CENTER FOR QUALITY ASSESSMENT IN HIGHER EDUCATION

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EVALUATION REPORT

STUDY FIELD of LINGUISTICS

at Vytautas Magnus University

Expert panel:

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2. **Prof. dr. Alberto Fernandez Costales,** *academic,*

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Vilnius
2021

Study Field Data

Title of the study programme	Programme "Applied English Linguistics"	Programme "Modern Linguistics"	Programme "Sociolinguistics and Multilingualism*"
State code	6211NX042	6211NX038	6281NX001
Type of studies	Master	Master	Master
Cycle of studies	Second	Second	Second
Mode of study and duration (in years)	Full time (2 years)	Full time (1,5 years)	Full time (2 years)
Credit volume	120	90	120
Qualification degree and (or) professional qualification	Master of Humanities	Master of Humanities	Master of Humanities
Language of instruction	English	Lithuanian	English
Minimum education required	Bachelor degree or its equivalent	Bachelor degree or its equivalent	Bachelor degree or its equivalent
Registration date of the study programme	19-05-1997	17-03-2016	04-04-2013

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I. INTRODUCTION

1.1. BACKGROUND OF THE EVALUATION PROCESS

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

1.2. EXPERT PANEL

The expert panel was completed according to the Experts Selection Procedure (hereinafter referred to as the Procedure) approved by the Director of Centre for Quality Assessment in Higher Education on 31 December 2019 Order No. V-149. The Visit to HEI was conducted by the panel on *11/05/2021*.

Prof. dr. Srebren Dizdar (panel chairperson), *Bosnia and Herzegovina;*
Prof. dr. Alberto Fernandez-Costales, *Spain;*
Doc. dr. Karolina Grzech, *Spain;*
Mr. Snorre Karkkonen Svensson, *Latvia;*
Mr. Gabrielius Simas Sapiega, *Lithuania.*

1.3. GENERAL INFORMATION

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

No.	Name of the document
1.	*Final theses*
2.	*Examples of the exams*

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

Although the interest in studying diverse language features could be traced several thousand years ago, it was only in the last two hundred years that there had been a number of attempts to establish a specific academic/scientific discipline on its own. However, despite rather productive activities and results that classical Philology studies have attained in the course of the 19th century, it was in the 20th century that *Linguistics* gained its renowned status as a vibrant research area and respective study field in Humanities and Social Studies across universities, primarily in Europe and USA, and, subsequently in other parts of the contemporary world. In this ongoing process, in the first two decades of the 21st century, certain burning issues about the actual nature of these studies have still remained unresolved. They mostly revolve around the issue of how Linguistics as a field of studies could be and should be organised, taking into account the ever-expanding range of approaches to phenomena related to language as the primary focus of academic and scholarly interest. This dilemma is present not only on the theoretical level, but even more so in relation to the practical organisation, structure, facilities, management, and, above all, in regard to the key actors – students, teachers and researchers involved in the field. These actors happen to be involved in the execution of different activities related to the manner in which respective departments respond to the needs and requirements that had been set up within the European Area of Higher Education (EHEA) under the auspices of the Bologna Process. It also seems feasible to bring the current Linguistics study field closer to international standards and academic excellence both at the level of the national legislation in higher education in Lithuania and its actual legal requirements. A rather fair and objective evaluation about the state of such studies, their features, challenges in view of opportunities and threats, and possible recommendations to help improvements and further advanced organisation and execution of these studies was not only needed from the point of view of the regular assessment, but highly necessary for future activities in the envisaged period following the evaluation.

That is why the international Team of experts (hereafter - the Team), having been entrusted by SKVC to perform the review of the Linguistics field of studies at Vytautas Magnus University (hereinafter VMU) at Kaunas, Lithuania – originally established in 1922 and re-established in 1989 – had to take into account many issues that could better illuminate how these studies

could be understood from external perspectives. Through a number of online interviews with the senior management, the team that has prepared Self-Evaluation Report (hereafter - SER), teachers, students, alumni and social partners, the evaluation Team gathered as much information as possible, leading to additional findings that, in the end, form a larger picture in the form of this Final Report.

The VMU offers degree studies of all three cycles – bachelor, masters, and PhD studies – which cover a broad array of interdependent fields ranging from humanities, social sciences and arts to the fundamental sciences, environmental sciences, and biotechnologies. The Linguistics field of studies (hereinafter LFS) has been carried out by the Faculty of Humanities (hereinafter FH), which consists of six Departments (Department of Foreign Language, Literary and Translation Studies, Department of Cultural Studies, Department of History, Department of Philosophy, and Department of Lithuanian Studies), six Research Centres (Centre for Asian Studies, Centre of Computational Linguistics, Centre for Research on Culture, Centre of Kaunas History, Centre of Letonics, Centre of Multilingualism and Intercultural Communication, and *Centre Universitaire des Pays Francophone*), and one Institute (VMU Lithuanian Emigration Institute). As it has been duly referred to in SER, the VMU FH, having declared its liberal study policy, tries to ensure that the studies offered at VMU are comprehensive and cover a broad spectrum of courses, which are not restricted to specialised, pre-defined subjects. Within a larger set of envisaged aims and objectives, VMU encourages its students to plan their studies themselves through choosing general study courses and a part of courses within their main field of study. As a clear sign of inward mobility, students have also been given the possibility to move from one study programme to another and change the form of studies. Teachers and students alike, and especially younger researchers, have all been invited to explore Lithuanian culture in its diverse aspects, and to promote it on an international scale, together with the interrelated civic, national, and European self-awareness values, in a close connection with other Lithuanian studies and multilingual research.

Having followed the prescribed methodology, the Team tried its best to assess not only the required seven specific areas of expertise, but also to take into consideration that the difficulties having been caused by the Covid-19 pandemic since mid-March 2020 had definitely affected the process of instruction and research, as well as all aspects of everyday life, in particular the inability to carry out traditional face-to-face classes and communication between teachers and students. That is why virtual visits, although they could never replace direct human communication, seemed to be the best solution under the given circumstances. Thanks to the good will and efforts of fellow colleagues, the interviews conducted by the Team members managed to produce an active interaction with fellow colleagues from the Linguistics field of studies at the VMU. A definite asset was the fact that all the questions and answers, as well as other valuable pieces of information, were provided in English, which saved the time allotted for interviews and enabled in-depth elaboration of some questions the Team had been particularly interested in.

