, where not only the knowledge and skills of journalism are needed, but also skills in communication and critical thinking. The graduates of the first cycle acquire appropriate competencies to not only start their professional activity, but also to continue the studies in the second-cycle journalism field study program as well as in various other social and humanitarian science field study programs that provide specific knowledge, which later can be applied in the professional journalistic activity.

Graduates of the second-cycle Analytical Journalism studies program can work in specialised publications on public life, politics, economy, culture and art. They can work in traditional and in new media publications, in public relation offices of various organisations, as well as in media monitoring, research and analysis organisations.

Many students, especially in the second cycle studies, work while studying. The students value the internship as one of the most important learning subjects, especially as an opportunity to find a job. According to the data of VU, 72 % of MA graduates from 2018 practice their profession (the survey is made one year after graduating).

(2) Expert judgement/indicator analysis

In general, this is a programme with a strong history, that in particular has made strides in hiring young, dynamic practitioner-teachers to help with practical instruction. It does seem that there is a slight disconnect, however, between the practical instruction and the traditional theoretical/critical thinking instruction given by the academic faculty. Students do not always see the links clearly, and particularly in the first cycle, students argued that the theoretical training could be more rigorous to prepare them for the broader competencies needed in the profession beyond the concrete practical skills.

Another issue that emerged was that once students graduate, the programme does not maintain close ties to them or involve them in maintaining the programme's strong links to the labour market. VU should improve its collaboration with graduates and establish sustainable relationships with alumni. It is very important to involve graduates who have made a successful career in the media field into improving a study process. This will ensure that the learning aims are kept up-to-date with developments in the field, and is perhaps one of the best ways to keep abreast of the needs of the labour market.

Regarding the second cycle programme, quite a few of the students are BA graduates from other study fields. It was mentioned during the meeting with students that they didn't have sufficient help from the teachers, especially in such an important subject as final thesis writing. It is important to ensure that these students get the same level of basic knowledge as the journalism studies BA graduates. This especially applies to the use of journalism-oriented methodologies for research and the writing of scientific work. Staff regards the final theses as one of the most important indicators showing the preparedness of graduates to step into the professional field, and work independently by themselves. It is doubtful that industry assigns equivalent importance to a work of scholarly research than it would to a substantial, news-oriented project that showcases students' talents and competencies.

Having received feedback from VU about the draft report, the expert panel would like to state the following. While the department's response was fair and thorough, it does not address the basic issue which is a continuing disconnect between the learning outcomes and the current needs of employers/graduates in the digital, multimedia age. We acknowledge that a set of new modules has been introduced, several of which are digital, in the earlier years. But practical skills are still relatively limited and there is still too much summative assessment (including a written exam for interviewing technique). There continue to be worrying aspects about VU's programmes including a lack of technical skills upgrading among teaching staff (who tend to opt for pedagogy training or Erasmus+ exchange programmes), a lack of research publications in quality international journals and, as was conveyed to us during our online site visit, some dissatisfaction among students that they are not getting adequate preparation for the job market. In its response, VU says that as new skills and practice activities are expanded to the senior years, these attitudes will change. We expect that to be true and the panel is sure this progress will be reflected in due course and approved in the next review.

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

Vilnius University has the largest journalism study field in Lithuania involving almost 100 members of staff and 1000 students for the First Cycle and Second Cycle programs. The University contributes a substantial number of graduates and postgraduates each year to the broad media industry in Lithuania and across the region and therefore holds an important position in the field. The Masters program “Analytical Journalism” was restructured in 2018 to fill a gap in the training of media analysts. The practical part of the first-cycle study programme has been improved by inviting practitioners as lecturers, improving the infrastructure for practical studies, and increasing the time for professional practice. The significant restructuring suggests HEI support and a synergy of interests, including newly-equipped radio and television training studios opened in 2016.

(2) Expert judgement/indicator analysis

Time and resources have been dedicated to sharpening the cycle 1 and cycle 2 programs at VU. There still remains a gap between current journalistic practice in digital newsrooms and learning outcomes. In general, the courses offer is still relatively focused on traditional media and skills. While speaking with practitioner-teachers, the panel sense a dynamic, more flexible and modern curriculum, but this is not clearly translated in the documentation of learning outcomes or the broader course load. This leaves the programme feeling relatively “safe” rather than a real leader in the field, which might better match VU’s strategic profile. Another interesting point raised by students was that VU should feel positioned to really be a thought-leader in the Lithuanian media market, to set up a center on media critique or monitoring media quality. It has the resources and profile to do so, but this broader investment in and focus on what media can/should do for Lithuanian society is a missed opportunity. It is difficult to overestimate the importance of VU to the history of Lithuanian journalism; however, VU should take into account today's requirements: very fast digitalization, managing the flow of information, understanding mechanism behind creation and spread of fake news, artificial intelligence and so on require specific knowledge. This is why VU has not only to accept the help from alumni but also to look for professionals who are able to implement new programs in a short time.

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

(1) Factual situation

ECTS per module, contact hours and qualification structure all meet the legal requirements. A single study credit represents 25-30 work hours with 240 ECTS required for the cycle 1 programme and 120 ECTS for the Masters.

(2) Expert judgement/indicator analysis

Both cycle programs appear to fulfill all the legal requirements.

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

(1) Factual situation

Following recommendations by an expert working group, significant revisions are underway or planned for both first and second cycle programs that will update the aims and learning outcomes. These revisions, which include modernising the curricula and closer ties between theoretical and practical elements, started to be implemented in 2018 but have not yet been fully incorporated across all years.

The opportunities for practical skill development in the first-cycle have been expanded by implementing the new subjects of Multimedia Storytelling and the Multimedia Project; the time for professional practice has been prolonged and given 5 more credits. These revisions were introduced in response to recommendations from the last review.

In the second cycle, the practical skill development block of Journalism Genres and Expression block has been expanded. Currently the block, together with creative practice in editorial offices, makes up 35 credits, or a third of the study scope. Creative tasks are also planned for optional subjects.

Learning outcomes, however, remain very traditional and largely pre-digital for both programs while practical experience opportunities on both cycles are still limited. First cycle students still graduate having done creative work in only one method of expression.

