



STUDIJŲ KOKYBĖS VERTINIMO CENTRAS
CENTRE FOR QUALITY ASSESSMENT IN HIGHER EDUCATION

MEDICAL TECHNOLOGY FIELD OF STUDY

Vilnius University

EXTERNAL EVALUATION REPORT

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I. INTRODUCTION

1.1. OUTLINE OF THE EVALUATION PROCESS

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

1.2. REVIEW PANEL

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

The composition of the review panel was as follows:

1. Panel chair: Prof. dr. Dalia Giedrimienė
2. Academic member: doc. dr. Aiga Švede
3. Academic member: doc. dr. Andžela Šešok
4. Social partner representative: doc. dr. Aurika Vanckavičienė
5. Student representative: Ömer Faruk Sönmez

1.3. SITE VISIT

The site visit was organised on 4 November 2025 onsite.

Meetings with the following members of the staff and stakeholders took place during the site visit:

- Senior management and administrative staff of the faculty(ies);
- Team responsible for preparation of the SER;
- Teaching staff;
- Students;
- Alumni and social stakeholders including employers.

There was a need for translation during the meeting with teaching staff, social partners and graduates.

1.4. BACKGROUND OF THE REVIEW

Overview of the HEI

Vilnius University (VU) is the oldest and largest higher education institution in Lithuania established in 1579 and is a public institution governed by the Senate, the Council and the Rector. It consists of 15 core academic units designated as 11 faculties, 1 institute, 1 centre, 1 academy and 1 business school with additional 12 core non-academic units. The University offers undergraduate, postgraduate and doctoral studies in the fields of humanities, social sciences, natural sciences, medical and health sciences, and technological sciences. It offers studies in 12 study field groups and 60 study fields.

Overview of the study field

Study field of Medical Technology includes a one first-cycle study programme in Optometry. This study programme was launched in 2021. As it is the only study program in Optometry at VU the aim is to offer a bachelor's degree in health sciences and the professional qualification of an optometrist. The graduates will acquire science-based knowledge and practical skills necessary for high-quality diagnosis, correction of defects and recognition of eye diseases using modern innovative technologies. Strategically, this is one of the programs created based on the assessment of the needs of society and the labour market, and the University capabilities and also by using the scientific and teaching potential with the available financial, physical and information resources.

Previous external evaluations:

Based on SER (p.10), the last external evaluation of the Optometry was in 2021 with positive assessment. It presented some recommendations, such as:

1. To increase the scope of topics for the bachelor's thesis proposed by social partners and to add a lecture into the Blindness and Visual Impairment module in collaboration with a social partner.
2. To engage students to participate in international research projects with social partners and encourage student participation in research activities.
3. To improve networking opportunities for cooperation with other universities through ARQUS and COIMBRA networks or other contacts. Course units could be prepared in English. Financial support for students should be expanded and to encourage students for taking internships and jobs in the regions.

As master's degree in optometry in Lithuania is not available, graduates with bachelor's degree can continue their studies in Latvia, Sweden, Norway and other countries while waiting for the Master's Program approval at VU.

The increase in teaching staff mobility by increasing funding and cooperation with partner universities with similar programmes abroad would be beneficial. Also, the inclusion of optometry practitioners by increasing the number of optometrists among the teaching staff was recommended. Pedagogical competencies of healthcare practitioners and doctors should be improved by their participation in training programmes. Also attract own graduates into pedagogical activities.

In order to ensure high quality training and to meet modern teaching and practice requirements the expansion and upgrade of medical equipment on regular basis is necessary. An ophthalmoscopy simulator should be introduced, and a separate optometric lab should be set up.

Student feedback on individual course units should be better organized. The focus on improvement of the educational competencies of teaching staff is important for the future and better communication with students, teaching staff and social partners how to use survey results was suggested.

Documents and information used in the review

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

- *Self-evaluation report and its annexes.*
- *Final theses and additional requested information after the visit:*
- *The basic principles of Ethics at the Vilnius University*
- *The Code of Academic Ethics*
- *The Guidelines on Artificial Intelligence Usage at Vilnius University*
- *Republic of Lithuania Law on Ethics and Biomedical Research*
- *Study Regulations of Vilnius University*
- *Procedure For Final Examinations in The Study Programmes of the Faculty of Medicine of Vilnius University*
- *Examples of modules descriptors:*
 - o "Biomedical Sciences. General and Eye Anatomy and Histology"
 - o "Geometric and Wave Optics"
 - o "Eye diseases and contact lenses. Contactology and Contact Lenses"
 - o "Optometrist's practice. Professional Optics and Ergonomics"
 - o "Research Methodology and Bachelor's Thesis. Final Qualification Exam".

Additional sources of information used by the review panel:

The panel has used the following additional sources of information for specific tasks related to evaluation areas:

- Medical Technology program related information from VU website.

II. STUDY PROGRAMMES IN THE FIELD

First cycle/LTQF 6

Title of the study programme	Optometry
State code	6121GX020
Type of study (college/university)	University
Study cycle	First cycle
Mode of study (full time/part time) and nominal duration (in years)	Full-time, 4 years
Workload in ECTS	240
Award (degree and/or professional qualification)	Bachelor of Health Sciences and professional qualification as an optometrist
Language of instruction	Lithuanian, English
Admission requirements	
First registration date	27 April 2021
Comments (including remarks on joint or interdisciplinary nature of the programme, mode of provision)	

III. ASSESSMENT IN POINTS BY CYCLE AND EVALUATION AREAS

The **first cycle** of the medical technology field of study is given a **positive** evaluation.

No.	Evaluation Area	Evaluation points*
1.	Study aims, learning outcomes and curriculum	3
2.	Links between scientific (or artistic) research and higher education	3
3.	Student admission and support	3
4.	Teaching and learning, student assessment, and graduate employment	3
5.	Teaching staff	4
6.	Learning facilities and resources	3
7.	Quality assurance and public information	3
Total:		22

*

1 (unsatisfactory) - the area does not meet the minimum requirements, there are substantial shortcomings that hinder the implementation of the programmes in the field.

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

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

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

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

IV. STUDY FIELD ANALYSIS

AREA 1: STUDY AIMS, LEARNING OUTCOMES AND CURRICULUM

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

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

Study programme Optometry (hereafter, SP Optometry) – is the only one first cycle programme in medical technology field of study at VU. The programme is relevant for the labour market and opens new opportunities for students to obtain a bachelor's degree in health sciences and the professional qualifications as an optometrist or personal health care specialist. This new programme (launched in 2021) is based on long-term experience and assessment of the needs of labour market in Lithuania. The programme also has successfully used the scientific and teaching potential of VU, including financial, physical and information resources. It has been confirmed during the site visit that the programme achieved the goal by offering a bachelor's degree in health sciences and the professional qualification of an optometrist being the only optometry study program in Lithuania. This program also proves the interdisciplinary nature of the studies, the interconnection between academic curriculum and practical application. It offers an individualization based on student's needs and created specialized interdisciplinary versions in the programme delivery. Overall, the design of the program is well aligned with the needs to achieve the relevant and expected learning outcomes and to prepare the graduates to enter the labour market directly after graduation.

The aims and outcomes of the study programme in the study field have been uniquely formulated to correspond to qualification levels defined in the Lithuanian Qualifications Framework with approach to the complexity, autonomy and variability of the activity and used to describe the outcomes for each study cycles (by using the Descriptor of Study Cycles) and also included the general and specific learning outcomes specified in the Descriptor of the Medical Technology field of study. As it has been confirmed at SER (Page 11) and by stakeholders during the site visit, there is still the shortage of optometrists in Lithuania, especially in some regions (more distant from Vilnius and Kaunas - northeast and west) where optometrists can provide not only vision examination and correction services, but also primary eye health care services.

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

The aims and learning objectives are directly aligned with VU mission, future goals and strategy as it is presented in SER and confirmed during the site visit. The strategic direction "Creating the Society and the State" contains the long-term aim of preparing the new generation of professionals "Graduates capable of solving societal problems". This is implemented in the study programme and is accomplished by the training an optometrist with specialist knowledge and necessary skills.

It is also worth to notice, that in this case less-time or resource-intense training than an ophthalmologist is required and optometrists can take over part of the eye care services from ophthalmologists by allowing them to focus on the provision of secondary or tertiary level eye care. As a benefit for the labour market the graduates from this programme will enter health care services sooner and provide important and timely optometric care, such as recording of medical history, performing of vision examination, necessary diagnostic measurements and other examinations to detect vision impairments or eye diseases.