II. GENERAL ASSESSMENT

Linguistics study field and **second cycle** at Vytautas Magnus University is given **positive** evaluation.

Study field and cycle assessment in points by evaluation areas.

No.	Evaluation Area	Evaluation of an area in points*
1.	Study aims, outcomes and content	4
2.	Links between science (art) and study activities	5
3.	Student admission and support	4
4.	Studying, student performance and graduate employment	4
5.	Teaching staff	4
6.	Learning facilities and resources	4
7.	Study quality management and publicity	4
	Total:	**29**

*1 (unsatisfactory) - there are essential shortcomings that must be eliminated;
2 (satisfactory) - meets the established minimum requirements, needs improvement;
3 (good) - the field develops systematically, has distinctive features;
4 (very good) - the field is evaluated very well in the national and international context, without any deficiencies;
5 (excellent) - the field is exceptionally good in the national and international context/environment.

III. STUDY FIELD ANALYSIS

3.1. STUDY AIMS, OUTCOMES AND CONTENT

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

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

(1) Factual situation

The three Masters' Degree programmes offered by VMU in the field of humanities are intended to provide graduates with solid competencies in languages, linguistics, translation, communication, multilingualism, and the relation between language and technology. The programmes are adequately framed within Lithuania's Progress Strategy "Lithuania 2030". The SER underlines the aim of VMU to go beyond traditional philological or translation studies-oriented programmes, so as to offer programmes oriented towards the current needs of the labour market. These needs are mostly evaluated by the reports from social partners. Graduates mostly work as translators, copywriters, editors, and also language teachers.

(2) Expert judgement/indicator analysis

The three second cycle study programmes evaluated within the LSF offer an updated view of Linguistics and the Humanities in general, which distinguishes them from more traditional, philology-oriented degrees. The study programmes are well planned to meet the objective of equipping their graduates with analytical competencies, knowledge, and skills valuable from the perspective of the labour market. In fact, graduates value the skills acquired through the programmes, especially in terms of information technologies, multilingual skills, and intercultural communication.

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

(1) Factual situation

The three study programmes are well-framed within the institutional strategy of VMU, its mission and objectives. There is a strong emphasis in two directions: the internationalisation of the programmes (especially SoMu) and its teaching staff, and efforts being made to strengthen the research component and promote the applicability of the study programmes.

(2) Expert judgement/indicator analysis

The study programmes are coherent with the mission and objectives of VMU and there is a well-defined strategy to build a study field with a distinctive focus on multilingualism and the relation between language and technology. It is noteworthy that the efforts to highlight the international dimension of the study programmes have translated into long-term partnerships with several institutions and research centres in Europe. The salary of some teachers (junior lecturers) should be a priority for the administration: although it is a national issue, more creative solutions could be implemented by the administration to make sure they can attract young researchers to work in the LSF.

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

(1) Factual situation

The scope of the MA in Applied English Linguistics (AEL) is 120 ECTS (2 years); The scope of the MA in Modern Linguistics (ML) is 90 ECTS (1.5 years); The MA in Sociolinguistics and Multilingualism (SoMu) is an international joint degree offered by VMU, Kaunas University, Johannes-Gutenberg University, Stockholm University and the University of Tartu, and its scope is 120 ECTS (2 years). In each of these study programmes 30 credits are assigned to the final thesis. As for the contact hours, the three MA programmes exceed the legal requirement (10%), as they offer 30% (AEL and SoMu), and 27% (ML). Likewise, the time allocated to individual learning complies with the legal framework. While the legal requirement is 50%, individual learning comprises 70% (AEL and SoMu) to 73% (ML) of the learning time.

(2) Expert judgement/indicator analysis

All legal requirements are met, and the programmes fit the main standards of the European Higher Education Area (EHEA). ECTS credits are allocated in a correct way, with a good estimation of student workload.

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

(1) Factual situation

The evaluated programmes have been designed in line with the study outcomes of second cycle studies: knowledge and its practical applications, research skills, specific competences, social competences, and personal skills. The aims and objectives of the three study programmes are described with sufficient detail and rigour, and the learning outcomes are coherent with the ethos of every programme. Each module is described in terms of its learning outcomes and all the learning results of the modules cover the expected results and goals of the whole study programme.

(2) Expert judgement/indicator analysis

The study programmes meet the requirements set in the Descriptor of Study Cycles in terms of the programme goals and learning outcomes that are specific to the second study cycle.

The aims, objectives, and the learning outcomes are clearly specified and they are in line with the overarching philosophy of each MA degree (focusing on comparative linguistics, translation theory, cross-cultural analysis, language and technology, and multilingualism). Sufficient attention is paid to the development of research skills in the ML programme aiming to prepare students for doctoral studies.

Possible improvements and future restructuring of each study programme are adequately discussed among teaching staff of each MA programme, as well as with the administration.

There is a suitable range and combination of teaching methods, and the methods are diversified and adapted to the study subjects. The information given in the SER and those gathered through the online visit led the Team to conclude that the new (online) teaching modalities are being successfully incorporated by the teaching staff.

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

(1) Factual situation

The core of the three MA programmes comprises modules on translation, foreign language teaching, intercultural communication, language and technology, sociolinguistics, and multilingualism. The way in which every study programme is organized varies depending on its specific focus, so the aforementioned areas are prioritized accordingly and modules are offered as compulsory or optional depending on the programme.

(2) Expert judgement/indicator analysis

The curricula of the programmes and the organisation of the modules are reasonable and coherent with the specific objective of each study programme. Interdisciplinarity is a key element of all three programmes. This is an advantage for the students, as it provides a broader perspective on linguistics.

There is a good balance between mandatory and optional courses. Good attention is paid to skills and competences that prepare students for the labour market, but there is also a focus on research activities to prepare graduates for their PhD studies (especially in the SoMu and the ML programmes).

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

(1) Factual situation

In each study programme, students can personalise their curricula by selecting specific optional modules. Two of the study programmes also offer further possibilities in the form of "other optional courses of the study field" (ML) and specific language combinations (SoMu).