VU claims in its SER to adhere to a “student-centred study model” in which “constant and formative assessment is especially encouraged and applied in all course units (modules)”. But there is little evidence of this in the assessment schedule contained in the annexures. It would seem in reality that there is a great deal of assessment, mostly summative, in almost every module. Exams, reports and tests are ubiquitous making it difficult to implement formative assessment or for students to learn by making mistakes.

(2) Expert judgement/indicator analysis

Efforts have clearly been made to better synchronise learning outcomes with aims and assessment methods. These have resulted in improvements in both cycle 1 and cycle 2 programs. However, there remains an imbalance between theory and practice in the curriculum and in the learning outcomes in both programs, as well as a heavy emphasis on summative assessment. At times, assessment does not appear to match learning outcomes, for instance in requiring students to sit a written exam on interviewing skills.

The strategy of providing “corrections after feedback” is only mentioned in the assessment plan for one or two modules across both programs.

The discussion with teacher-practitioners did show a high level of flexibility in terms of setting the level of the courses based on students’ entry levels each semester; this flexibility is admirable but also time-consuming for teachers and raises the potential that course quality (and achieved learning outcomes) might differ from year to year depending on the qualities of the students. Notably, with the recent decision to get rid of the entry test requirements for applications, students remarked that many students no longer seem to even necessarily want to be journalists or have the level they used to have. Therefore, this curriculum adjustment might be even more risky when the student body is more dispersed in terms of interests and level.

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

A number of adjustments have been made to ensure consistent development of competencies in both the first and second cycle programs. The practical skills load has been greatly improved, but there is a need to better integrate these skills and the traditional theoretically focused courses. The panel understands many of the theory courses are not taught within the journalism team but in other faculties leading to a disconnect in approach across different disciplines. Academics without a journalism background often view subjects like ethics and public relations from a contrasting perspective. There also seemed to be a significant gap in how the new teacher-practitioners view the subject in comparison with more traditional, academic staff.

At times, these felt like two different worlds who rarely interact, creating a very different atmosphere for students engaging with different faculty across different courses.

(2) Expert judgement/indicator analysis

Essentially, the panel sees that there is not only a theory-practice gap in terms of the integration of courses, but also a gap in terms of the practical skills – mostly focused on traditional media instead of cutting edge skills in data visualization, data journalism, etc. The integration of multimedia courses is a positive development, however.

Notably, students seemed to feel the thesis (especially at master's level) was an outlier and they did not feel prepared for it or sufficiently trained to execute it. Whereas the internship was seen universally as valuable, the thesis had much less positive reactions. This is another indication of the lack of coherence between the theoretical and practical skills. But there is also a lack of coherence within the theoretical instruction as journalism students are getting contrasting, and at times contradictory, advice depending on the disciplinary inclination of the teacher.

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

(1) Factual situation

Students are able to choose from a range of options in the first cycle programme including the choice of Expression Subjects. While preparing the Journalistic Project, they are also given a chance to choose the topics. In Professional Practice, the student independently chooses the media tool, expression, and topic while many choices are presented for both the Course Work and Research Work options. In the second cycle, programme allocates 15 credits for elective subjects. Students in both cycles can participate in exchange programs and students are also given the option of studying a foreign language.

(2) Expert judgement/indicator analysis

A good amount of personal choice is available for students on both programs, though more specific practical experience across different media platforms would be valued.

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

(1) Factual situation

The thesis represents an important cornerstone of both the Bachelors and Masters programs. Students choose their topics and are expected to defend their work. Topics from theses provided were contemporary and relevant to modern society in both cycles with first cycle thesis topics including media convergence and the manipulation of social media and the second cycle theses including analysis of Instagram and Television content. The theses looked comparable with work being produced at other European universities in this field.

(2) Expert judgement/indicator analysis

The thesis complies with the cycle requirements, though an alternative to the thesis, such as a practical project, might help the learning outcomes synchronise more accurately with the needs of the workplace. As noted earlier, several of the second-cycle students in particular felt unprepared for the thesis. Some even expressed skepticism about the quality of supervision they received, which is concerning. The panel would suggest the thesis training and evaluation be re-visited.

Strengths and weaknesses of this evaluation area:

(1) Strengths:

1. A willingness to revise and update curricula and course structure depending on the needs of the students.
2. Clear investment in and support for the programme by the HEI.
3. Highly personalisable programme.

(2) Weaknesses:

1. Learning outcomes of both cycles are in the process of being updated and revised, but while this process is being rolled out, there continues to be an over emphasis on theoretical aspects without providing the full scope of contemporary digital practice. This is particularly the case in the later years of the first cycle program.
2. Simultaneously, and also as a consequence of the gradual implementation of the new revisions, students don't seem to understand and appreciate the value of theoretical training alongside the practical, so there is work to be done on integrating these learning outcomes, and in particular expressing to students the relationship between theoretical orientations, methodological skills, and journalistic competencies.
3. Alumni are ready and willing to be involved, but rarely invited to participate.
4. The thesis – particularly in the second cycle – needs to be better integrated, and training/supervision perhaps reviewed to ensure students can benefit from this major project.

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

There has been an increase in research activities over the past years, although the scores on the weighted sums of positively evaluated research are not self-explanatory. The majority of work is published in journals which suggest high scientific quality, however, the language of the publications as well as the nature of the journals has not been specified. A significant number of journal articles appeared in Journalism Research, Vilnius University's social science journal. The editor in chief is a senior member of the department, which raises concerns about conflict of interests. The number of overall publications in three years (61) is good but not outstanding considering the number of faculty members. There seems to be a trend of rising numbers of journal articles, from 2017 to 2019.

From 2017-2020, 14 research projects were carried out, of which eight were international. Most of the international projects were funded by Horizon 2020. Most national projects were funded by the Research Council of Lithuania. Faculty are active in editorial boards of journals, most of them regional. The study field has established awards, but emerging scholars – in particular – could be additionally supported.

(2) Expert judgement/indicator analysis

Research activities are related to the general scope of the study field, and there is a rising awareness of the importance of internationalising research. However, it is not clear if all faculty members are research active on a similar level. Large-scale European grants such as ERC awards are missing, and the international visibility of the program could be improved. There are noteworthy international collaborations, but a large share of international research projects are COST projects that primarily deal with research networks and not actual research activities. Overall, activities in international journalism research might be extended, and the strategic directions taken by the leadership of the university expressed during the site visit (i.e., excellence in research, international orientation) do not fully translate down to faculty members. There are important research cooperations, but not with leading research institutions, particularly not from other continents. There is strong cooperation with scholars from the Baltic area, but institutional partnerships with leading research institutions might be strengthened.

