



**STUDIJŲ KOKYBĖS VERTINIMO CENTRAS
CENTRE FOR QUALITY ASSESSMENT IN HIGHER EDUCATION**

POLITICAL SCIENCE FIELD OF STUDY

Vytautas Magnus University

EXTERNAL EVALUATION REPORT

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CONTENTS

| | |
|--|-----------|
| I. INTRODUCTION | 3 |
| 1.1. OUTLINE OF THE EVALUATION PROCESS | 3 |
| 1.2. REVIEW PANEL | 4 |
| 1.3. SITE VISIT | 4 |
| 1.4. BACKGROUND OF THE REVIEW | 5 |
| II. STUDY PROGRAMMES IN THE FIELD | 6 |
| III. ASSESSMENT IN POINTS BY CYCLE AND EVALUATION AREAS | 8 |
| IV. STUDY FIELD ANALYSIS | 9 |
| AREA 1: STUDY AIMS, LEARNING OUTCOMES AND CURRICULUM | 9 |
| AREA 1: CONCLUSIONS | 10 |
| AREA 2: LINKS BETWEEN SCIENTIFIC (OR ARTISTIC) RESEARCH AND HIGHER EDUCATION | 11 |
| AREA 2: CONCLUSIONS | 11 |
| AREA 3: STUDENT ADMISSION AND SUPPORT | 13 |
| AREA 3: CONCLUSIONS | 13 |
| AREA 4: TEACHING AND LEARNING, STUDENT ASSESSMENT, AND GRADUATE EMPLOYMENT | 15 |
| AREA 4: CONCLUSIONS | 16 |
| AREA 5: TEACHING STAFF | 17 |
| AREA 5: CONCLUSIONS | 17 |
| AREA 6: LEARNING FACILITIES AND RESOURCES | 19 |
| AREA 6: CONCLUSIONS | 19 |
| AREA 7: QUALITY ASSURANCE AND PUBLIC INFORMATION | 21 |
| AREA 7: CONCLUSIONS | 21 |
| V. SUMMARY | 23 |
| VI. EXAMPLES OF EXCELLENCE | 24 |

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. Stefan Gänzle
2. Academic member: Prof. Anu Toots
3. Social partner representative: Simonas Gaušas
4. Student representative: Karolina Markauskaitė

1.3. SITE VISIT

The site visit was organised on 6th of February 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 no need for translation and the meetings were conducted in English.

1.4. BACKGROUND OF THE REVIEW

Overview of the HEI

Vytautas Magnus University (VMU) was established in 1922 and re-established in 1989. It is a classical university with a strong emphasis on freedom, openness, and dialogue, incorporating a Liberal Arts education model. VMU offers bachelor's, master's, and Ph.D. programs across a wide range of disciplines, including humanities, social sciences, arts, natural sciences, environmental sciences, and biotechnologies. The university collaborates internationally, supporting student and staff exchanges and interdisciplinary research. It is governed by the Council, Senate, and Rector, with 14 academic divisions, including faculties and specialized research centers.

Overview of the study field

The Faculty of Political Science and Diplomacy (FPSD) is one of VMU's nine faculties, consisting of four departments and four research centers. It offers six bachelor's, five master's, and two doctoral programs in political science, public administration, and communication.

Political Science studies are conducted by three departments, and the Ph.D. program has been offered since 2003 in collaboration with multiple Lithuanian universities. The faculty integrates interdisciplinary studies, practical skill development, and international cooperation. Several programs, including Political Science, World Politics and Economy, and International Relations, are well-established and recognized in Lithuania. FPSD has continuously updated and optimized its programs in response to labor market demands, student needs, and legal requirements.

Previous external evaluations

According to the SER, the following external evaluations have been conducted in recent years:

- The Erasmus Mundus 'MIREES' Joint Master's Degree Programme was positively evaluated in 2013, with praise for resources and faculty expertise. Some concerns were raised about accreditation issues in Russia and Hungary, which have since been resolved.
- The International Politics and Development Studies bachelor's program was evaluated in 2017 and accredited for six years, receiving high marks for academic staff and resources. Program improvements focused on curriculum updates, practical training, and international engagement.
- The Political Science bachelor's program (taught in Lithuanian) was evaluated in 2013 and accredited for the maximum period, with subsequent updates to curriculum and teaching methods.
- The Contemporary European Politics master's program was last evaluated in 2016 and accredited for six years, with strengths in program structure, faculty expertise, and employability. Recommendations included increased engagement with social partners and faculty internationalization, which have since been addressed.
- The Diplomacy and International Relations master's program was last evaluated in 2013 and accredited for the maximum period. Recommendations focused on improving international faculty involvement and student mobility. Continuous improvements have been made in response to these suggestions.
- The Public Administration study program, operating as a two-field study programme, was externally evaluated in 2022 as part of the broader Public Administration field and accredited for seven years, with active program enhancements based on expert recommendations.
- The World Politics and Economy bachelor's program, launched in 2014, has not yet undergone an external expert review.

Most importantly, starting in 2024, VMU is merging three undergraduate political science programs into a unified Political Studies bachelor's degree, addressing labor market trends and resource optimization.