(2) Expert judgement/indicator analysis

The three study programmes allow students to personalise their learning experience to some extent, although a great deal of variability can be perceived. ML is clearly the most flexible programme (with students having the possibility to select a specific "stream" or specialisation focusing either on "Language Technologies and Translation" or on "Sociolinguistics") while the AEL programme is limited to a more standard variety of options. As an international joint programme, SoMu also provides further flexibility to students, who have to choose language combinations and optional subjects in the destination universities where they study in addition to VMU.

AEL could offer broader possibilities to choose specialisation and free elective subjects.

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

(1) Factual situation

The preparation and defence of final theses is regulated by VMU Study Regulations and the General Order on the Final Theses Preparation and Defence. The theses are reviewed by defence committees, each of which includes a member from among the social partners. The learning outcomes of the final thesis are clearly defined in each programme. The theses are written in English in AEL and SoMu, and in Lithuanian in the ML programme. The specific features of SoMu regarding the elaboration of the theses are in line with the standard practices in joint Masters' Degrees in the European Higher Education Area.

(2) Expert judgement/indicator analysis

The preparation and defense of the final theses meet all the legal requirements, and the information provided to the students in the three study programmes regarding the elaboration of their dissertation, editing issues, the preparation of the defence and plagiarism is appropriate. The topics of the theses in each programme are in line with the specialisation of the students and the particular research areas of the teaching staff working in the corresponding study programmes.

Strengths and weaknesses of this evaluation area:

(1) Strengths:

1. The objectives, aims and learning outcomes of the three study programmes are coherent with the study plans.
2. The overarching objective of VMU – to offer programmes in linguistics that depart from the classical "philological only" perspective – is appropriate to provide students with suitable skills and competences to enter the labour market.
3. The University is making progress with regard to the internationalisation of the programmes (especially SoMu).

(2) Weaknesses:

1. More optional courses could be offered in the AEL programme.

3.2. LINKS BETWEEN SCIENCE (ART) AND STUDY ACTIVITIES

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

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

(1) Factual situation

A considerable amount of research is produced within the LSF, especially with regard to the number of staff members. The staff of the VMU LSF are involved in several national and international projects, to a great extent targeting issues important for society. Cooperation takes place both with academic and non-academic institutions.

(2) Expert judgement/indicator analysis

Taking the staff numbers and the financing into consideration, the scientific output in the LSF at VMU is very good. This is a strength that should be nurtured further. One issue that should be addressed based on the visit is to make it easier for staff to take sabbaticals to do research. A clear system and procedures should be implemented in this regard.

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

(1) Factual situation

The researchers working within the LSF apply different methodologies and carry out interdisciplinary research, while also collaborating with several national and international partners. The SER gives several excellent examples of activities and their impact on the study programmes when it comes to language resources and technology infrastructures, national and international cooperation in project work and professional networks, mobility, and internship possibilities.

(2) Expert judgement/indicator analysis

The link between the content of studies and the latest developments in the LSF is very good, and should be upheld. It is a great advantage that VMU is involved in several larger national projects that involve use of language technologies, giving students research possibilities.

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

(1) Factual situation

Students within the LSF get involved in scientific activities by participating in national and international projects, scientific events (giving presentations at conferences, either independently or as co-authors with teachers), and by publishing their research.

(2) Expert judgement/indicator analysis

The involvement of students in research projects is very positive, and it develops skills that are useful both for further research and for work outside of academia. Furthermore, it is a good way to recruit students for doctoral studies, as well as to give the students a possibility to develop professional networks. This good practice should be continued and developed further. A suggestion that was mentioned during our visit was that teaching research methods should be introduced into the curriculum of the study programmes from the very beginning. Also, it could be beneficial to introduce the development of skills that are useful both for research and for work outside of academia (e.g. project writing and management).

Strengths and weaknesses of this evaluation area:
(1) Strengths:

1. The level and scope of research done at the institution.

2. Focus on societal impact and usage of language technologies.

3. The integration of research in the study programmes and the possibility for students to get involved in research activities.

(2) Weaknesses:

No problems identified.

3.3. STUDENT ADMISSION AND SUPPORT

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

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

(1) Factual situation

The admission criteria for the degree programmes are clear and consistently applied. The intake of students fluctuates somewhat but is stable overall.

(2) Expert judgement/indicator analysis

The overall assessment is positive; The admission procedures are carried out in accordance with the legal acts of the Republic of Lithuania. The students had no complaints about their integration into VMU. All acceptance criteria are clear.

On the other hand, it is not entirely clear whether foreign students are admitted on the basis of practical, transparent provisions, and not just to ensure the criterion of internationality.

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

(1) Factual situation

The criteria for recognition of foreign degrees are in accordance with the Lisbon Recognition Convention and in cooperation with the Centre for Quality Assessment in Higher Education. If students embark on a study abroad programme, they first agree on a study plan with their advisors, so that the credits obtained abroad can be recognised at VMU. Students entering with higher language levels are able to take alternative credits.

(2) Expert judgement/indicator analysis

The system is fair, as well as ensuring transparency for potential applicants. Recognition of credits received abroad (if not in the ECTS scheme) is performed according to the established procedures. Study plans are coordinated to ensure proper quality of studies and students cannot manipulate credits and study subjects.

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

(1) Factual situation

Student mobility is fully guaranteed. The students are allowed to take advantage of mobility opportunities if they meet all the appropriate criteria set by the VMU's default procedure. Students choose to study abroad in large numbers and receive the support from VMU.

(2) Expert judgement/indicator analysis

VMU can be commended for the availability of mobility programmes for students. This experience ensures the quality of studies when students travel to the country where they are learning the language of their specialisation. In such cases, they have a great opportunity to stay for more than one semester.

Some of the lectures are conducted in English, which allows students to choose mobility programmes more smoothly, and at the same time to integrate properly into the university social life of another country, and provides further career prospects.

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

(1) Factual situation

Student support (financial, wellbeing, careers) is coordinated centrally through relevant departments within VMU, whereas academic support is provided locally. Students can apply for a fee reduction, or a delay in payment, and clear and relevant information regarding this is provided on the VMU webpage. Scholarships are also available: this includes scholarships for students from disadvantaged backgrounds, as well as motivational scholarships. Fees for university accommodation can also be reduced. Social support is provided through the student council.