ANALYSIS AND CONCLUSION (regarding 1.1.)

The aims and learning outcomes of SP Optometry have been achieved by providing the training of professionals serving for personal healthcare with a bachelor's degree in health sciences and the professional qualifications as an optometrist. The graduates will have a broad science-based knowledge and practical skills. Graduates of SP Optometry obtain the competencies to work at personal healthcare institutions independently or in a team with other healthcare or social care professionals.

The graduates from this programme will have the science-based knowledge, practical skills for comprehensive vision examination, vision correction and detection of eye diseases. They will be trained by using modern innovative technologies, as it has been confirmed during the site visit, especially during the meeting with stakeholders. The options for graduates to be employed and provide health care related services are increasing as they will have competencies to work at personal healthcare institutions, including social care institutions, or optical stores.

As number of optometry-based services are growing, especially for aging population in the country, the aims and learning outcomes, such as performing vision correction, dispensing of spectacles or contact lenses are well aligned with economic and social needs, as well as HEI mission to improve education and delivery of health care services.

1.2.	Programmes comply with legal requirements, while curriculum design, curriculum, teaching/learning and assessment methods enable students to achieve study aims and learning outcomes
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FACTUAL SITUATION

1.2.1. Programmes comply with legal requirements

The scope, structure and content delivered at VU in the Medical Technology study field shows the overall compliance with the study Descriptor approved by the Minister of Education, Sports and Science. The legal requirements are consistent with the Lithuanian Qualifications Framework, with the Description of General Requirements for Study Implementation, the Descriptor of Study Cycles, with the Descriptor of the Medical Technology Study Field, and with the Study Regulations of Vilnius University.

The profession of an optometrist is regulated by medical standard (MN 166:2018 Optometrist) and is a licensed occupation.

Based on the formal requirements for the first cycle studies, SP Optometry is compliant with the planned study programme outcomes that correspond to the awarded qualification of level 6.

SP Optometry fully complies with the requirements for the first-cycle study programme: one year of full-time studies in the program corresponds to 60 credits; the bachelor's degree is awarded after completion of 240 credits; the structure of the programme is based on study field course units (modules) – no less than 120 credits; the final thesis is 15 credits and internship (practice) is 40 credits.

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

The objectives of the study programme and learning outcomes are consistent with the aim of the programme – to prepare qualified optometrists who will be able to work independently (either as a business entity, including optical stores, hospitals and private practice (e.g., as an optician or an optometrist).

Using a variety of study methods the curriculum aims are achieved through course units (modules). Each module has defined aim and intended outcomes and includes contact hours and self-study, determined by the lecturer and approved by the SPC. Student workloads consist of required and elective course units. Study methods include lectures, seminars, discussions, demonstrations and practice of hands-on activities, work in pairs or as a team.

Overall, SP Optometry based on variety of teaching methods and tools mainly delivered by well-organized teaching modules provides students with extensive theoretical knowledge, especially background and application of physics and optics, as well as anatomy and physiology.

Students take examinations after the completion of the individual module. There are 4-5 modules per semester. Assessment methods (exams for theoretical knowledge) or assessment of practical skills and competencies correspond to learning outcomes and allow for an objective assessment of student's achievements.

The academic load and obtained knowledge were extensively discussed during the site visit with students and teaching staff. It was confirmed that teaching/learning and assessment methods are well aligned and prepare students well for final steps of the completion of the study programme.

The structure and delivery methods are well presented in the Description of the Optometry Program, which was received as an additional document after the site visit. It also presents a variety of study tools used to obtain the theoretical knowledge and practical skills through the seminars, independent studies of literature, practice in the classroom or auditorium, etc.

As it has been discussed and clarified during the site visit with students, alumni and stakeholders, a better alignment of science courses in the curriculum is recommended, especially for the studies during the first and second years of academic curriculum. The intense course load regarding inclusion of anatomy and physiology, also physics modules would be recommended to be re-adjusted to make the content delivered during these two first years to be more practice in optometry oriented and integrated with clinical applications.

1.2.3. Curriculum ensures consistent development of student competences

Based on programme design and each course (module) content, the curriculum ensures the intended outcomes and development of student competencies. This study programme is well situated along with others at a university-level and provides systematic, theoretical, and research-based knowledge and skills. The study program meets the academic requirements as it is set up in the "Descriptor of the Medical Technology Study Field" and these requirements in the curriculum are sufficient to achieve the expected learning outcomes, which is required by legal acts.

University operative system ensures the compliance with the cycle, academic and professional requirements.

The evaluation shows that the SP Optometry in the field of Medical Technology meets the academic and professional requirements by educating professionals with multidisciplinary competencies which is beneficial for future independent research and professional activities or participation of graduates in research or public life.

Incorporation of case-based studies and scenarios into the curriculum (lectures, seminars or self-study) and regular update of new practically oriented scenarios would be important points for the consistent development of student competencies.

The selection of practical sites is extremely important, and students have noticed that they like and value the experiences obtained and are able to work on their competencies in real life clinical settings. Based on the feedback obtained during the site visit from social partners, graduates and stakeholders, there is insufficient communication between VU and social partners regarding student's study requirements for each internship block. They also pointed that the final-year students and graduates had shortcomings in communication competences and in the capacity to align theoretical knowledge with practical implementation. In addition, students indicated a late development of understanding regarding the learning outcomes essential for the profession.

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

SP Optometry offers possibility for students to personalize their studies by developing individual study plan or by adding new course units that reflect student's needs or creating study plans for entire group of students with individual selection of course modules. Students in the programme can explore other possibilities, such as participation in academic exchanges and internships. Also, they can study various foreign languages or choose elective courses. There is also an option to choose twin-track studies. Since 2023, 60 credits in the first-cycle studies are dedicated for individual studies with personalized selection of modules, internships, international exchanges, etc.

The Vilnius University has a procedure for recognizing the competencies obtained by students through non-formal or self-education. This expands students' independent learning opportunities.

For students with special needs there are the modified and individual study plans available, and the program is very flexible regarding necessary support or individualization based on student's needs. An individual study plans for persons with special needs are available after approval by Study Program Committee (SPC) and the Dean of the Faculty.

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

Final theses are prepared in accordance with the Methodological Guidelines for the Preparation, Defence and Storage of Research Papers of the Faculty of Medicine and address relevant topics. They meet the requirements of the study programme in optometry, aligning with both theoretical and practical goals.

During the site visit, the process of thesis topic selection and advisor guidance was reviewed. Students begin their work by collecting resources and defining study goals and objectives. Linking their theses to practical sites, volunteering, or internships adds significance and value. Throughout the writing process, students are supervised by researchers or experts in the field. Students expressed appreciation for being active participants in selecting topics and collaborating with advisors, and their feedback provided insight into how the process is organized. The involvement of thesis advisors was also assessed during the visit.

The completion of final theses requires multiple steps. Compliance with requirements is ensured through discussions at Department of Optometry meetings, and approval is necessary before proceeding to defence. Topics and supervisors are confirmed by the SPC, while the defence committee evaluates alignment with the study programme. Final theses are uploaded to the VU Information System (VUSIS), which incorporates the electronic plagiarism verification system (EPAS). The first defence of bachelor's theses in Optometry took place in June 2025.

The list of final theses also includes the topics recommended by the social partner – UAB Baltoptik, and it was available to assess the defended theses during the site visit. During the site visit, it was observed that the requirements for final theses, statistics, and research ethics are unclear, and that monitoring of students' independent performance is insufficient, particularly regarding the possible use of AI and academic dishonesty in the study process.

ANALYSIS AND CONCLUSION (regarding 1.2.)

SP Optometry at VU complies with legal requirements, with a curriculum and teaching modules aligned to the aims and learning outcomes. The program ensures the development of students' competencies and provides research-based knowledge and skills comparable to other university-level programs. Assessment methods and evaluation processes are clear and appropriately designed, and students benefit from opportunities to personalize their studies through individual plans, interdisciplinary options, electives, foreign languages, and academic exchanges.