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

(1) Factual situation

Both programs are suited to the needs of the labour market in the country; research reflects the main practical areas and there are sufficient connections to media practitioners. Overall, the content of studies covers the main areas of research in journalism and teachers transfer

some recent research knowledge to the study field. Yet there is a strong focus on traditional topics in journalism.

(2) Expert judgement/indicator analysis

Current journalistic practices in *digital* newsrooms are not sufficiently integrated into the research activities. The content of studies is adequate, but somewhat behind the latest developments, mainly focusing on traditional media but with a rising awareness for multimedia. Latest trends in journalism theory, such as data driven journalism or recent technological developments, are not fully visible in the research activities. A stronger connection to international journalism research involving recent debates is encouraged. Not all faculty members appear to see the need for top-notch research activities.

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

From the SER, it is not clear how students can get involved in internationally visible research activities, although they are engaged in the Students' Scientific Society. The students are encouraged to read research by Faculty members, but it is not visible to what extent current international literature is being incorporated. Some work by students is published in the Vilnius University social science journal. For students, the research program needs a stronger connection to international research activities.

(2) Expert judgement/indicator analysis

Students are involved in research activities and there have been significant improvements since the last evaluation. Yet it is not fully clear how students are trained to produce internationally visible research. Publications by students in Vilnius University social science journal *Journalism Research* is a good first step, but a step with low visibility. The research consulting system for students is a positive step. The earlier points raised about the master's thesis quality are also relevant here; if students do not feel prepared for or understand the importance of the thesis project, this also reflects on the generally weak connection with scientific research among students in the programs.

Strengths and weaknesses of this evaluation area:

(1) Strengths:

1. There are some international research projects.
2. Students are encouraged to engage in local research activities.
3. Some faculty members are productive in research.

(2) Weaknesses:

1. International visibility of the research activities is low to moderate. Publications in major international outlets are missing. There is only national visibility.
2. There is a strong focus on traditional topics; latest developments in journalism theory are not visible.

3. Faculty seem resigned to the significant challenges to conducting top-notch research, and seem to lack support to try to engage in new, larger international projects.

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 University's Admissions Procedure for First-Cycle Study programs is approved by Senate and enacted in line with national requirements. The procedure, together with entry requirements, is published on the institution's website. Students are admitted through an open admission contest, using a predefined calculation, or 'admission grade'.

Similarly, students applying for master's programs are admitted according to the University's Admission Procedure for Second-Cycle Study programs. Applicants are typically required to hold a bachelor's degree, those with qualifications in an unrelated field are required to complete a bridging course. Students receive additional admissions points if they have delivered research reports at student, national and/or international scientific conferences.

In order to make the study programs more appealing the University has removed the creative contest for the Bachelors course and the entrance examination for the Masters degree. While this has not had the desired effect for the second-cycle, the number of students on the first-cycle programme has increased from 24 in 2017 to 61 in 2020. The success of this has been such that the CAU Board has taken the decision to set a maximum student quota.

New students also receive support from a senior student (known as a 'curator') who helps to answer questions, refer students to other services and generally aid transition to the University.

(2) Expert judgement/indicator analysis

The admissions process is robust and consistently applied. Students generally receive the information they require, especially with respect to course and unit level specifications. However, students reported there is a gap in the provision of student testimonials to help applicants understand what it is like to study on the programme. The panel recommends that the University develop testimonials for prospective students.

The admissions changes made for the first and second cycle have had mixed results, as described above. Some alumni and employers viewed expansion of the programme as having diluted the proportion of students who possess a real commitment to the profession. While the expert panel found that students did show an interest in a wide range of employment opportunities, the experts did not find evidence to confirm the contention that current students are less committed to the profession. However, the experts recognise the potential for this problem to manifest, with subsequent implications for graduate outcomes. At the

same time, aside from the obvious financial benefit, the panel recognise the potential benefits that a more diverse student population can bring to the learning environment. As both approaches have their merits the panel considered that the programme should be clear about its strategic approach to admissions and how to assess its impact and effectiveness.

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 University has procedures in place to recognise foreign qualifications, including partial studies and prior non-formal and informal learning. Decisions on recognition are taken by Study Program Committees. Where students have studied in a foreign country, prior qualifications are assessed on an individual basis to evaluate the study field, type of study and unit aims, content and scope, among other factors. Partial credit is permitted to account for no more than 75% of the University's first and second-cycle programs. Where the University recognises informal learning, it is permitted to account for no more than 50% of a programme. Exemptions are not permitted for final theses.

Between 2017 and 2020, data for the first-cycle programme shows that 9 foreign qualifications were awarded credit, as well as 10 units from credit obtained elsewhere in Lithuania. In addition, 2 applications were refused.

(2) Expert judgement/indicator analysis

The panel found that suitable policies and processes were in place to assess and accredit prior learning. These arrangements also take account of external reference points and good practice.

3.3.3. Evaluation of conditions for ensuring academic mobility of students

(1) Factual situation

The University's International Relations Department is responsible for overseeing international cooperation. The Core Academic Unit Board (CAU) is responsible for organising international cooperation and studies abroad. Information about mobility opportunities are provided on the University and CAU websites, as well as in newsletters and dedicated meetings.

All students have the opportunity to spend a semester or year abroad, including a compulsory internship as specified in the study plan. Additional internships, including for graduates, are also available. Currently, there are 95 Erasmus agreements in place with foreign universities. Mobility opportunities for students have been expanded since the University joined the ARQUS and COIMBRA networks. In order to be eligible to study abroad, students must have completed either one year (first-cycle) or one semester (second-cycle) of their studies.

There is a significant imbalance between incoming and outgoing students and the University recognises the challenges which exist in encouraging student mobility; namely, fear of failure, especially when studying in a foreign language, and students' commitments to employment in Lithuania. Work is currently underway to help overcome these challenges,

including showcasing success stories. University staff also provide general encouragement to students to assure them that the opportunity will be manageable and beneficial.