(2) Expert judgement/indicator analysis

The system includes clear procedures. There is also a fairly clear division of functions between the departments. The requests from students in need of support are managed adequately and channeled in the right direction. Students' needs are well understood, and the desire to cooperate is felt.

3.3.5 Evaluation of the sufficiency of study information and student counselling.

(1) Factual situation

Students are satisfied with the availability of information. They receive all the necessary information by email, and know where to go in case of any problems. VMU also excellently ensures the dissemination and availability of information on online platforms.

(2) Expert judgement/indicator analysis

The flow of information is assessed positively, students have no complaints. The information provided to the students is clear. In the event of any questions, they receive answers fairly quickly, in a properly coordinated manner.

Strengths and weaknesses of this evaluation area:
(1) Strengths:

1. The student support system is well-designed, they receive information in a timely and appropriate manner, various scholarship opportunities are provided.
2. There is also a clear desire to provide the students with opportunities for practical application of their knowledge in collaboration with social partners.
3. The students themselves evaluate the support they receive positively.

(2) Weaknesses:

1. Students from foreign countries could receive better support to become properly integrated in the new cultural environment. They should receive more streamlined help with residential, formal and academic matters, and greater focus should be placed on their needs and effective communication with them.
2. The criteria for admitting foreig students are unclear, and the Team could not determine whether such students are indeed properly prepared to study at VMU.

3.4. STUDYING, STUDENT PERFORMANCE AND GRADUATE EMPLOYMENT

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

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

(1) Factual situation

The AEL and ML study programmes' timetables are adjusted to the needs of the students who work, with classes scheduled for the afternoons and flexible scheduling policies. The organisation of the teaching process includes many types of practical tasks, and the complexity of the teaching content increases as the students develop new skills. In the documents made

available to the Team the expected teaching outcomes were matched with the courses in which they are to be achieved, rather and discussed and problematised more broadly. Nonetheless, the learning outcomes are appropriate for the study cycle and field. The SoMu programme is organised differently from the other programmes due to its international character, but the part organised within the VMU is based on similar principles with regard to teaching and learning as the other two study programmes.

The transition to online teaching due to COVID-19 was well-prepared, changes were communicated to the students via email and online learning platforms. The Institute for Innovation assisted the study programmes in the transition to online on the technical side, also providing training for teachers. Blended learning has been introduced already before the pandemic.

The curriculum is systematically reviewed, new courses are being developed (e.g. a course on second language acquisition), and the existing ones are adapted (e.g. to be more suitable for international audiences). New materials, such a learner's corpus, are being introduced into the basis for several courses, as well as student research.

(2) Expert judgement/indicator analysis

The teaching and learning process in the field of linguistics at VMU is well-organised and appropriate for the study cycle. It emphasises the interdisciplinary nature of the study programmes and focuses on practical language skills, sociolinguistics and technology. Such a broad perspective is beneficial for the students, as the content and design of the curriculum allows them to be well-oriented in contemporary linguistics.

The online teaching is effective, and its implementation due to the COVID pandemic was based on previous experience with blended learning. Despite some initial difficulties, the teachers adjusted well to the online environment and made an effort to improve their skills and to adapt. The communication channels between the student and the teachers have not been particularly affected, and email remains the primary means of communication.

It is very positive that efforts are being made for the teaching/learning process to be active and problem-based. The aim of this approach – making students focus on specific problems and interests early on – is appropriate for the study cycle and beneficial from the point of view of the expected learning outcomes.

The Team was provided with a document (Annex 2) which described the descriptive learning outcomes and matched them with the relevant courses. However, it would have been useful to have more detailed information on the expected learning outcomes and teaching/learning methods for each of the courses. Preparing/reviewing such documents could be useful not only from the perspective of assessment – it would allow a better insight into the organisation of the learning process. The results of the evaluation visit suggest that in such review, particular

attention should be paid to the skills reinforced by particular tasks and assignments, so that they do not focus on reinforcing the skills which students have already acquired, but rather focus on new and more challenging learning outcomes.

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

(1) Factual situation

Individual study programmes can be provided to students with special needs and disabilities, and are also accessible to other students under special circumstances. The Team was not able to determine how easy it is to apply for the individual course of study, or what the application process entails, but the procedures are regulated by official documents on the University level. Students from socially vulnerable groups can receive scholarships, as well as discounts on tuition and dormitory fees.

The University facilities (including the library and the dormitories) are updated to better meet the needs of disabled students. VMU organises disability education campaigns. Facilities are provided at the library for visually-impaired students. The documents made available to the Team did not specify whether such provisions or other assistance (e.g. interpreters) are also provided for deaf students.

(2) Expert judgement/indicator analysis

In general, good levels of support exist for disabled students and students from disadvantaged backgrounds for the AFL and ML study programmes. It is less clear whether scholarships are available for such students wishing to study in the SoMu programme, which involves studying in multiple countries and carries a heavier financial burden. If not in place, such support should be considered. The provisions for deaf students should match the ones currently available for visually-impaired students (e.g. facilities at the library).

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

(1) Factual situation

Students' progress is monitored in accordance with VMU-wide regulations and procedures. Students are informed about the details of the study process before the start of each semester, and their queries are answered by the staff. During the first lectures, they are informed about the course aims, requirements and assessment methods. This information is also provided on Moodle. Students are assessed through mid-term and end of term exams (30% and 50% of the overall grade, respectively), as well as individual tasks/essays (20% of the final grade). The weighting can be adjusted to a particular module. An electronic system informing students

about their grades is in place, and procedures for giving post-assessment feedback are established. Assessment criteria are clear and students are made aware of them. In the AEL programme, the students also write research papers. Their evaluation criteria are set by the SPC. SPCs of all the study programmes play an active role in supervising student assessment, and discuss the results of their students once per semester. Students are also encouraged to self-evaluate and to discuss their progress with their teachers.