During the site visit, it was noted that better alignment of courses, particularly in the first and second years, would strengthen the curriculum. Improvements in the sequence of courses, teaching methods, and content are needed to help students achieve learning outcomes more effectively. Stakeholders also recommended enhancing the module on visual impairment and developing services for blind people and other populations, such as children and older citizens, through internships, summer programs, or diagnostic services.

Practical training remains an important part of the programme, though stronger collaboration with social partners and a better selection of internship sites are required. Final theses are prepared in accordance with methodological guidelines, published openly on the university website, and uploaded to the VU Information System with plagiarism verification. The first bachelor's thesis defence in Optometry took place in June 2025.

Overall, the program provides a supportive environment and necessary resources to prepare students for the optometry profession and for delivering services that meet societal and healthcare needs. At the same time, curriculum adjustments, clearer requirements for theses, and improved monitoring of independent student performance are needed to ensure full compliance with intended learning outcomes.

It should be noticed that the presence of several errors conveys the impression that SER has been prepared using material from another study programme (e.g., Page 14, Page 32).

AREA 1: CONCLUSIONS

AREA 1	Unsatisfactory - 1 Does not meet the requirements	Satisfactory - 2 Meets the requirements, but there are substantial shortcomings to be eliminated	Good - 3 Meets the requirements, but there are shortcomings to be eliminated	Very good - 4 Very well nationally and internationally without any shortcomings	Exceptional - 5 Exceptionally well nationally and internationally without any shortcomings
First cycle			3		

COMMENDATIONS

1. There is a well-organized and supported programme by VU resources which helps to reach the study aims and objectives based on the needs of society and healthcare.
2. The interdisciplinary nature of studies and interconnection between the academic and applied nature of study programme allows the individualization of the programme for students and specialized interdisciplinary versions as future opportunities.
3. With 40 credits allocated to internships, the program provides strong opportunities for students to develop profession-specific practical skills.

RECOMMENDATIONS

To address shortcomings

1. Improve the alignment and sequencing of courses, particularly in the first and second years, to ensure students can effectively achieve the intended learning outcomes and have a more balanced study load.
2. The curriculum and teaching methods (including internship content) should be reviewed to more effectively ensure the achievement of learning outcomes related to communication skills, the integration of theoretical knowledge with practical competencies, and the acquisition of fundamental research skills.

For further improvement

1. Ensure greater stakeholder participation in curriculum development (internships, final theses, etc.) to ensure a better opportunity to achieve the defined learning outcomes.
2. The improvement or modification of the module designated for visual impairment can be beneficial preparing students for expanded services in health care especially by identifying the options to improve the service for blind people in Lithuania or some populations in need, such as children or geriatric patients.

AREA 2: LINKS BETWEEN SCIENTIFIC (OR ARTISTIC) RESEARCH AND HIGHER EDUCATION

2.1.	Higher education integrates the latest developments in scientific (or artistic) research and technology and enables students to develop skills for scientific (or artistic) research
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FACTUAL SITUATION

Research within the field of study is at a sufficient level

SP Optometry is delivered by teaching staff who are specialists and active researchers in the field with multiple publications on the subject. Their research is published nationally and internationally and is incorporated into the course units or modules. As an example, associate professor S. Galgauskas had a publication in the Journal of Clinical Medicine "Biometric Curcumin Loaded Liposomes for the Treatment of Dry Eyes and Meibomian Gland Dysfunction: An in Vivo Study" and the data have been used in study module Eye Diseases. The scientific interests of permanent teaching are represented as a broad list, including management of health care institutions, factors affecting corneal thickness, changes in cornea endothelium under chronic hypoxia, history of medicine, optometry, nursing and public health. Some of topics related to human health or health care, such as metalobolomics, cytomics and microbiomics of processes occurring in the healthy and sick human body, nutrition physiology, growth studies: longitudinal studies of growth, medical educology, medical humanities, human anatomy, anthropology. Some of faculty interests are related to research in physics or optics, such as application of spectral methods in medical diagnostics, chemical physics, vibrational spectroscopy of biomolecules or geometric and wave optics.

In general, the number of articles continue to increase. Teaching faculty have participated in a variety of publications, such monographs, textbooks or teaching aids for studies, published in conference material (national or international conferences).

In addition, the lecturers of Medical Technology field of study actively participate in a variety of research projects: international, such as Nordic Baltic Network of Philosophy of Medicine or national projects in Lithuania.

Fundamental and applied aspects of scientific research are included in various modules, e.g., the module on *Impaired Vision and Visual Rehabilitation* incorporates the results of modern research in physical geometrical optics and innovative technologies in visual rehabilitation.

The latest examples and case studies or seminars are supported by the representatives of the Publishing houses who help lecturers with selection of most appropriate teaching materials. Additional sources, including the latest scientific publications as additional resources for the students' individual self-study are added based on the lecturer's suggestions.

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

The research is integrated by teaching staff into various course units and modules, and teaching content is regularly updated based on the latest science and technology trends in the field of optometry. Research-based information is presented and discussed during lectures, seminars, and practical activities.

The syllabi are supplemented with the newest information on research and technological innovations, and the latest examples and case studies are included in teaching materials. New integrated information is approved by the Study Program Committee (SPC).

The content of the study programme is regularly updated, as lecturers are responsible for incorporating the latest trends and innovations in science and technology. During the preparation of term papers or the final thesis, students are required to provide a comprehensive overview of previous research and include the latest advances in the field.

Each module is upgraded with new options for practical applications. For example, the module on *Fundamentals of Refractive Surgery* provides the most up-to-date achievements in the surgical field and explores practical applications and the success of this innovative technique.

Research-based collaboration with external partners is accomplished in a variety of forms, such as consultations with social partners selecting important topics or participation in research studies initiated by social partners (as an example – in cooperation with UAB Bod Lenses the project on Myopia management).

Some scientific events are organized with Lithuanian Optometric Association. Close international cooperation with the Department of Optometry and Vision Science of the University of Latvia is started (planning a joint research project, conferences). This is one of the closest and most popular sites for students and teaching staff to visit.

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

From 10 to 13% of students are actively involved in scientific activities or research projects. They participate in the VU MF Ophthalmology Student Research Network or in the Lithuanian Optometric Association events. A few of students have prepared articles and published in peer-reviewed journals or delivered scientific presentations, some are involved in the Student Scientific Society activities or have participated by organizing science promotional events. However, none of students from the study program took part in research practice, internship or Summer School.

During the preparation of final theses, students are writing a comprehensive review on chosen topic based on latest science and technology achievements in the field. There is a plagiarism detection system. AI input has not yet been evaluated. Guidelines for the use of AI have been developed but have not yet been fully implemented. Additionally, during the site visit, it was observed that insufficient attention has been paid to the specifics of research in this area, namely, research involving humans lacks the application of biomedical ethics principles and the implementation of appropriate statistical data analysis.

The funding for research is sufficient, and more support is provided for the researchers based on student needs and involvement.

ANALYSIS AND CONCLUSION (regarding 2.1.)

Lecturers in the Medical Technology field integrate both fundamental and applied aspects of scientific research into the modules they teach, and they actively participate in preparing publications and attending local, national, and international conferences. Teaching staff use up-to-date examples, case studies, seminars, and the latest scientific publications to ensure timely integration of research into the academic curriculum.

There are strong opportunities for students to engage in research across medical technology, including optometry, medical physics, and clinical practice, although these opportunities are not yet fully utilized. Established professional networks, such as the Lithuanian Optometric Association, could further support students' professional development, but stronger links between research activities and academic education in the optometry study program are still needed. The curriculum should consistently require students to acquire and apply knowledge of biomedical research ethics and statistical methods, regardless of the type of research conducted.

Greater visibility of the study programs could be achieved by integrating scientific research results into final theses, seminars, conferences, and presentations for broader audiences. This would allow students to engage with the newest technologies, achievements, and innovations in optometry, including diagnostic and therapeutic developments in eye care. Students should also be encouraged to participate in research projects with social partners at local, national, and international levels, and to strengthen their practical skills through summer internships or clinical placements.

Although the field of medical technology offers a wide range of research directions, publications and project topics specifically related to optometry and vision science are currently absent from the study program. Despite the active involvement of teaching staff in research, stronger cooperation with other higher education institutions and international partners is needed to advance applied scientific research. Students would also benefit from taking a more proactive role in research engagement early in their studies, including during the summer period.