(2) Expert judgement/indicator analysis

The University has a wide range of agreements and partnerships in place to foster student and staff mobility. Where students do engage in mobility opportunities they are given assistance with course selection, credit matching and finding suitable opportunities. Students informed the panel that participation in mobility opportunities is a challenge at the University, as it is across Lithuanian Higher Education, in part because so many students are required to work to fund their studies. Nevertheless, students also reported to the panel that they considered more could be done to encourage students to participate in mobility initiatives. Students held concerns about employment, integration and other factors which they believed the University could do more to alleviate. The panel concluded that the University could conceivably develop more innovative approaches to encouraging mobility and helping students recognise that it is possible.

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

A wide range of student support is in place including academic consultations and careers, IT and library support. The University also offers cultural and leisure services together with psychological and spiritual support together with services for students with disabilities.

The University operates a mentorship programme designed to provide holistic support. The scheme uses volunteer staff and graduates to share their advice and skills with mentees, helping to support students in preparing for life after graduation. To date, 9 students from the Journalism study field have benefitted from a mentor.

Following significant growth between 2018 and 2019 a large number of career counselling sessions were held with students. Students are able to access diagnostic testing as well as advice about skills and expertise needed for their profession. Students can also take part in training on presentation skills, CV writing and participate in simulated job interviews.

A range of financial support is in place, including scholarship, state loans and particular funding for students with disabilities. Information about how to access financial support is available on the University's website and students are informed about them at induction. High-performing students may also apply for scholarships specific to their study or research field. Evidence provided to the panel shows that a significant number of students receive incentive scholarships on the first-cycle programme (42 in 2019/20). The University has also worked to establish scholarships in partnership with employers. Procedures also exist for students to request tuition discounts should they encounter financial difficulties.

Students can receive professional psychological counselling from the VU Counselling and Training Centre on a wide range of personal issues. The University Chaplain is also at students' disposal where they need religious and spiritual support.

Social support is provided to students by the VU Health and Sports Centre which operates three locations and a wide range of sport and exercise classes. The Students' Union

also organize extra-curricular and cultural events, in addition to providing representation for students.

(2) Expert judgement/indicator analysis

The University's provision of student academic, financial, social, psychological and personal support provided is effective. Students are knowledgeable about the academic, psychological and spiritual support available.

3.3.5 Evaluation of the sufficiency of study information and student counselling

(1) Factual situation

Induction acts as a focal point for providing students with study information. This includes detail on timetables, learning outcomes and assessment, among other important information. Students receive a range of emails and direct information from University departments and the Students' Union, as well as through academic consultations and other meetings.

Students receive academic counselling on a wide range of issues including admissions, academic leave, changing programs and adopting individual study plans. International students, including those on exchange programs, receive the same level of support. Within the Journalism study field, students benefit from 5 academic counsellors and another counsellor dedicated to supporting students with disabilities.

(2) Expert judgement/indicator analysis

The University's provision of student study information and counselling is effective. Students confirm that they have access to all of the programme and course information that they require in order to succeed.

Strengths and weaknesses of this evaluation area:

(1) Strengths:

1. The wide range of high-quality support services, which benefit from high levels of student satisfaction.

(2) Weaknesses:

1. Limited and high-level student testimonials for applicants and prospective students.
2. Despite recognizing national challenges in relation to mobility, students would value greater encouragement and guidance from the University to enable them to take advantage of opportunities

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

Notwithstanding findings elsewhere in this report about the alignment between assessment and learning outcomes, a wide range of teaching and learning methods are employed to engage all learners, and as part of an effort to make the programme stimulating. These include lectures, seminars, group work, research projects and case analysis, among others. Problem-based learning strategies are employed to help support critical thinking. As part of the programme's student-centred model, there is also a focus on regular formative assessment which is applied across all units. The support mechanism described under evaluation area 3, in particular academic counselling, is designed to support this strategic approach.

The University currently employs a 10-point grading scale. This is reinforced by mapping at unit level, where staff explain what is required to achieve grades at different points of the scale.

(2) Expert judgement/indicator analysis

The University has a clear grading system in place which is tailored at the unit level. This is reinforced by University staff employing an adaptive approach whereby requirements are explored using peer learning, feedback on draft assessment and feedback on practical work in seminars. Students value the range of teaching methods employed and understand what is required of them to succeed.

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

(1) Factual situation

In addition to the financial support discussed under 3.3.4, the University operates a Procedure for Adapting Studies to Individual Needs Arising from Disability. Students discuss this with an Accessibility Coordinator who then advises the CAU employee responsible for the provision about any adaptations that might be needed. These needs include visual, auditory, mobility and other impairments and adaptations detailed in an individual study plan and can include the provision of materials in alternative formats, extended assessment times and adaptations to the physical environment. There was one Journalism student studying on such a plan in 2018-19.

The institution is looking to grow the number of scholarships on offer for students from socially vulnerable groups, by creating relationships with socially responsible companies across Lithuania who want to support education. The intention is that these would not just include financial scholarships but a wider range of support.

(2) Expert judgement/indicator analysis

The University has an appropriate range of scholarships, which it is actively seeking to grow. While information on financial support is readily available for prospective students, the panel struggled to identify a proactive approach to encouraging students from socially vulnerable groups to apply. The focus remains heavily on academic excellence. However, the panel believes the institution could support access to higher education from socially vulnerable groups by adopting a more prominent role in promoting the values of higher education and the openness of the institution to relevant groups in Lithuania.

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

Student progress is monitored at unit and programme level. At unit level, lecturers provide feedback about completed tasks and more generally about the progress students are making. The University informed the panel that by reviewing student outcomes, and gathering feedback from students themselves, staff can improve units for subsequent delivery. The Study Administration Department monitors overall progress and the Student Services and Career Department monitors retention and attrition, taking action where necessary. The Study Program Committee maintains oversight of the students defending their thesis in a timely manner.

Students' academic counselling is the primary mechanism for providing student feedback. Varied strategies are employed between the first and second-cycle programs. With less time spent on course work for undergraduate provision, this enables more time for students to meet with staff and discuss their work; whereas, students spend more time on practical activity during the second cycle which means feedback is usually more directed towards specific projects.

Students working on their final theses receive guidance and advice from their supervisors. Defence Committees appointed to scrutinise student work will also provide feedback, including suggesting routes to publication.