(2) Expert judgement/indicator analysis

The assessment of student progress is appropriately regulated, as well as carefully planned and thought-through. It is very positive that emphasis is placed on problem-based learning and that students are assessed cumulatively. At the same time, the Team did not manage to collect adequate information about the extent to which group work is involved in the learning process. The SER mentions that student evaluation is based on individual tasks, but the discussion with the staff revealed that students are involved in group research projects. In any case, group work could be a positive addition to the repertoire of assessment methods employed throughout the study programmes. It could also contribute to a more positive learning experience. Group work should also be considered as an additional opportunity for students to get and provide feedback to their peers.

The Department has organised a variety of ways in which teachers give constructive feedback to students. At the same time, as far as the Team was able to observe, the student-to-teacher feedback mechanisms work less well, especially under the COVID-19 conditions. In online teaching, it is much more challenging to observe whether students are genuinely engaged in the learning process, and greater emphasis should be placed at ensuring that they are. The versatility of the online environment should be exploited fully, e.g. through implementing a more diverse range of learning tasks adjusted to specific study subjects. The teaching process across the modules should be organised in a way which ensures that the students are both actively involved in the learning process, and intellectually challenged despite the lack of in-person interaction. The tasks which the students are expected to complete, and how they will be assessed for them, should be explained more clearly; Teachers have a great deal of control over how they structure their courses and the exam procedures, which is positive overall, but this heterogeneity can potentially be confusing for the students, especially in the absence of in-person contact with peers and lecturers.

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

(1) Factual situation

VMU Career Centre provides counselling for students during Job Fairs. The staff at the Department organises meetings with alumni and potential employers. The VMU has an active Alumni Club. The employment of VMU graduates is monitored through a survey conducted a year after graduation. The 2020 survey for the AEL programme received responses from 17

alumni – 16 were in employment, one was on maternity leave. The graduates of the evaluated study programmes pursue a range of different careers. A number of graduates from across the programmes undertake PhD studies, both in Lithuania and abroad. Those working outside academia pursue careers in business or as teachers.

(2) Expert judgement/indicator analysis

The data from the EXIT surveys regarding the employability of graduates are very positive. It is unclear, however, why VMU only surveys its graduates once, a year after graduation. It would have been telling to have periodic surveys of this type in the subsequent years. The employment prospects of the graduates from the evaluated study programmes are generally good, and the university keeps the students informed about prospective job opportunities at the University and the partnering institutions. From the perspective of the employers, the evaluated study programmes prepare valuable employees, but the students themselves seem to lack awareness of their good preparation for the job market. This could be addressed e.g. through organising a smaller version of Job Fairs or career counselling on the level of the Department, focusing specifically on the job opportunities related to the LSF. From the employability perspective it is also very positive that the Department is looking for new ways to collaborate with social partners and these efforts should be upheld. In particular, a wider range of prospective social partners should be made aware of the job-related skills in which the LSF trains its graduates.

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

(1) Factual situation

VMU-wide regulations and documents are in place regarding the academic integrity, tolerance and non-discrimination. Procedures regarding dishonest behaviour during examination and assessment are implemented at the SPC, Faculty and University levels. Procedures for prevention of plagiarism are in place, including the use of an electronic plagiarism detection tool. At the study programme level, issues related to integrity, tolerance and non-discrimination are treated by the SPCs and passed to the VMU-wide Ethics Commission if necessary. The Academic Ethics Commission responds to integrity-related appeals from both teachers and students.

(2) Expert judgement/indicator analysis

Appropriate VMU-wide regulations and documents are in place regarding the academic integrity, tolerance and non-discrimination. Problems related to these issues are handled on various levels of the VMU structure, from SPCs through Faculty to the University level, which ensures that they are adequately considered and resolved. In the period under evaluation, only one case of academic dishonesty was detected and it was handled with due seriousness – the

student had to re-submit the coursework in the following semester. In the SoMu programme, the students are explicitly trained in the issues regarding vulnerable and at-risk groups and develop research projects focusing on them. This practice is highly valuable and should be extended to the other programmes within the LSF.

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

(1) Factual situation

Procedures for appeals are established by VMU-wide regulations. Students have a right to lodge appeals regarding the quality and fairness of assessment if they have an argument to support their appeal. The Dean of the Faculty and the Head of Department are involved in the procedures of investigating student complaints.

(2) Expert judgement/indicator analysis

In the evaluation period there were no complaints from students regarding the results of their academic assessment. The special commission appointed to investigate student appeals involves the Head of Department and two Faculty lecturers. This could be a factor discouraging the potential appeals, as students are aware their complaints will be handled in their immediate environment and might be wary of being adversely affected about lodging an appeal.

The appellation form referenced in the SER was only available on the VMU webpage in Lithuanian, and the Team could not find a way to access it without the link provided in the SER. The document should be translated into English for the benefit of international students. If not already in place, an easily accessible link to the form and information about the appeal procedure should be made available to the students, e.g. though Moodle. From the information made available to the Team it is also not clear how much time students have to make the appeal – if not currently available, this information should be provided to students.

Strengths and weaknesses of this evaluation area:
(1) Strengths:

1. The employability of the graduates is good, and efforts are being made to assist them to situate themselves in the professional world.

(2) Weaknesses:

1. The assessment procedures used in each module, especially in online teaching, are not always clear to students, which leads to potential confusion as to what is expected of them.
2. Assessment methods are heavily based on individual work, and the learning potential of group work is not exploited sufficiently.
3. The synergy between the study field and the social partners could be stronger.

3.5. TEACHING STAFF

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

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

(1) Factual situation

The staff working in LSF is qualified and meets the requirements of the General Study Requirements Description. The LSF includes 24 lecturers from the departments of Foreign Language, Literary and Translation Studies, Lithuanian Studies, "Public Communication, Sociology and Education Academy, the Centre of Intercultural Communication and Multilingualism, the Centre of Computational Linguistics, and the Institute of Foreign Languages. The Field involves 11 professors (46% of the staff), 8 associate professors (33%), 4 lecturers with a PhD, and one assistant.

The teachers are hired based on their academic qualifications and teaching experience. The hiring process is competitive, with standards set in accordance with the national and international requirements. The student-teacher ratio is appropriate.

(2) Expert judgement/indicator analysis

Teachers are hired through a public tender, and the entrance requirements are consistent and transparent. The teaching staff working in the LSF has sound pedagogical experience at university level (the minimum teachers' experience is 7 years). The teaching staff includes teachers at different moments of their academic careers, and their specialisation and expertise match the areas related to the subjects they teach.