AREA 2: CONCLUSIONS

AREA 2	Unsatisfactory - 1 Does not meet the requirements	Satisfactory - 2 Meets the requirements, but there are substantial shortcomings to be eliminated	Good - 3 Meets the requirements, but there are shortcomings to be eliminated	Very good - 4 Very well nationally and internationally without any shortcomings	Exceptional - 5 Exceptionally well nationally and internationally without any shortcomings
First cycle			3		

COMMENDATIONS

1. Great opportunities exist for students to be actively involved in the research of study field by integrating medicine, physics, optometry, and eye care.
2. A few professional networks, such as MF Ophthalmology Student Research Network and Lithuanian Optometric Association are great venues for optometry students' scientific participation.

RECOMMENDATIONS

To address shortcomings

1. Better involvement of students in research projects with social partners locally or internationally is important and should be encouraged.
2. A variety of options for student scientific involvement can be identified, including summer internships or research projects at practical-clinical sites.
3. Considering the structure of bachelor's theses, it is necessary to establish as a mandatory requirement for teaching and integration of biomedical ethics principles into the theses, as well as to define criteria for the use of artificial intelligence in the study and research process.

For further improvement

1. To improve students' understanding of the latest developments in the field, more active participation of students can be encouraged in social activities university-wide including promotional or educational actions delivering seminars or lectures for people with visual problems or providing them with new achievement in technology and practice regarding eye care.
2. To encourage faculty to become active in established networks, such as Lithuanian Optometric Association, which would be beneficial for the better integration of science and research into academic process and would stimulate students for their future professional growth.
3. It is necessary to develop research specifically in the field of optometry and vision science.

AREA 3: STUDENT ADMISSION AND SUPPORT

3.1.	Student selection and admission is in line with the learning outcomes
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FACTUAL SITUATION

3.1.1. Student selection and admission criteria and procedures are adequate and transparent

Student selection and admission procedure takes place during the general admission according to the rules of VU for admission to the first cycle studies. Students are admitted based on their admission score. The competition score is calculated using a set formula, which is different for state-funded (SF) and for non-state funded (NSF) places. Additional points are added for prize winners and for Olympiad's participants. The admission score is highly depending on Biology, Chemistry, Mathematics, Physics, Information Technology and Foreign or Lithuanian Language.

Student admission scores are significantly higher for SF places, mean value in 2023 for SF places – 7,84 and 6,51 – for NSF. There is some reduction in scores for NSF places compared to 2021.

In 2021-2023, the total number of applicants to SP Optometry decreased by 31% (from 307 to 202 applications). In 2023, the number of applicants for the SF (with the first choice) remained stable (33 applicants) as compared to 2021. During the review period, the number of students admitted to SF places with the first choice remained stable (1.0-1.2 applicants per SF) and this allows the most motivated students to be admitted to SF places. The total number of students admitted to SF places slightly decreased (from 33 to 28), while the number admitted to NSF places increased from 9 to 12, keeping the total number of students relatively stable.

Information about admission conditions is published on the University, Faculty of Medicine, LAMA BPO, AIKOS and other study-related websites, as well as through media outlets, publications, and promotional initiatives such as study fairs, school visits, and educational events. In addition, the Faculty of Medicine Study Department and Academic Adviser provide guidance to prospective students, representatives participate in school visits and initiatives such as "Student for one day," while the Lithuanian Optometric Association promotes opportunities to pursue the optometry profession at Vilnius University.

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

Vilnius University is authorized by the Minister of Education, Science and Sports of the Republic of Lithuania to recognize foreign education and qualifications related to higher education, following the Lisbon Recognition Convention, national procedures and methodologies, and other relevant documents; recognition decisions are made individually by the Student Admission Sub-Division, with up to 75% of formal study outcomes and up to 50% of non-formal or informal learning outcomes eligible for recognition, while final examinations and theses cannot be recognized, and during the evaluation period 78 applications were submitted in SP Optometry, of which 42 were approved, 17 rejected, 15 withdrawn, and 4 returned for additional information.

International students are not accepted for full-time studies in SP Optometry.

ANALYSIS AND CONCLUSION (regarding 3.1.)

The obtained information from SER and additional supportive explanations during site visit show that admission procedure for SP Optometry is clear, accessible to all applicants and well-advertised for public access. Detailed and relevant information about admission procedure, requirements, scoring system, financial support and important services is available on VU website. The stable number of both interested and enrolled students observed during the reporting period confirms the study program's ability to attract students and importance of this programme for the health science.

The procedure for recognition of foreign qualification, periods of study, and prior learning is well described and complies with regulatory enactments.

3.2.	There is an effective student support system enabling students to maximise their learning progress
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FACTUAL SITUATION

3.2.1. Opportunities for student academic mobility are ensured

Vilnius University has a well-established process for studies abroad which is coordinated by VU International Relations Department. Students have an opportunity to spend a semester or full academic year studying abroad. Students willing to travel for partial studies must have completed at least one year of their first-cycle studies at VU before planning their studies abroad.

Overall, academic mobility is provided and is well incorporated into SP in a variety of options - from spending one semester or full academic year abroad or even more. Students are advised by SPC chair, and the process is organized by the Student Services and Career Department.

Special study plan or internship can be designed, and student can spend up to half of their study period in their mobility programmes.

Students of the field have access to 38 universities as a part of COIMBRA – the network of the oldest classical universities in Europe. However, the site visit revealed that there is a limited number of HEIs with optometry programmes. SP Optometry has agreements with the University of West Africa and Biomedical Sciences Sector of Optics & Optometry in Greece. Students also have opportunities to spend semester abroad under ERASMUS+, ISEP, Nordplus and ARCUS or COIMBRA University Alliance and can attend some collaborative events at University of Latvia or Riga Medical College.

In 2023-2024, one student visited University of West Africa, and two students visited University of West Africa in 2024-2025. During last year's, 20 students had an opportunity to visit the University of Latvia under the ERASMUS BIP program.

During the review period, there were no incoming students partially due to the lack of courses translated in English.

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

The support system for students at VU is very well established and is oriented to each student in need as well as to whole students' population to foster the growth as an individual and as a professional. The system of support includes a variety of services, and the information for students is available on VU website.

From the beginning of their studies, students can receive the academic information, support and advice regarding individual plan of study and necessary health or career counselling, or mentoring services.

All students receive IT, library accommodation services, and financial support. There are other important services, such as cultural, sports, religion, and services for students with special needs. Most of these services are provided based on students' initiatives and requests. Students also positively commented on personal support, including individualized schedules, consultations and flexibility of the time selection for consultations or use of e-mails and zoom sessions and had great access to recorded materials. In addition, scholarships are available for a certain number of students.

3.2.3. Higher education information and student counselling are sufficient

All students are introduced to the study program through the course of study by the Student Services and Career Department and well informed about their internship and other mobility programs. Students are provided with timely information about the study organization, the requirements of study programme or changes/additions in the curriculum, opportunities and study abroad options, possibilities to participate in local or international projects or exchanges. Learning materials and relevant information including daily messages are available via the Moodle platform and Intranet of VU. Students have access for counselling to their SP advisors that they have established close and efficient contacts or if they have any specific questions or counselling needs, they have a direct access to university counselling services. Students have access to all higher education related information (program requirements, internship, transferring process to other programs, selection of

internships and etc.) on VU website. Students also have access to VU intranet and other sources of information at VU. In general, students are happy with all information that is easily accessible, and all counselling services are timely provided.

The only concern raised during discussions with students and graduates related to the timely availability of information confirming that the courses they are studying will adequately meet the requirements of their future profession, as they are highly motivated to become successful optometrists. This uncertainty contributes to feelings of insecurity and a lack of confidence in whether they have chosen the most appropriate study program. Students reported that they gained a clearer understanding of their future professional role during the third year of studies. By the fourth year, they had developed a well-defined perception of the optometry profession and were able to begin practice successfully after graduating in May 2025.

ANALYSIS AND CONCLUSION (regarding 3.2.)

The counselling and support system for students at VU is very well established. It has a personal approach and is oriented to each student in need as well as to whole students' population to foster the growth as an individual and as a professional. The support system includes a variety of services, and the information for students is available on VU website. Students in SP Optometry have a strong knowledge regarding available choices and opportunities related to mobility programs. However, the lack of incoming international students does not allow internationalization and knowledge exchange so that local students can gain an idea of the profession and its development in other countries. Thus, courses (modules) in English should be prepared to ensure incoming mobility.