(2) Expert judgement/indicator analysis

While there has been a slight increase in the number of students suspending their studies (2017=16, 2019=20), this is in the context of a growth in overall student numbers on the programme. The University reports that the majority of these early leavers occur quickly in the first cycle usually as a result of low student motivation to complete their studies. The panel determined that, in particular considering national challenges with respect to student attrition, the University's flexible approach to students' studies, academic counselling arrangements and wider support services effectively contributed to the monitoring of student progress.

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

(1) Factual situation

The University tracks graduate employment through the Career Tracking Information System (CTIS). The system captures two types of indicator; subjective and objective. Objective

indicators derive from state data; whereas, subjective indicators are formed on the basis of graduate opinion, typically gathered through surveys.

The University has a detailed understanding of the graduate destinations of its journalism students. Students value the contribution that internships make to supporting graduate employment. Students provided examples where internships had led to offers of permanent employment. Students are aware that they can access specialist advisers at Vilnius Career Centre and commented to the team about career days run by the University. Students on the Bachelors recognise that improvements have been made in recent years to strengthen the program; however, they informed the team that, in their opinion, there are some Bachelors courses that are not closely enough related to the program. They also commented on the competency of certain teachers who they felt did not have sufficient journalism experience. Masters students also reported they believe there is an insufficient focus on analytical writing for a programme in Analytical Journalism.

A significant, and growing, proportion of students progress from first to second-cycle study. Data indicates that the employment rate for graduates of the first-cycle programme in the direct field of journalism is modest. However, the University recognises that, upon graduation, students go on to work in a wide range of professions, utilising the transferable communication skills they have acquired. While, there has been no progression from second-cycle students to undertake doctoral qualifications during the period under evaluation, the University has provided evidence of numerous graduates returning to practice for an extended period before continuing third-cycle education.

(2) Expert judgement/indicator analysis

The University's system for tracking the careers of its graduates is fit-for-purpose and effective. Students' and employers confirm that their employability prospects are enhanced by practical experience, including internships. The University also faces challenges under this criterion. Students and employers are concerned about the continued prospect of sourcing enough suitable internships as the number of students on the programme increases. The use of international mobility periods could help to combat this risk but relies on the University addressing the weakness identified under Standard 3, if it is to form part of the solution.

Students are also concerned that the nature and content of some theoretical courses is not making a significant enough contribution to their employability. The Panel recognises the work undertaken by the University to address the balance between practical and theoretical learning since the last accreditation. Nevertheless, it appears the Programme would benefit from keeping this balance, the connectivity between theory and practice and its responsiveness to employer need under constant review. Ensuring that its approach is recognised and understood by all stakeholders.

Most significantly under this standard, the institution should look to strengthen graduate employment outcomes for its Journalism students. For instance, 80% of the 2016 female graduates were employed, as compared to 60% in 2017 and 33,3% in 2018. This is a declining trend that the institution would benefit from arresting. Additionally, and in total, 50% of 2016 first-cycle graduates, 26% of 2017 first-cycle graduates, and 42,85% of 2018 first-cycle graduates work in the journalism field. This fluctuating position and ultimate

decline since 2016 ought to be strengthened, even considering the fact that a higher proportion of students are electing to take up second cycle studies.

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

(1) Factual situation

The University's approach to academic integrity, tolerance and non-discrimination is detailed in its Statute, the Academic Ethics Code of Vilnius University and the Diversity and Equal Opportunities Strategy. The Academic Ethics Code provides students with definitions of different forms of academic misconduct and the Students' Union operates a programme called 'Sazingai', which translates as 'honesty' to help provide further information for students in an accessible format. VU Study Regulations then set out associated penalties.

Breaches of ethics as considered by the CAU Academic Ethics Commission, which includes a representative from the study field. Between 2017 and 2020, a total of 3 students have been expelled from the University. The institution informed the panel that instances of plagiarism are currently decreasing, following the introduction of the 'Honesty' programme and other measures. An anonymous hotline has been established for staff to report suspected violations of academic ethics or issues of discrimination; however, no allegations have been received to date.

(2) Expert judgement/indicator analysis

The University considers that there is very minimal plagiarism, in part due to their effective preventative work, including instructions to students, and use of detection software. This work, and the University's decision to establish a hotline were viewed as positive developments by the panel. However, the fact that only a small amount of plagiarism cases have been identified, and nobody has used the hotline to date, means the University should continue to monitor the effectiveness of its arrangements.

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

Students may submit an academic appeal against a grade to the Appeals Commission within 5 days of the publication of results. Between 2017 and 2020, the University received one appeal from a student studying Analytical Journalism. No appeals have been received from the first-cycle programme.

Students are also permitted to submit a complaint about an aspect of their experience by placing it in writing to the Administration or the Dean. The institution considers that the majority of issues are resolved informally at programme level.

(2) Expert judgement/indicator analysis

The University has suitable processes in place for handling complaints and appeals. The fact that one appeal has been received is evidence that at least some students are aware of the process and feel able to submit appeals. The University may benefit from ensuring that all students are familiar with the formal processes in this area.

Strengths and weaknesses of this evaluation area:

(1) Strengths:

1. The range of opportunities available for students to discuss their progress and receive feedback on their work.

(2) Weaknesses:

3. The lack of a proactive approach to promoting the field of journalism among socially vulnerable groups.
2. Limited monitoring of the balance between theory and practice and the extent to which the students and employers recognise that this is operating effectively.
3. Under-developed monitoring processes to assure the effectiveness of the University academic misconduct processes.
4. Not all students are familiar with the formal processes for complaints and appeals.
5. Graduate employability data for the program is insufficient and the program should work to ensure more students progress into journalistic careers.

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

There is a broad list of teaching staff with unique, adequate and diverse skills, generally well suited for the needs of the programs. Overall, the number of teaching staff as well as their qualifications are adequate. Also, teaching staff rotation was minimal during the evaluation period. As detailed in the SER, the legal requirements for the teaching staff are met. Teachers draw on rich practical experiences, especially with respect to traditional topics in journalism. Teaching staff are evaluated every five years, ensuring the quality and contemporaneity of the education. The evaluation looks at the number of published research articles, conference visibility, supervision, publications, and other research activity. Student feedback on the work of the evaluated teacher is also taken into account. However, the consequences of the evaluation are not entirely clear.

Teaching staff are involved in sufficient practical and research oriented activities. As for instance, teaching staff was present at ECREA conference. However, not all teachers are connected to international journalism research. The total ratio of teaching staff and students in the field is 1:6.