The lecturers collaborate with several research groups affiliated with other (foreign) HEIs in the fields of Linguistics and Translation Studies, and the visibility of their activities has merit. The internationalisation of the teaching staff is good, and the collaboration with foreign colleagues may enrich the teaching and research activities at VMU. The scientific track of the teaching staff is very relevant in language and technology and multilingualism, with a good record of publications and research projects.

Although the research activities and the academic productivity of the teaching staff are noteworthy, it would be advisable that more efforts are made to publish scientific papers in peer-reviewed high-impact journals and book chapters in leading publishing houses in the field of Linguistics outside Lithuania. The possibilities for teaching staff to have sabbaticals is restricted for practical reasons, e.g. lacking substitutes for the courses they are teaching.

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

(1) Factual situation

The teaching staff participate in Erasmus+ mobility exchanges (1 teaching exchange and 3 training mobilities in 2018), and there have also been outgoing mobilities in the framework of joint research projects with foreign universities.
Incoming mobility is also promoted through the participation of foreign experts in PhD vivas. Also, seminars for students are organised regularly.

(2) Expert judgement/indicator analysis

Overall, the internationalisation strategy of the LSF is appropriate. It is worth mentioning that most lecturers have worked in other HEIs. They have practical experience studying and/or teaching abroad (46% of the teaching staff received one degree outside Lithuania). The teaching staff working in the LSF actively participate in international networks and exchanges. There is a coherent strategy to incorporate some of the lessons learned from other institutions into the teaching and research activities of the VMU*.*

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

(1) Factual situation

Teacher professional development is organised under 8 groups of competencies: higher education didactics competencies, digital competencies, research competencies, management competencies, foreign language competencies, intercultural competencies, subject-related competencies, and personal competencies (regulated by the Description of Procedure for Professional Development at VMU, 2018).

(2) Expert judgement/indicator analysis

The conditions to improve the competencies of the teaching staff are adequate, and teachers are provided with sufficient opportunities to progress in their careers. Suitable training and support are offered by the administration, and teachers can update their skills.

The training offer provided at VMU is consistent, comprehensive and well-organised. Lecturers are also encouraged to take courses at other institutions. Several teachers have participated in

international courses and events related to professional development (Summer school in Lancaster, CLARIN workshops in Austria and Sweden, a staff training event in Spain, etc.).

Strengths and weaknesses of this evaluation area:

(1) Strengths:

1. Teaching staff profile and competencies are suitable for the study programme.
2. The internationalisation strategy is appropriate and most lecturers have international experience.
3. The research productivity of the teaching staff in this study field is good.

(2) Weaknesses:

1. Currently, there is no system implemented to request sabbatical leaves.
2. The salaries of junior staff should be more competitive, since they are earning less than the PhD stipend. Although it is a national issue in Lithuania, it should be addressed by the administration to make sure that they can attract and keep talent at VMU.

3.6. LEARNING FACILITIES AND RESOURCES

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

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

(1) Factual situation

With its 222 classrooms and many working places for both small and larger groups of students, VMU provides a more than suitable physical environment for studying and other activities necessary for the overall educational process. Most of the LSF classes take place in the building at V. Putvinskio str. 23. This building also houses the workplaces of the LSF teachers, but office space for the teaching staff is limited.

All the rooms have been computerised and have internet connection as well as other necessary equipment, such as multimedia projectors and audiovisual equipment. If needed, additional technical equipment can be supplied - upon request and if the need arises in the educational process - in order to properly organise specific courses and enable appropriate application of different study methods. All in all, 46 computer rooms have been equipped for the study process, and the size of computer classes varies from 5 to 31 workspaces.

In a number of lectures and seminars computers are needed to complete course activities. Therefore, most of the LSF teachers use the so-called "magic" Room 413, which is equipped

with computers and all the necessary software (e.g. CHILDES, SDL Trados, software for translation, and terminology management). The room has to be booked in advance. Other classrooms also have suitable working conditions to meet the study aims (e.g. a smartboard in Room 313 with a possibility to take notes during seminars; such notes can be saved and uploaded on Moodle).

The majority of research and study activities have been provided for by the rather sophisticated Library, which, with its diverse multimedia and printed facilities, provides service to more than 12 thousand users, served in 8 library departments. The Library has a total of 770 working places, visitors can work with 237 Library computers, and 329 places are available to connect with personal computers. There is readily available access to individual and group work rooms, workplaces for visitors with disabilities, discussion spaces, and recreation areas.

There is an enviable amount of 624 thousand electronic resources (357 thousand e- books, 31 thousand e-journals, 236 thousand conference presentations, audio recordings, study theses, and other documents). The community also uses 58 databases, which can be accessed on the University premises and from remote computers. The Library managed to create user-friendly conditions for access to information resources. The most necessary printed documents are freely available and stored according to research fields; the search for publications is facilitated by information notes and various visual aids. Just about 9 thousand full-text documents (books and articles of scientific journals published by the University, students' final theses) and over 60 thousand records of scientific publications can be retrieved or borrowed with external interactive links to full-text documents. The archives of 33 electronic University scientific journals have been prepared in the VMU CRIS repository.

(2) Expert judgement/indicator analysis

VMU is dedicated to providing its staff and students with state-of-the-art hi-tech surroundings, and good commendable efforts are being made to ensure a comfortable, adequate and efficient physical space and virtual potential for all the areas of activities needed to meet the contemporary requirements in conducting teaching, preparation of papers and theses, as well as research on projects relevant to the LSF.

At the same time, not all lecturers have access to the office space and the computers at VMU. This also puts feedback procedures under strain, in what relates to the student-teacher contact. This is not relevant so much under the Covid, but in regular situations, if students need to approach the lecturers and seek a piece of advice for their work, they should be able to visit their teachers at a dedicated office.

It should also be pointed out that while the existence of the 'magic room' 413 for specialised courses is very positive, it has to be booked, which somewhat limits its productivity. The students can work remotely on the computers there and to use the software, e.g. Trados, which has made the relevant software's use teaching possible under the COVID conditions. This

experience should be used more in future, and more tangible developments are needed in this regard so that the students' and staff access to all the relevant software and hardware can be ensured. If possible, it would be preferable to have another such room.