The information, counselling services and multi-level support provided to students is well appreciated.

AREA 3: CONCLUSIONS

AREA 3	Unsatisfactory - 1 Does not meet the requirements	Satisfactory - 2 Meets the requirements, but there are substantial shortcomings to be eliminated	Good - 3 Meets the requirements, but there are shortcomings to be eliminated	Very good - 4 Very well nationally and internationally without any shortcomings	Exceptional - 5 Exceptionally well nationally and internationally without any shortcomings
First cycle			X		

COMMENDATIONS

1. The study program has stable demand and the ability to admit highly motivated students.
2. It is a great opportunity for students that special study plan or internship can be designed, and a student can spend up to half of their study period in their selected mobility programmes.
3. The support system for students is very well established, is oriented to each student in need as well as to whole students' population to foster the growth as an individual and as a professional.

RECOMMENDATIONS

To address shortcomings:

1. A stronger connection between the study content and future career pathways (especially during the first study year) could be provided through enhanced counselling services and more proactive guidance from program advisors.
2. Mobility opportunities should be expanded and well presented to students as soon as possible of their studies.

For further improvement

1. To promote the personal development of the study program, a clear strategy, should be created specifically for the SP Optometry to continue to popularize the study programme and maintain stable competition for study places over a longer period.
2. More publicity about career choices, internships and future regarding growth of the program would be beneficial.
3. To attract foreign students and increase incoming mobility, reconsider offerings in English.

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

4.1.	Students are prepared for independent professional activity
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FACTUAL SITUATION

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

SP Optometry provides an appropriate internal structure and by offering both traditional and innovative study methods and their combination aims to involve students actively participate in the learning process. The site visit revealed that the main contact hours are dedicated to seminars and practical classes (compulsory attendance), and lectures are not mandatory but lecture' recording can be watch at any time.

Mainly, the content and aims of the course unit (module) and theoretical part is presented in the classroom on a problem-basis by highlighting sources of study. The seminars and workshops use interactive study methods, informational technology, teamwork, case studies, modelling, etc. Most assignments during seminars or workshops require independent work by students and the progress is well monitored. The entire study is organized with the focus on improvement of students' theoretical and practical knowledge with inclusion of self-study and by adding the access to supplementary material for each course.

Students' abilities to plan and control their own learning process is regularly assessed with the lecturers and advisors. The experimental learning is integrated for the improvement of practical skills and uses a variety of settings in affiliated institutions, for example simulations in Neurobiology.

Internship for this programme is organized with the aim to train students' ability to effectively solve problems and communicate appropriately based on professional ethics. However, during the site visit, employers indicated that this goal is not yet being achieved. Graduates, employers, and social partners highlighted that the program provides strong theoretical knowledge but lacks sufficient practical training. Recommendations included adding more diagnostic algorithms, clinical case analysis, and critical thinking activities, as well as improving curriculum sequencing and reducing the overload in the first year. Internships were valued but require clearer organization, mentor guidelines, and stronger communication between the university and internship sites. Employers emphasized the need to better integrate practical skills, patient communication, and case history collection, while also expressing willingness to contribute more actively to curriculum development and thesis supervision.

The internships are mainly based on the cooperation with various companies and social partners, such as UAB Baltoptik, UAB Optometrijos Centras, UAB Vision express, UAB Pasaulio optika and others. The process and requirements of the internship is described. However, during the site visit, it was noticed that communication between the involved parties (VU, student, and social partner) regarding these requirements for student's internship is not well communicated placing risk on the achievement of the learning outcomes.

Research competencies are achieved by requiring a course paper and training for research skills is included into many course units and is used as a part of cumulative assessment. The bachelor's thesis includes the defence process and is completed with the presentation before the Thesis Défense Committee.

The competencies are trained along the curriculum and summarized through the assessment of the final thesis and the final examination.

Teaching staff is familiar with ECOO (European Council of Optometry and Optics) requirements and should follow the requirements for their syllabi. However, during the site visit, the teaching staff confessed that the review of possible changes in ECOO requirements is not regularly monitored.

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

This access is based on “Vilnius University Diversity and Equal Opportunities Strategy 2020-2025” adapted in 2020 and is aiming to establish the process for socially disadvantaged groups by providing access to compensatory equipment, advising students and lecturers on accessibility issues and possibility to study using an individual study plan.

Decisions regarding individualization are described in the “Description of the Procedure for the Individualization of Studies at Vilnius University according to Individual Needs Arising due to Disability” and the most important information for students with disabilities is available on the VU website.

Other socially vulnerable groups receive appropriate financial support as VU nominal scholarship and a variety of needed or relevant services, including psychological counselling and spiritual support.

ANALYSIS AND CONCLUSION (regarding 4.1.)

Overall, the study programme has a well-established system that ensures an effective, individualized, and student-oriented teaching and learning process. It promotes active student participation, supports the integration of theoretical and practical skills, and prepares students for professional practice by enabling them to acquire the necessary competencies and research abilities. However, more attention needs to be paid on strengthening the curriculum by incorporating additional diagnostic algorithms, clinical case analyses, and critical-thinking activities to ensure better linking of theoretical and practical knowledge. Clearer organizational structures, more explicit mentor guidelines, and improved communication between the university and internship sites should be addressed.

Socially vulnerable groups and students with individual needs are guaranteed access to higher education in accordance with VU regulations and established procedures. Support for socially disadvantaged students includes access to compensatory equipment, guidance for students and lecturers on accessibility issues, and the possibility of developing an individual study plan.

In conclusion, the methods used to implement the study process are appropriate for delivering strong theoretical knowledge. However, a review of the study program is recommended to ensure that students not only acquire knowledge in a sequential and coherent manner but also develop broader and more robust practical skills (including communication skills) that enable an effective connection between theoretical learning and practical application.

4.2.

There is an effective and transparent system for student assessment, progress monitoring, and assuring academic integrity

FACTUAL SITUATION

4.2.1. Monitoring of learning progress and feedback to students to promote self-assessment and learning progress planning is systematic

The monitoring of the learning process is carried out at several levels, including the evaluation of individual course units (modules), annual academic performance, and overall study programme outcomes. At the beginning of each semester, lecturers introduce the methods, forms, and criteria of assessment for each course. Student learning progress is subsequently assessed by the lecturer responsible for the specific course unit, with cumulative scores composed of interim assessments and a final examination or thesis.

Feedback plays a central role in supporting student learning. Vilnius University ensures that students receive regular and effective feedback throughout their studies. Lecturers provide guidance on the significance of recommended sources, online materials, and other resources, which students can access flexibly, acknowledging that many of them work during the day. Students are encouraged to engage in self-assessment and independent study, and they report finding the Moodle platform particularly beneficial for reviewing learning materials. Collaborative learning, whether in groups or independently, is also supported through consultations and guidance from teaching staff.

Feedback is provided through various channels, including contact hours, classroom discussions, remote consultations, and group sessions addressing common errors. Email communication is

additionally used for individual or group-related feedback. Discussions with students during the site visit confirmed that they regularly receive feedback on their performance and can request further clarification from lecturers. Students expressed appreciation for the feedback provided, noting that it enhanced their preparation for assessments and improved their ability to use appropriate tools and information during examinations.

Monitoring processes extend beyond coursework. The Student Services and Career Department tracks student drop-out levels and implements an action plan to ensure that, at the end of each examination session, final scores are analysed and students requiring retakes are notified. These students are also informed about available assistance to support their preparation for retake examinations.

Practical training is monitored through internship diaries, which are collected at the end of each internship. These diaries include feedback from internship supervisors, and students' skill levels are evaluated using a 10-point scale. In addition, student satisfaction with studies is assessed through various surveys conducted either at the university level or within individual academic units.

4.2.2. Graduate employability and career are monitored

The monitoring of graduate employment and career is in place since SP Optometry started in 2021, and the first graduates received their Diploma in June 2025. Therefore, this programme has only a few recent graduates and has limited ability to monitor their employability. Graduates met during the site visit indicated good employment opportunities with qualification optometrist.

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

The policies regarding academic integrity, tolerance and non-discrimination are based on general requirements at VU. The syllabi of the courses/modules also have relevant information included. Each student has to familiarise themselves with the University Study Regulations and the Code of Academic Ethics as this is a part of the requirement to ensure academic integrity and to understand the punishment in case of student's failure to correspond to these requirements.