(2) Expert judgement/indicator analysis

Overall, the teaching staff serves well the needs of the study field. The measures to increase English language classes are not fully clear. For the evaluation of teaching staff, the number of

published research articles, conference attendance, or research supervision are relevant indicators. But according to those indicators, not all teaching staff seem to perform well.

The international visibility of the teaching staff could be improved, not all teachers are connected to the latest trends of the journalism profession.

The number of foreign lectures could be increased, but the recently established relationship with the Amsterdam School of Communication Research is outstanding.

The ratio of teaching staff and students is adequate.

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

Some of the teaching staff engage in teaching visits abroad (Erasmus+ teaching visits) and teachers are encouraged to register for Erasmus+ teaching visits regularly. Faculty members are provided with sufficient information about academic mobility. Agreements with research institutions have been made strategically, as for instance with the University of Amsterdam, more recently. There were visits from foreign lectures from Norway, Poland, Denmark, or the U.S.

(2) Expert judgement/indicator analysis

The Erasmus+ teaching visits are a strength of the programs. Their number of incoming and outgoing visits is sufficient but could be further increased. No all faculty members are active in teaching exchange, but the information provided is sufficient.

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

(1) Factual situation

Teaching competences are constantly developed with pedagogy-oriented measures as well as exchange visits to other universities, mainly via the Erasmus+ programme. Vilnius University offers 16 different training programs for teaching skills, such as active learning methods, student group work, supervision, or communication skills. Furthermore, five training workshops about innovative teaching, learning, and evaluation methods were delivered by guest lecturers from abroad. Also, teachers can apply for research competency development courses at any time. Noteworthy, a relationship with the Amsterdam School of Communication Research, a leading research Department in the world, has recently been established.

(2) Expert judgement/indicator analysis

The conditions to improve the competences of the teaching staff are adequate, as they are a broad range of support schemes. More recent media-specific skills, particularly with respect to emerging technologies, are not integrated.

Strengths and weaknesses of this evaluation area:

(1) Strengths:

1. There is an international exchange via Erasmus+. The recent partnership with the Amsterdam School of Communication Research is a strength.

2. There is a strong practical expertise of the teaching staff in respect to traditional journalism.

(2) Weaknesses:

1. Not all teaching staff is sufficiently active in research, particularly in internationally visible research.
2. Not all faculty are prepared and keep up with the latest trends in journalism.

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

VU learning facilities are located in a few premises. The Faculty of Communication has 24 rooms, providing 936 workplaces in total. The rooms have the latest equipment, which allows for video material and active teaching and learning methods to be widely used in the study program. All students and teachers in the University premises can use fast Eduroam wifi. Program software, such as Microsoft Office, Adobe Master Suite publishing software suite, etc, is regularly updated from the University funds, and is sufficient for performing more complicated graphic design, layout, video editing, statistics, analysis, and other tasks.

The students of the field programs can use the 109 workplaces in the VUL Communication Reading Room (in the VU Library Scientific Communication and Information centre known as MKIC). Forty three of those workplaces are computerised, 23 are lounge spaces or mobile workplaces. Eight workplaces are equipped with special software and technical gear.

The VU Library Scientific Communication and Information Centre is established in a building constructed in 2013, so the premises are up to date and convenient for all users. An important aspect was the setting up of seven professionally equipped training TV channels and radio stations in 2016. The studios have all the necessary technical and software equipment needed for students to perform their self-study tasks: computers, video cameras, photo cameras, headphones, different microphones, dictating machines, special panels, and other auxiliary hardware used to perform radio and TV studio work. Professionally-equipped television and radio training studios that are identical to professional studios are an exceptional advantage.

The Communication reading room has more than 37,000 specialised journals on the topics of human, social, communication and information, and journalism sciences. Students have full access to the latest communication and information field research journal sets. Vilnius University library implements database subscriptions largely through membership of Lithuanian Research Library Consortium (LMBA).

In the last three years, the Library has significantly expanded the supply of electronic book subscriptions in databases. VU students and teachers can connect to the subscription databases in the Vilnius University area, and while at home, they can connect to the same databases through VU VPN service. All electronic resources can be accessed via the VU Library website.

VU is subscribed to the electronic book databases of other Lithuanian universities: Vytautas Magnus University, Vilnius Gediminas Technical University (Vilnius Tech) and Kaunas' University of Technology.

Vulnerable students are provided with compensatory tools.

(2) Expert judgement/indicator analysis

Premises, places for practical activities, information resources for studies (i.e. library publications and databases) are very well suitable for implementing high quality studies.

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

(1) Factual situation

The resources needed for the field study implementation are updated through yearly purchases made from the targeted University funds and / or stipulated in the Faculty's budget. The specific subject-related needs (mixed audience subjects for full-time field program students and students under international exchange programs) are funded from the targeted funds centrally allocated to faculties. Since 2018, the Faculty's academic staff has been encouraged to purchase centrally the resources needed for study implementation, by using the opportunity provided by the VU Library to purchase the journals necessary for studies.

(2) Expert judgement/indicator analysis

Vilnius University library implements the greatest part of database subscriptions through the membership of Lithuanian Research Library Consorciium (LMBA), which professionally represents research and study institutions.

The University gives appropriate attention to the studying facilities, so that they are effective, contemporary and regularly renewed.

Strengths and weaknesses of this evaluation area:

(1) Strengths:

1. Premises, places for practical activities, information resources for studies (i.e. library publications and databases) are suitable for implementing high quality studies.

(2) Weaknesses: none found

3.7. STUDY QUALITY MANAGEMENT AND PUBLIC INFORMATION

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

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

(1) Factual situation

The primary body for study quality monitoring is the Study Program Committee. This committee comprises teachers in the programme, a student representative and social partners – two from LRT for the first-cycle programme, and one from the Lithuanian Journalism Centre for the second-cycle programme. These committees report to a faculty council annually, providing a report about the implementation of the programme. These reports gather data from a number of monitoring devices, ranging from student surveys, input from social partners, study programme data on admissions, workload, expenses, internationalisation, grades, etc. In 2018, a significant rearrangement was undertaken, specifically with regard to hiring more “teacher-researchers” who work (or have worked) in the mass media, as well as younger researchers with an eye on social change and media system dynamics. This also instituted a new professional trajectory for practitioner-teachers, the “associate professor of partnership” role, which was spoken of highly by those involved. An additional, recent change worth noting is the split into two committees with two separate chairs for the two study cycles; this seems to have been effective.