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

(1) Factual situation

VMU has developed suitable annual and longer-term plans for upgrading its resources. A number of new computers (about 20%) and multimedia equipment have been purchased regularly, according to the resource development plans prepared according to the study and research needs. Almost all computers are connected to a common network and have an Internet connection; VMU computer network security systems are constantly updated and meet all the contemporary requirements. Through a centralised system for monitoring and updating hardware and software, VMU makes certain that only legal software is used in computer classrooms and other computerised workplaces. Every six months, the software is audited and updated or supplemented. The commercial software used in the study process is used with educational licenses and is available to students free of charge.

The Library website runs an interactive document-ordering service for resources required for studies or research. Students, teachers and researchers also benefit from versatile resources in the Center of Computational Linguistics and the Center for Multilingualism and Intercultural Communication, where users can access corpora, databases, automatic annotation tools and other useful digital resources.

(2) Expert judgement/indicator analysis

Since the previous evaluation, there has been the evident improvement of physical facilities, primarily in terms of the new building, where the department moved to 5 years ago. It definitely means that the teaching staff are able to work more productively. At the same time, the Library has also been renewed, which allows both the students and other visitors to work more comfortably. Computers and other pertinent multimedia equipment have been regularly renewed and the access to licensed electronic resources, both the hardware and software, has been secured according to relevant international regulations and benchmarking.

However, despite such good access to research databases with a wide spectrum of digital publications, the information collected by the Team suggests that students still do not know how to use them properly for the purposes of doing research for their studies, and, especially, final theses. More training is needed in this regard - something the Library could do at the beginning of the semester, upon the recommendation of teachers, or at the students' request.

Strengths and weaknesses of this evaluation area:

(1) Strengths:

1. Sufficient physical space with comfortable classroom and other related facilities are available to researchers, teachers and students within the LSF
2. Digital resources available to students and staff have the capacity to be used on 24/7 basis, which efficiently resolved most of the issues linked to distance learning;
3. Technical assistance is available for teachers, researchers and students;
4. Constantly updated library resources readily available for studies within the LSF contribute to creating an enviable learning environment.

(2) Weaknesses:

1. The overall and individual access to office space should be improved within the LSF, since not all lecturers have access to the office space and the computers at VMU.
2. The capacity of the 'magic room' 413 for specialised courses could be improved, or another such room could be provided.

3.7. STUDY QUALITY MANAGEMENT AND PUBLICITY

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

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

(1) Factual situation

The internal quality assurance system is ensured by the SPCs, the Head of Department, and the Dean of the Faculty. Quality assurance follows international and national, university-level standards and description of procedures. The SPCs, which consist of teachers, a social partner, and a student representative have a central role in the process. The programmes are reviewed yearly.

(2) Expert judgement/indicator analysis

The quality assurance system for the LSF is appropriate and efficient. The inclusion of a social partner and a student in each of the SPCs is positive, and it should be ensured that they do not have a merely formal role.

3.7.2. Evaluation of the effectiveness of the involvement of stakeholders (students and other stakeholders) in internal quality assurance. Evaluation of the planning and upgrading of resources need to be carried out in the field studies.

(1) Factual situation

Students and other stakeholders are engaged in internal quality assurance through the mechanisms and bodies of the institution. Surveys are conducted among the students on a regular basis each semester, covering a variety of important aspects. Additionally, there are surveys for graduates when finishing studies, and for alumni a year after graduation. There are also yearly surveys for teachers, and for employers/social partners. The results are evaluated by the SPCs, covering important aspects, and are discussed with the Head of the Department and the Dean. In addition to the surveys, the mentioned stakeholders are listened to in other ways, e.g. meetings.

(2) Expert judgement/indicator analysis

The stakeholders are engaged in the quality assurance of the programmes and the LSF in a good way, mainly participating in surveys. It is positive that social partners and students are participating in the SPCs. One could consider using additional ways of including the stakeholders, e.g., roundtable discussions, brainstorming sessions, or workshops, as this might give a different, and useful input complementary to the surveys. Moreover, it is important to organise closer and regular contact with a larger variety of social partners and employers, as well as with alumni (e.g. through alumni association or similar) for improvement of the programmes and fruitful cooperation with partners outside of university.

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

(1) Factual situation

The collection of information on studies is done through surveys for students, graduates, alumni, and social partners, covering different areas. There is a system for how the results are used to improve the programmes and processes, e.g., through annual analysis. Teachers have online access to the survey results. The results are shared with the SPC chairpersons, and are discussed in the SPC meetings. The results are published on the VMU website.

(2) Expert judgement/indicator analysis

The collection of information is done systematically and regularly. It is positive that also the students are encouraged to reflect on their own learning.

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

(1) Factual situation

A variety of surveys are conducted: surveys for graduating students, university's surveys for students in each course, and decentralised surveys for each of the programmes. Generally, the students were positive regarding the study programmes (especially, quality of lectures, interdisciplinarity, communication, and atmosphere), and there have been actions to improve the stated shortcomings.

(2) Expert judgement/indicator analysis

As far as the Team was able to conclude, the feedback system functions well, and there are several concrete examples of the VMU having taken action based on the opinions of the students. This is positive and should be continued. The results regarding the strengths and shortcomings mentioned in SER were generally confirmed during the visit. Some of the areas to improve could include the quality of teaching for some of the teachers (students' satisfaction with a subject/module is more dependent on teaching staff than on the subject itself) and also information for students on what to expect before the studies start, as well as a greater degree of internationalisation (study programmes others than SoMu).

Strengths and weaknesses of this evaluation area:

(1)   Strengths:

1. There is a well-functioning system of quality management, where shortcomings are evaluated and actions taken based on the feedback from all the central stakeholders.

(2) Weaknesses:

No problems identified.

IV. EXAMPLES OF EXCELLENCE

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

The LSF at VMU shows several examples of excellence when it comes to the links between science and study activities. The most notable aspects of the LSF's exceptional performance are the following:

- The research productivity of the staff is very high.
- The research areas and questions, tackled by both staff and MA students, are highly relevant for society: VMU shows commendable social awareness in this respect.
- The research within the LSF is well-connected with study activities, and involves extended use of language technologies.
- The University initiates projects, attracting external financing and involving social partners.