Cases of a breach of the academic integrity, tolerance and non-discrimination are examined based on the Regulations of The Central Academic Ethics Commission and the Regulations of the Academic Ethics Commission of Core Academic units and the Regulations of the Central Dispute Resolution Commission and the Regulations of the Dispute Resolution Commission of Core Academic Units of Vilnius University.

The university also has an electronic plagiarism checking system (EPAS) to check submitted papers. Students are informed and stay aware as lecturers for each learning unit remind about the significance of academic integrity.

During the period of evaluation, no student in the Optometry SP was sanctioned or expelled.

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

There is MF Dispute Resolution Commission in place. Students can submit the appeal if they disagree with the final score for the course unit within 7 days. The Commission must examine the appeal within 30 calendar days, and this decision can be appealed to VU Central Dispute Resolution Commission within next 7 calendar days.

Also, any student who considers that their rights have been violated may submit a complaint to the Commission. No complaints or appeals have been received during evaluation period.

VU also has a dedicated hotline to report violations of academic affairs or principles non-discrimination by any member of the academic community. The reports are anonymous.

Overall, SP Optometry uses a well prepared and systemically set up system at the university for submission and processing of appeals or complains.

ANALYSIS AND CONCLUSION (regarding 4.2.)

SP Optometry has well established monitoring of learning process which is accomplished through the course unit (module), through academic year, or the study programme and helps to provide students with timely feedback, promote self-assessment and planning of learning progress. Feedback on study progress is available individually or to groups by e-mail or Moodle platform.

The alumni of the program are first graduates from SP Optometry this year in May, and they are evaluating this programme as an interesting, combining different areas of knowledge and they would recommend this programme to others.

The policies to ensure academic integrity, tolerance, and non-discrimination are implemented based on general requirements at VU. Students have to familiarise themselves with the University Study Regulations and the Code of Academic Ethics. There is an electronic plagiarism checking system (EPAS) to check submitted work.

The procedures for submitting and processing appeals and complaints are well designed and in place. University Dispute Resolution Commission is used for submission of appeals related to SP Optometry.

AREA 4: CONCLUSIONS

AREA 4	Unsatisfactory - 1 Does not meet the requirements	Satisfactory - 2 Meets the requirements, but there are substantial shortcomings to be eliminated	Good - 3 Meets the requirements, but there are shortcomings to be eliminated	Very good - 4 Very well nationally and internationally without any shortcomings	Exceptional - 5 Exceptionally well nationally and internationally without any shortcomings
First cycle			X		

COMMENDATIONS

1. SP Optometry provides an appropriate internal structure and by offering both traditional and innovative study methods.
2. The programme has well established learning progress monitoring which helps to provide students with timely feedback, necessary policies related to academic integrity, and non-discrimination.
3. The university has an electronic plagiarism checking system (EPAS) to check submitted papers.
4. Well defined process and clear procedures are in place for submitting and processing appeals and complaints from students.

RECOMMENDATIONS

To address shortcomings

1. The students have a very good theoretical background that is appreciated at the clinical sites but there is a need to combine better with practical usage, therefore more analysis of clinical cases and problem solving should be included, as well as strategy for communication skills improvement should be developed and implemented.
2. The guidelines for the mentors before the internship starts and description of their responsibilities is recommended. The communication between clinical sites, stakeholders and university should be improved.

For further improvement

1. Although the curriculum content enables the achievement of intended learning outcomes, the sequence of courses needs to be revised to ensure that related outcomes are attained in a logical order.
2. Teaching methods should be supplemented with more clinical case analysis and problem-solving based approaches to help students integrate their strong theoretical background with practical application.

AREA 5: TEACHING STAFF

5.1.	Teaching staff is adequate to achieve learning outcomes
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FACTUAL SITUATION

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

Based on information in the SER, the teaching staff is employed based on the Regulations for the Organization of Teaching Staff and Research/Art Recruiting Competitions and Certification.

The interests of competitiveness and transparency competitions are publicly advertised to attract foreign researchers, also the competitions for senior posts are published on VU website in English. The certification for pedagogical staff is carried out every five years and includes their pedagogy, research activities and student's feedback.

In 2023/2024, there were 37 lecturers involved in teaching process of SP Optometry. Three of them are licenced optometrists (one at 0.5, and two – at 0,25 working load) and are mainly involved in optometrist practice. Due to the rather narrow professional field, the shortage of the practitioners is noticed leading to overload for the few involved in providing the practices.

It is good to notice that 75% of permanent teaching staff have practical work experience. A total of 69% hold doctoral degree. Thus, the composition of the teaching staff corresponds to the Order No V-1168 of the Minister of Education, Science and Sport of the Republic of Lithuania of 30 December 2016 "On the Approval of the Descriptor of the General Requirements for the Implementation of Studies".

Over the past three years the ratio of lecturers to students has changed due to an increase in the total number of students. This ratio from 2021 as 0.7 has changed to 4.6 in 2024-2025. Some teaching staff turnover was due to introduction of new courses, some due to family circumstances (pregnancy, parental leave), some graduates are joining teaching staff.

ANALYSIS AND CONCLUSION (regarding 5.1.)

The teaching staff for SP Optometry is sufficient and meets the required qualifications. A total of 69% of teaching staff hold doctoral degree and have their research interests and activities relevant to their teaching. There are 12 permanently employed members of VU academic community and 3 of teachers are currently working as professional optometrists.

Some of units taught or coordinated by practicing and licensed ophthalmologists. There was no staff rotation since the program was initiated in 2021, but younger optometrists should be invited to teach in the program.

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

5.2.1. Opportunities for academic mobility of teaching staff are ensured

There are academic exchanges through ERASMUS+, NORDPLUS, ISEP (Qualification training courses, monitoring visits, international cooperation visits, teaching and staff qualification training visits to universities abroad and non-university institutions) and on a basis of bilateral agreements. Teaching staff in SP Optometry usually use ERASMUS+ exchange programme *Learning Mobility of Individuals*. These programs are funded through EU funds.

The MF administration promotes the mobility, but activity in mobility programmes depends on personal initiative. A total of 5 members from SP Optometry had teaching/learning visits for improvement of general and pedagogical competencies.

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

The improvement of teaching staff competencies is based on the participation at various conferences, seminars and training sessions including membership and international networks, organizations and participation in various projects.

There are few programs in place for the improvement of the qualifications of the academic staff and training. The VU Centre for Educational Excellence is established for training didactic/pedagogical competencies and offers multiple workshops, seminars or programs related to e-learning and others for training of teaching staff.

Lecturers can update their pedagogical qualifications in the international context through ARQUS Alliance as well.

Since 2021, lecturers can receive specific funding from VU annual budget for updating and developing course units to increase student engagement. Teaching staff can use professional development funds and financial support for conference attendance, especially if there is an oral or poster presentation.

ANALYSIS AND CONCLUSION (regarding 5.2.)

SP Optometry has sufficient opportunities for academic mobility of teaching staff and has the process in place for the improvement of teaching staff competencies. Teaching staff is encouraged to participate at various conferences, seminars and training sessions including membership at international networks, organizations and participation in various projects. The administration promotes the mobility, however the activity in mobility depends on personal initiative.

AREA 5: CONCLUSIONS

AREA 5	Unsatisfactory - 1 Does not meet the requirements	Satisfactory - 2 Meets the requirements, but there are substantial shortcomings to be eliminated	Good - 3 Meets the requirements, but there are shortcomings to be eliminated	Very good - 4 Very well nationally and internationally without any shortcomings	Exceptional - 5 Exceptionally well nationally and internationally without any shortcomings
First cycle				X	

COMMENDATIONS

1. There are great academic exchange opportunities, including international exchange programs, such as ERASMUS+, NORDPLUS, ISEP (Qualification training courses, monitoring visits, international cooperation visits, teaching and staff qualification training visits, etc.).
2. Lecturers can update their pedagogical qualifications in the international context through ARQUS Alliance, and they can receive specific funding since 2021 for updating and developing course units to increase students' engagement.

RECOMMENDATIONS

To address shortcomings

1. -

For further improvement

1. With the emergence of a larger number of optometry graduates, the programme would benefit by hiring more certified optometrists who should be involved not only in providing

- practical skills, but also in delivering optometry-related courses, especially younger professionals who could help to connect theoretical and practical skills.
2. There is suggested to improve the academic collaboration and faculty research exchange at the international level to increase the visibility of SP Optometry and to attract students from other countries.