(2) Expert judgement/indicator analysis

In general, it seems that a structure is present for regular monitoring of the programs. However, the formality of the process, as well as clarity about which teachers and social partners are involved, could be improved, at least with regard to how it is described in the Self-Evaluation Report. Admittedly, it was difficult for the panel to understand at some points whether flaws in the study quality monitoring were due to a poorly written SER, or actual flaws in the systems. The panel missed transparency – both in the SER and in discussions during the site visit – about who can be a member of the committee, for how long, how often it meets, and in what ways its very many tasks are delegated. After a response from the SER group to the draft report, more clarity was given which reassured us that these procedures are well designed, even if more transparency might benefit the community.

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

(1) Factual situation

As described, the SPC structure includes a student representative from both cycle programs, as well as at least one social partner (two in the case of the first-cycle programme). It is clear that the strongest social partner of the programme is LRT, and that LRT’s input is actively and routinely taken into account to address student needs (particularly with regard to the internship). The number of social partners at the SPC is limited to a maximum of two members, for procedural reasons related to reaching a quorum.

(2) Expert judgement/indicator analysis

It's not clear from the SER how the student or social partners are selected, nor how often the social partner membership rotates. Furthermore, the panel noticed an ostensible lack of alumni in the SPC structure, although several younger members of the SPC who are also faculty or social partners are also alumni. It might be beneficial to incorporate alumni as a separate role in the SPC, so that their voice is considered distinctly from those who are lecturing in the programme or working in the social partners, however.

Furthermore, in speaking with the alumni during the (online) site visit, the panel noticed that many would welcome the opportunity to be more involved in the program after graduation, and this seems like an excellent way to involve them—also to get their valuable insights as to how the programme served their professional needs and what aspects might warrant change based on their experiences. Alumni gave their impression that VU is not interested in the opinion of alumni systematically, and all the communication /interaction is rather random and depends on personal connections. The alumni expressed a desire to communicate and collaborate more with their Alma Mater. Many of them occupy important positions in the media field and are ready to help VU with their experience, knowledge and skills to create a contemporary shape of teaching that corresponds with today's requirements. (See also evaluation area 3.1.1, which speaks to how a lack of meaningful alumni involvement undermines the curriculum's ability to remain cutting edge and up-to-date.)

In response to this critique, the SER group clarified that alumni of both first and second cycle programs are already actively involved in teaching (SER appendix no. 4), participation in the study programme committees (SER p. 47), cooperation in implementing of students' professional practices (SER p. 58), consultations regarding improvements of the programmes (SER p. 8), advertisement and popularisation of the programmes and journalism in general (SER p. 34). The most prominent alumni are featured on the dedicated virtual platform, managed by the Faculty: <https://www.kf.vu.lt/apie/alumni-galerija> . They are particularly proud of the close collaboration and involvement manifested by continued support and trust provided by their alumna, who serves as general director of the Lithuanian radio and television company, and takes part in all the activities stated above. In response to this clarification, the panel acknowledges that this is a more robust incorporation of alumni than was our initial impression. However, the experts were struck by the alumni themselves who, during the site visit, did not give the same impression. Perhaps the centrality of this particularly distinguished alumna ends up giving other alumni the perception that they are not given the opportunity to be involved. In any case, we encourage the department to consider how it might be able to involve more alumni more concretely in the SPC process, specifically.

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

(1) Factual situation

In 2018, a new 'department of communication' was established to better publicize the study programs and to attract students. This also involved creating special publications with student interviews, graduate career success stories, etc. Video material advertising the programme has also been created. After eliminating several of the entry requirements, in

particular the extra creative step for the first-cycle studies, student numbers in the first cycle are up quite dramatically.

(2) Expert judgement/indicator analysis

Between the new communication efforts and the information provided to students during their orientation, it seems that sufficient information is indeed provided to students about the programs. Furthermore, information about the quality assurance processes undertaken by the SPC is regularly shared with the students through working groups, and the notes and meeting recordings are available on the VU intranet. These are excellent means of transparency and reporting of the quality assurance process.

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 VU uses a standardized, centralised survey of students at the end of each semester, asking about all their subjects and their general satisfaction with their studies. Response rates are often very low. The CAU has tried to implement alternative methods--the SER mentions a student-run independent student satisfaction survey and a student representative survey--to gain student feedback. Feedback from these surveys was used to inform distance learning choices in the curriculum, and the SER notes that more positive evaluations occurred after teachers took into account the feedback on distance learning.

(2) Expert judgement/indicator analysis

Regarding the twice-yearly centralised survey and piecemeal approach to other surveys, more personalized and yet systematic moments of gathering feedback would be useful, as well as a clear system for keeping track of the feedback over time and noting when changes have been made in response to specific trends in evaluations would be useful—also for students. Students expressed frustration with the current evaluation system which feels repetitive, tedious and time-consuming, yet not particular enough to each course, because many items don't apply to all courses. They did not mention the “alternative methods” noted in the SER and in the previous point; this suggests that students are not entirely aware of the differences between these evaluation systems. The panel believes students would benefit from feedback/evaluation instruments more closely tailored to their modules and not centralised from the VU. Perhaps using focus groups on an annual basis would be an option.

The review panel also received a somewhat mixed picture from students with regard to feedback; some said they could give feedback on their modules and expected it to be responded to; others expressed that when they, e.g., encountered a stressful testing situation, there was no real opportunity to provide feedback, and that it should be changed in the future. It's also not clear from the SER or site visits the extent to which feedback from faculty or the department is given to students themselves. All of these aspects should be more transparent for students and stakeholders to ensure more systematic and rigorous study quality management.

Strengths and weaknesses of this evaluation area:

(1) Strengths:

1. The SPC as a formal body undertakes a number of different tasks to evaluate, monitor, and change the programme in response to the input of teachers, student representatives and social partners. The procedures and notes from these meetings are made available to the community and closely scrutinized by the Board of the Faculty.
2. The development of the Department of Communication in 2018 improved the public communication of the university/CAU in terms of publicizing its study programs.