V. RECOMMENDATIONS

Evaluation area	Recommendations for the evaluation area at HEI (study cycle)
Study aims, outcomes and content	The AEL programme could include more optional courses.
Links between science (art) and study activities	It should be easier for staff to take sabbaticals to do research, and there should be a clear system and procedure for this. Teaching of research methods could be introduced at an earlier stage in the course of studies. The LSF should consider introducing development/teaching of skills useful both for research and for work outside academia (e.g. project writing and management).
Student admission and support	The admission criteria of foreign students should be ensured, and they should receive assistance with all the necessary arrangements. It is important that foreign students be admitted according to default criteria and that their academic level corresponds to that of the requirements for national students.
Studying, student performance and graduate employment	The programmes train well-prepared, employable graduates. Efforts should be made, however, to make the students more aware of their value to the job market and potential career opportunities outside academia. The examination procedures for individual modules should be explained to students in more detail, especially in the online teaching situation, and some standardisation should be considered regarding the detail in which learning outcomes and objectives are framed across the courses. At the moment, the assessment is mainly based on individual work: more meaningful use of group work, also in student assessment, should be considered.
Teaching staff	A specific procedure to apply for sabbatical leaves should be implemented. The university should explore ways to improve the situation of young scholars regarding their salary.

Learning facilities and resources	The overall but also individual access to office space should be improved.
Study quality management and publicity	Closer and more regular contact with a larger variety of social partners and employers, as well as alumni (e.g. through alumni clubs or similar) should be developed. There should be better information for potential students about what to expect before the studies start.

VI. SUMMARY

The following is a summary of the findings of the expert panel based on the Self-Evaluation Report (SER) and the interviews with the university administration (senior management and faculty administration staff), staff responsible for the preparation of the SER, teaching staff and stakeholders (students, alumni, employers, social partners). The summary includes the main positive and negative quality aspects encountered in the evaluation - for specific recommendations and a more detailed discussion of issues to be addressed, the previous section of the present report should be consulted.

The LSF at the VMU offers an updated view of Linguistics and the Humanities. The study programmes equip their graduates with analytical competencies, knowledge, and skills valuable from the perspective of the labour market. The objectives of the evaluated study programmes are coherent with the mission and objectives of VMU. The LSF has a distinctive focus on multilingualism and the relation between language and technology. The teaching methods applied within the LSF are diverse and adapted to the study subjects, and the teachers are allowed much control over the content of their courses and mode of examination. Online teaching modalities are being successfully incorporated. Possible improvements and future restructuring of each study programme are adequately discussed among teaching staff of each MA programme, as well as with the administration. The curricula of the programmes and the organisation of the modules are reasonable and coherent with the specific objective of each study programme. Sufficient attention is paid to the development of research skills in programmes aiming to prepare students for doctoral studies. The teaching and learning process is well-organised and appropriate for the study cycle: It focuses on practical language skills, sociolinguistics and technology. Such a broad perspective is beneficial for the students, as the content and design of the curriculum allows them to be well-oriented in contemporary linguistics.

The link between the content of studies and the latest developments in the LSF is excellent. It is an advantage that VMU is involved in several larger national projects and collaborates with international HEIs. The involvement of students in research projects is very positive, and it develops skills that are useful both for further research and for work outside of academia.

The admission procedures are carried out in accordance with the appropriate legal acts of the Republic of Lithuania. The students had no complaints about their integration into VMU and all admission criteria for domestic students are clear. On the other hand, more clear admission criteria should be specified for foreign students. The level of internationalisation and student mobility is very good.

Good efforts are being made for the teaching/learning process to be active and problem-based. The aim of this approach – making students focus on specific problems and interests early on – is appropriate for the study cycle and beneficial from the point of view of the expected learning

outcomes. The LSF has organised a variety of ways in which teachers give constructive feedback to students. At the same time, as far as the Team was able to observe, the student-to-teacher feedback mechanisms work less well, especially under the COVID-19 conditions. In online teaching, it is much more challenging to observe whether students are genuinely engaged in the learning process, and greater emphasis should be placed at ensuring that they are, as well as on explaining to them what is expected of them in mid-term and final assessment and how their work will be evaluated. The data from the EXIT surveys regarding the employability of graduates are very positive.

The scientific output in the LSF staff is very good. The teaching staff working in this study field has sound pedagogical experience and are active in international networks and exchanges. At the same time, procedures for taking sabbaticals for research are not optimal, and a clear system and procedures should be implemented in this regard. At the same time, the teachers are provided with sufficient opportunities for training and progress. The low salaries of young researchers are a significant problem. Although this is a national issue in Lithuanian HE, it needs to be addressed creatively to attract and keep talent at VMU.

VMU is dedicated to providing its staff and students with adequate and efficient physical space and digital resources, including professional software relevant to the LSF, but efforts to secure good access to hardware and software for both staff and students should be intensified. Not all lecturers have access to the office space and the computers at VMU, and it should be a priority for the administration to solve this situation.

The quality assurance system for the LSF is appropriate and efficient. The inclusion of a social partner and a student in each of the SPCs is positive, and it should be ensured that they do not have a merely formal role. It is positive that social partners and students are participating in the SPCs and efforts should be made to ensure their role is not merely formal. The LSF could consider using additional ways of including the stakeholders, e.g., roundtable discussions, brainstorming sessions, or workshops, as this might give a different, and useful input complementary to the surveys. It is also important to organise closer and regular contact with a larger variety of social partners and employers, as well as with alumni for improvement of the programmes and fruitful cooperation with partners outside of university.

The expert panel gives a positive evaluation to the implementation of the Study Field of Linguistics (Second Cycle) at Vytautas Magnus University. All areas of evaluation assessed as very good or exceptional.

Expert panel signatures:

1. **Prof. dr. Srebren Dizdar (panel chairperson),** *academic*
2. **Prof. dr. Alberto Fernandez Costales,** *academic*
3. **Doc. dr. Karolina Grzech,** *academic*
4. **Mr. Snorre Karkkonen Svensson,** *representative of social partners'*
5. **Mr. Gabrielius Simas Sapiega,** *students' representative*