AREA 6: LEARNING FACILITIES AND RESOURCES

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

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

In general, study process is carried out at several addresses (basic optometric skills - at Akademijos Street 4, and additional skills - at the Faculty of Medicine, the Faculty of Physics and the Life Science Centre). At Akademijos Street 4, the classrooms/auditoriums are equipped with basic optometric equipment, posters and educational literature, computers and other learning tools necessary for vision assessment and correction of refractive errors, as well as for teaching practical skills.

All classrooms are equipped with wireless internet and most have stationary multimedia equipment, which allows the use of visual and/or audio material. There is sufficient provision for both in-person lectures and remote lectures (via MS Teams). Teaching staff can also connect their laptops. Four classrooms can accommodate 152 students at the time.

The general facilities are fully prepared and correspond to the needs of SP Optometry. Some of rooms are designated for teaching staff to work individually with students and a separate lounge is available for students of SPs Rehabilitation, Nursing and Optometry. There is a cafeteria in a proximity and open spaces for informal interactions, group or individual work. Also, there are rooms for student organizations.

Significant renovations were completed in 2022 with an expenditure for the general infrastructure used in SP Optometry reached approximately 3,500 EUR. And adding other expenses, including purchase of the equipment and furniture reached 33,450 EUR. However, the site visit and meeting with students have revealed that the equipment for practical skill training in optometry is not sufficient and only 2 optometric workstations are available for students for hands-on practice. Additional two optometric workstations are planned to be purchased in the near future.

For the internships, students have an opportunity to use other facilities, such as various prestigious optometry practice facilities Baltoptix, Optometrijos centras, Pasaulio Optika, UAB Lirema, VSI Santaros klinikos, and UAB Optikorial. As well as classes on the evaluation of eye structures and eye diseases are conducted in eye clinics (both lectures and practical classes), where students can also use ophthalmic equipment.

For informational and methodical resources there are a few sites: main publications for the studies in Optometry Spare at VU MF Library and VU Library. Students and staff have access to the MF Library fund, the Central Library, SCIC, and the VU Virtual Library, which provides printed and electronic resources, including optometry e-resources accessible via VPN. The VU Library subscribes to 96 scientific databases, 42 of which cover medical and health sciences, though students request more optometry books. Teaching and supplemental materials are added based on recommendations from teaching staff and students, including textbooks, periodicals, and subscription databases with Lithuanian and foreign authors. However, the SER does not specify how much of the available library resources are directly dedicated to optometry.

Learning facilities are adapted for students with special needs, offering ramps, automatic doors, elevators, wide corridors, and technology such as screen-reading software, magnification tools, and lecture recordings. The Central Library also provides adjustable tables, ergonomic chairs, a text

recognition device, a Braille printer, and other assistive tools, supporting the university's strategy "University Open for Persons with Disabilities" adopted in 2017.

6.1.2. There is continuous planning for the improvement of the access to supplemental materials and upgrading of resources

The resources for studies are planned through an annual estimate of the CAU's income and expenditure, which includes state budget allocations, tuition fees, project funding, and donations. This estimate is reviewed and approved by the CAU Council, allowing it to decide on the provision and renewal of study resources within available funds. As confirmed during a meeting with senior management and faculty administration staff, funding has been allocated to SP Optometry to purchase 2 additional optometry workstations and improve its ability to provide practical skills. The additional support is planned for several years to allow study programme to stabilize.

Teaching or supplemental materials, such as textbooks, educational and methodical literature or new publications are added based on recommendations of the teaching staff and students.

MF accommodates literature by Lithuanian and foreign authors for studies not only as textbooks, but also periodicals and subscription databases, including foreign medical journals and multiple scientific journal databases. Students and teaching staff have a relevant access to the MF Library fund and additional funds provided to by the Central Library and to SCIC (The Scholarly Communication Information Centre). VU Virtual Library provides a one-stop shop for searching the library's printed and electronic resources. The relevant e-resources for the studies in SP Optometry are selected and made available on the optometry librarian's website or can be accessed from home using VU Virtual Private Network (VPN) service.

Overall, the VU Library subscribes to 96 scientific databases and 42 of them contain medical and health sciences content, however the students would like more books in the field of optometry.

The learning facilities are adapted for students with different special needs and equal access is ensured for all - as the buildings are equipped with convenient entrances with ramps, automatic doors, elevators and wide corridors to allow mobility with wheelchairs or walkers. For students with visual impairments there are computers with screen-reading software and magnification tools. Teaching aids are available in different formats, including the recordings of Lectures or access to a variety of compensatory technology tools. In 2017, VU adapted the strategy "University Open for Persons with Disabilities" and systematically works toward equal opportunities for persons with disabilities (www.vu.lt/negalia).

The VU Central Library has 4 hight-adjustable tables and 3 ergometric chairs for students with special needs. It also has a text recognition and reading device SARA CE as well as a computer connected to a Braille printer with an acoustic booth and a high Contrast Keyboard.

ANALYSIS AND CONCLUSION (regarding 6.1.)

The students and teaching staff in the Optometry Study Program have a sufficient access to multiple resources and facilities that are a part of infrastructure of VU, especially Faculties of Medicine, Physics, and the Centre of Life Sciences.

An appropriate and modernised access is ensured to the facilities and resources for students with disabilities and special needs.

More optometry related equipment and literature are still needed, and this could be useful to improve the teaching of practical skills and improving theoretical knowledge.

For the internship, students have an opportunity to use other facilities, such as various prestigious optometry practice facilities Baltoptix, Optometrijos centras, Pasaulio Optika, and others, but the opportunities for a better partnership should be increased, especially supporting practical training, integrating innovative technology, new diagnostic and treatment options.

It would be good step forward for the growth of optometry program for the future alignment of labour market in health care services and academic community needs.

AREA 6: CONCLUSIONS

AREA 6	Unsatisfactory - 1 Does not meet the requirements	Satisfactory - 2 Meets the requirements, but there are substantial shortcomings to be eliminated	Good - 3 Meets the requirements, but there are shortcomings to be eliminated	Very good - 4 Very well nationally and internationally without any shortcomings	Exceptional - 5 Exceptionally well nationally and internationally without any shortcomings
First cycle			X		

COMMENDATIONS

1. There is a great access to the multiple resources for students with disabilities and special needs.
2. Each student in SP Optometry can use the Central Library and other VU Libraries with unlimited access to publications, textbooks, or databases.
3. For the internship, students have an opportunity to use other facilities, such as various prestigious optometry practice facilities.

RECOMMENDATIONS

To address shortcomings

1. It is recommended to enrich the VU library with information resources specifically related to the field of optometry;
2. Explore opportunities for expanding the range of equipment necessary to ensure more comprehensive acquisition of practical skills.

For further improvement

1. A long-term strategy must be developed for attracting larger funding sources, including external ones, in order to ensure the acquisition and maintenance of state-of-the-art equipment for SP Optometry.
2. It is recommended to develop laboratory facilities that fully comply with current patient rights and privacy requirements, as defined in the *Law on the Rights of Patients and Compensation for the Damage to Their Health* of the Republic of Lithuania (Law No. I-1562). This necessitates expanding the optometry study premises to ensure that each optometrist's workstation is located in a separate, dedicated room. As Vilnius University is currently planning to acquire additional optometrist workstations, this development provides a timely opportunity to align the laboratory infrastructure with these legal and professional standards.

AREA 7: QUALITY ASSURANCE AND PUBLIC INFORMATION

7.1.	The development of the field of study is based on an internal quality assurance system involving all stakeholders and continuous monitoring, transparency and public information
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FACTUAL SITUATION

7.1.1. Internal quality assurance system for the programmes is effective

SP Optometry has sufficient information about Quality assurance system, which is oriented to meet the highest standards for SP and the needs of stakeholders. The study quality assurance system at VU was developed and implemented in accordance with the standards and guidelines for quality assurance in the European Higher Education Area (ESG) and other regulations and procedures at VU.

The system applies various processes and procedures for internal quality assurance and implements drop-out prevention programmes for students and academic staff. It also ensures a suitable study environment and necessary support for students, provides career counselling services, analyses the feedback from the participants of the study process, disseminates information best on the best practices.