(2) Weaknesses:

1. The composition of the SPC does not include alumni as a separate role (only in their function as teachers or social partners).
2. The annual VU student survey does not work well for students – it is tedious, repetitive, and many questions do not pertain to their specific modules. Additional feedback moments seem possible but are not formalized. As a result, (some) students do not feel they have a voice or that their concerns are responded to.

IV. EXAMPLES OF EXCELLENCE

The newly developed career paths for teacher-practitioners, providing some career recognition and security for those media professionals who also teach in the programme, is a very positive development. Involved teacher-practitioners quite appreciated it, and their involvement in the teaching clearly benefits students who receive more dynamic, first-hand training in (particularly) practical journalism skills. This is an excellent way for an HEI to invest in dynamic, professional faculty and keep them motivated.

V. RECOMMENDATIONS

Evaluation Area	Recommendations for the Evaluation Area (study cycle)
<p>Intended and achieved learning outcomes and curriculum</p>	<p>Due to the high volume of summative assessment, the panel would recommend a mapping exercise of assessment in both cycles and an evaluation of the extent of assessment, its necessity and the link to learning outcomes.</p> <p>Even more integration of practical elements to both cycles as many of the modules remain highly theoretical.</p> <p>The panel recommends an updating of the aims and learning outcomes of the study cycle to better match recent global trends and counterbalance the classical orientation of the programs.</p> <p>Investigate with students, staff and industry the desirability of offering a practical journalistic alternative to the dissertation.</p>
<p>Links between science (art) and studies</p>	<p>The panel had the impression that there are noteworthy international research efforts, especially with respect to international grants. However, the international orientation of the research activities should be increased in the future. International visibility is still low to moderate. Additional measures need to be taken to increase passion for state-of-the art research among faculty members.</p> <p>The awareness and orientation to publish in the leading outlets of international journalism research should increase. Publications in local or national journals are clearly not sufficient, international outlets should be targeted to a greater extent.</p> <p>The panel appreciated the integration of students into research projects. But this should also occur at an internationally competitive level.</p> <p>The research foci are dominated by a strong focus on traditional journalism topics. On the one hand, this is a great strength. On the other hand, more attention needs to be paid to the latest developments in journalism theory and journalism research.</p>

<p>Student admission and support</p>	<p>The University should develop more detailed student testimonials at programs level for applicants and prospective students.</p> <p>The University should strengthen guidance and support for students considering mobility opportunities to ensure that the programs continue to be able to offer enough high-quality internships for students.</p>
<p>Teaching and learning, student performance and graduate employment</p>	<p>Consider a more proactive approach to promoting the field of journalism among socially vulnerable groups.</p> <p>Continue to monitor the balance between theory and practice and the extent to which the students and employers recognise that this is operating effectively.</p> <p>Through internal quality assurance, monitor the effectiveness of the University's academic misconduct processes.</p> <p>Ensure all students are familiar with formal processes for complaints and appeals.</p> <p>The programs should work to increase the number of students who progress into journalistic careers.</p>
<p>Teaching staff</p>	<p>The panel appreciated the international teaching exchanges via Erasmus+ and further encourages all faculty members to increase these efforts.</p> <p>The panel also appreciated the practical expertise of the teaching staff with respect to classic journalism topics. However, more efforts are needed to involve all teaching staff members into research activities, particularly internationally impactful ones.</p> <p>The teaching staff is well trained in practical journalism, but there is a danger that more recent trends and developments in journalism are missed out. The experts recommend to better connect current teaching staff to recent developments in journalism practice and research.</p>

<p>Learning facilities and resources</p>	<p>University gives appropriate attention to the studying facilities, so that they are effective, contemporary and regularly renewed. It is important to not lose focus on measures that ensure quality of studies, to have up-to-date scientific literature and modern equipment; to continuously ensure that students have the possibility to access the main online resources also in the future.</p>
<p>Study quality management and public information</p>	<p>The composition of the SPC should be varied. The panel recommends incorporating alumni as a distinct group, as well as a broader range of social partners if possible, or perhaps more regularly rotating social partners. It may be that delegating work to subsets of the committee makes most sense to avoid overburdening SPC members.</p> <p>The SPC should be more transparent about its work. The annual publishing of a report about the work of the SPC and changes made to the curriculum would be helpful not only for the Faculty Council, but also for students/the departmental community more broadly.</p> <p>Improve and formalize the collection of student feedback about their course modules/programme more generally: offering annual or semi-annual focus groups with students, or incorporating more students into the SPC – would be a way to ensure students feel they are given more of a voice.</p> <p>The next SER should be more clearly written, particularly with regard to giving very specific, concrete reflection upon the strengths and weaknesses of the current systems.</p>

VI. SUMMARY

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

The journalism study field at VU has a longstanding tradition. The HEI is highly supportive of the programs, and they have a strong national profile. These strengths, however, come with the burden of needing to continuously work to maintain the top position. While the hiring and professionalization of the career paths of teacher-practitioners has kept the teaching and curriculum vibrant, and certainly improved the practical training given to students, the expert panel can also see that there is a disconnect between this strong practical training and (a) the theoretical training students receive, as well as (b) the latest developments in the journalistic field (both in research and practice). Regarding point (a), whereas some students do not seem

to recognize and appreciate the value of the theoretical training, others felt it was not rigorous enough. It seems there is a potential gap here, where the role, normative value, and democratic imperative of journalism (and journalism research) in society can be more integrated throughout the coursework, and more linked to practice throughout the curriculum. Regarding point (b), the courses and particularly learning outcomes are still relatively focused on older media forms; while the professional market should of course dictate the primary skills taught, the field of journalism is clearly trending toward newer technologies, the centrality of data and visualization, and the competencies of being able to integrate new tech skills into a robust and responsible journalistic practice. The panel knows that VU should be a leader in the national education market, and should be a highly visible, prominent international research partner. The panel is in opinion that VU's profile sets the bar even higher for VU to succeed in these elements, and the panel encourages more systematic reflection on, evaluation of, and updating of the curriculum, learning outcomes, and instructional styles in order to remain in this top position. Additional areas for attention include the involvement of alumni in the programme, the transparency around the procedures of programs review, the integration of and preparation for the master's thesis, and the international profile as well as the international impact of research activities – both among faculty and students.

Expert panel chairperson signature:

Prof. dr. Jörg Matthes