One of the main tasks of SPC (Study Program Committee) is to improve the SP in order to achieve coherence between program aims, competencies, content, methods, student performance assessment, and the relevance and competitiveness of the SP to the Medical technology field study. It also considers changes to field study programmes.

Study programme administration and quality management issues are coordinated in the study unit by a designated specialist who assists the SPC with relevant documents, collects and analyses relevant data.

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

Stakeholders contribute by participating in the work of the SPC - by helping to identify the market needs for competencies and learning outcomes, providing suggestions for course units and thesis topics. During on-site visit, social partners/stakeholders confirmed that they are taking part in the programme by participating on thesis defence committee learning about the students' research and knowing them better. They are organizing and carrying out the internships for students in SP Optometry by advising students and evaluating their learning outcomes. Social partners are also giving lectures as invited guests. SPC or the Study Unit informs them about the changes in SP.

Social partners contribute to the study infrastructure and as example – provided equipment for practical training of students and BOD lenses - as the only Lithuanian manufacturer of optical lenses. They invited students to show them the latest optical lens manufacturing technologies.

However, during the on-site visit with social partners it was noticed that more involvement of social partners in program delivery and improvement would be beneficial. For example, it was observed that not all employers are informed about how they can influence the development and improvement of the study programme, or they pointed to insufficient (late) communication regarding internship requirements.

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

The information on the programme is available on the University intranet by giving an admissions report and results of student surveys. Teaching staff can also view the results of surveys of their course. Graduate employment data is also available on VU website along with the information about the numbers of student's enrolment, Erasmus+ student exchange, results of surveys on student's satisfaction, the number of dropouts and reasons.

There is also the information about the appeal or complaint (if available) and graduate employment. All orders of the Dean or the Rector concerning students, including the topics of thesis are presented in VUSIS. Diploma supplements are also issued using this system. Teaching staff have electronic workplaces to enter examination results, course unit description etc.

The study assessment results are published on the VU website, intranet and VUSIS. Improvement plans for study fields and progress reports are published on VU intranet.

During site visit, it was confirmed that the access to information about the programme, external evaluation, or improvement processes is easily accessible and information is regularly upgraded.

7.1.4. Student feedback is collected and analysed

VU has a well-structured internal system for feedback and opinions from students' collection and analysis. Students in SP Optometry actively participated in surveys. For 2023-2024 academic year, the participation was around 80%. The majority of students have been satisfied with the program, and they would recommend it to others. The average score for all aspects of the program was above 4 out of 5 except for teaching quality rated at 3.8 on average.

Students also complete a survey on the specific course units at the end of each semester, and lectures have a direct access to view and work on the responses and suggested improvement.

The feedback from students is used to improve the quality of studies and is linked to the indicators of the VU Strategic plan. Some of recommendations from students are taken very seriously – for example, the need for additional optometric equipment as only two workstations are currently available for students' hands-on practice. This recommendation is under consideration and plans and funds are being identified.

The most recent survey of graduates regarding the competencies was conducted but the program has only one year of graduates (last May), therefore the collection of data and analysis is limited.

ANALYSIS AND CONCLUSION (regarding 7.1.)

VU has all general quality assurance and public information procedures. There is ensured sufficient publicity of the study program on the VU website and University intranet regarding program's aim and learning outcomes, as well as admission and results of surveys. The site visit ensures, that general satisfaction of students, alumni and social partners with the study program is high. However, the quality assurance principles are not fully implemented yet in the SP Optometry. Because the programme is still new, further work is needed to ensure that all internal processes of the VU are correctly implemented in the new study program.

AREA 7: CONCLUSIONS

AREA 7	Unsatisfactory - 1 Does not meet the requirements	Satisfactory - 2 Meets the requirements, but there are substantial shortcomings to be eliminated	Good - 3 Meets the requirements, but there are shortcomings to be eliminated	Very good - 4 Very well nationally and internationally without any shortcomings	Exceptional - 5 Exceptionally well nationally and internationally without any shortcomings
First cycle			X		

COMMENDATIONS

1. There is a well-designed internal quality assessment system in place at VU, which assesses multiple quality indicators and multiple surveys are used to assess the feedback from students, graduates, and social partners.
2. The surveys from students show a high satisfaction with their studies and SP Optometry.

RECOMMENDATIONS

To address shortcomings

1. Better defined surveys for students should be prepared to assess the educational competencies and practical skills.
2. Improvement in communications with social partners and graduates is necessary to ensure the collection and analysis of completed surveys.

For further improvement

1. The sharing of survey results should be planned, and the outcomes should be discussed and published.

V. SUMMARY

SP Optometry at VU - an interesting and valuable study programme (first-cycle) in the field of Medical Technology. Launched in 2021, this is still the only study programme in optometry at VU which offers a bachelor's degree in health sciences and the professional qualification of an optometrist. As a new programme it is a great example how the programme can prepare the graduates to obtain science-based knowledge and teaches important practical-clinical skills necessary for high-quality diagnosis, correction of refractive defects and recognition of eye diseases using modern innovative technologies. Strategically, this is one of the programmes created based on the assessment of the needs of society, health care services and the labour market. It is also based on the university capabilities, and scientific and teaching potential. In addition, there are more available financial, physical and information resources comparing to any other higher education institution. This program is well aligned with the mission of VU.

A valuable part of the programme is that aims and outcomes are formulated to match other similar local or international programmes, labour market and is structured in cooperation with social partners from Lithuanian scientific institutions and businesses. It seems that high demand still exists and around 500 of optometrists are needed in the Lithuanian labour market. The program prepares graduates to apply for a licence and be directly emerged in the health care system.

Student selection and admission process for SP Optometry takes place during the general admission according to the rules of the University. The students are admitted based on their admission score, which is highly depending on applicants' performance in multiple sciences, such as Biology, Chemistry, Mathematics, Physics, Information Technology, and Foreign or Lithuanian Language. Higher scores are required to be accepted into State funded places and this ensures that study program receives strong applicants with a good science background.

The University offers multiple resources and access to highly recognised academic clinics (such as Santara Academic Hospital) and multiple prestigious private clinics and offices with established practices in ophthalmology. There is also cooperation with optical stores to ensure almost all the internship and acquisition of optometric skills. However, the non-standardized provision of optical equipment in optical stores, as well as insufficient equipment in the optometric laboratory at VU, creates the main risk to ensure the same acquisition of optometric skills for all graduates of the study programme. As there is a great opportunity for students to experience the studies abroad, it is suggested to consider not only learning mobility, but also internship and research mobility to expand the student's experience in the optometry field.

There are an established support system and dedicated funding to encourage faculty participation in conferences, seminars, training sessions, and international professional networks. Nevertheless, several areas for further development have been identified. In particular, increasing teaching staff mobility would be beneficial, which requires additional financial resources and strengthened cooperation with foreign universities offering comparable study programmes. Furthermore, the pedagogical competencies of healthcare practitioners and medical doctors involved in teaching should be enhanced through systematic participation in relevant training programmes. The focus on improvement of the educational competencies of teaching staff is important for the future and better communication with students, teaching staff and social partners is recommended. Employee training can be done in collaboration with professional organizations and industry companies. This will allow for the integration and development of stronger industry-specific topics in the curriculum, for example, improving the learning outcomes related to blindness and vision impairment etc.

Expanding the thematic scope of research projects, academic publications, and student final theses, especially in areas directly related to optometry and vision science, would contribute to strengthening the academic profile of the programme. In addition, students should be more actively involved in research activities, including the acquisition of fundamental biomedical research skills,

understanding of methodological and ethical requirements, and the development of competencies in data analysis.

For high quality optometric skills training and need to meet modern teaching and practice requirements the expansion and regular upgrade of optometric equipment is necessary. Therefore, more additional optometric workstations for hands-on activities should be added as soon as possible and ophthalmoscopy simulator should be introduced, also a separate optometric lab should be set up.

Given that the study programme is new with only the first graduates in May 2025, it requires a comprehensive analysis of the current pros and cons and strong strategic support from both the VU and external financial sources (including social partners) for further development.

Our panel of experts wants to THANK YOU for the intense and hard work preparing Self-Evaluation Report, organizing site visit and showing your teaching facilities, for engaging in useful discussions, inviting your students, staff, graduates and stakeholders. All of this gave us an opportunity to learn more about your SP Optometry – a work that has been done, the success that has been achieved, and remaining goals with new plans.