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*
- *Written responses to additional questions from the panel*
- *Final theses*

Additional sources of information used by the review panel:

The following additional sources of information have been used by the review panel:

- *Site visit interviews*

II. STUDY PROGRAMMES IN THE FIELD

First cycle/LTQF 6

| | | |
|---|--|-----------------------------------|
| Title of the study programme | Political Science | World Politics and Economy |
| State code | 6121JX038 | 6121JX037 |
| Type of study (college/university) | University | University |
| Mode of study (full time/part time) and nominal duration (in years) | Full-time, 4 years | Full-time, 4 years |
| Workload in ECTS | 240 | 240 |
| Award (degree and/or professional qualification) | Bachelors of Social Sciences | Bachelors of Social Sciences |
| Language of instruction | Lithuanian | English |
| Admission requirements | Secondary education | Secondary education |
| First registration date | 1997-05-19 Nr. 565 registered as "Politology", 2001-08-01 title changed to "Political Science" | 2013-05-08 |
| Comments (including remarks on joint or interdisciplinary nature of the programme, mode of provision) | N/A | N/A |

First cycle/LTQF 6

| | | |
|---|---|--|
| Title of the study programme | International Politics and Development Studies | Public Administration |
| State code | 6121JX043 | 6122LJ001 |
| Type of study (college/university) | University | University |
| Mode of study (full time/part time) and nominal duration (in years) | Full-time, 4 years | Full-time, 4 years |
| Workload in ECTS | 240 | 240 |
| Award (degree and/or professional qualification) | Bachelor of Social Sciences | Bachelor of Public Administration and Social Sciences |
| Language of instruction | English | Lithuanian |
| Admission requirements | Secondary education | Secondary education |
| First registration date | 2012-03-20 | Registered as study program of two study fields 2019-10-18 |
| Comments (including remarks on joint or interdisciplinary nature of the programme, mode of provision) | N/A | Two study field program |

Second cycle/LTQF 7

| Title of the study programme | Diplomacy and International Relations | Contemporary European Politics | Eastern European Studies and Research |
|---|--|---------------------------------------|--|
| State code | 6211JX049 | 6211JX055 | 6281JX001 |
| Type of study (college/university) | University | University | University |
| Mode of study (full time/part time) and nominal duration (in years) | Full-time, 2 years | Full-time, 1,5 years | Full-time, 2 years |
| Workload in ECTS | 120 | 90 | 120 |
| Award (degree and/or professional qualification) | Master of Social Sciences | Master of Social Sciences | Master of Political Science |
| Language of instruction | English | Lithuanian | English |
| Admission requirements | Bachelor's degree | Bachelor's degree | Bachelor's degree |
| First registration date | 2001-08-02 | 2009-08-17 | 2010-06-21 |
| Comments (including remarks on joint or interdisciplinary nature of the programme, mode of provision) | N/A | N/A | Joint study program |

III. ASSESSMENT IN POINTS BY CYCLE AND EVALUATION AREAS

The **first cycle** of the Political science field of study is given a **positive** evaluation.

| No. | Evaluation Area | Evaluation points ^{1*} |
|---------------|--|---------------------------------|
| 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 | 3 |
| 6. | Learning facilities and resources | 5 |
| 7. | Quality assurance and public information | 4 |
| Total: | | 24 |

The **second cycle** of the Political science field of study is given a **positive** evaluation.

| No. | Evaluation Area | Evaluation points ^{2*} |
|---------------|--|---------------------------------|
| 1. | Study aims, learning outcomes and curriculum | 3 |
| 2. | Links between scientific (or artistic) research and higher education | 3 |
| 3. | Student admission and support | 4 |
| 4. | Teaching and learning, student assessment, and graduate employment | 3 |
| 5. | Teaching staff | 3 |
| 6. | Learning facilities and resources | 5 |
| 7. | Quality assurance and public information | 4 |
| Total: | | 25 |

^{1*}

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.

²

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 |
|------|---|

FACTUAL SITUATION

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

VMU political science programmes at all levels aim to produce informed and active citizens. The political science programmes aim to provide the skills to understand the increasingly complex world in which we live in and prepare students for professional and leadership roles. All programmes are aligned with the "Lithuania 2030 and 2050" strategies.

VMU's first cycle study programmes - Political Science, World Politics and Economy, International Relations and Development and Public Administration - conform to that of a liberal arts programme providing students with choice and flexibility. The choice to study in either Lithuanian or English is an important aspect of the VMU offer. The individual programmes have specific knowledge outcomes related to their specialisms within the broad field of political science but the programmes in English have a more interdisciplinary perspective. The Political Science programme and the two-field programme in Public Administration both respond to a specific need in Lithuanian society and its labour market.

The second cycle programmes are designed to deepen students' knowledge and skills in specific fields such as Diplomacy, Public Administration and European Politics. The Contemporary European Politics programme is taught in Lithuanian whilst the Diplomacy and International Relations programme is taught in English. The East European Studies and Research (hereafter abbreviated as MIREES) programme is an interdisciplinary joint Master's degree programme run by the University of Bologna (Italy), Vytautas Magnus University and the University of Zagreb (Croatia).

Graduates of political science degree programmes go on to work in various ministries within the Lithuanian government, the local municipality and EU institutions. Graduates are also employed in think-tanks, research agencies and a range of private and public sector organisations including NGOs. First cycle programmes prepare students well for second cycle programmes. Second cycle programmes allow students to progress to third cycle Ph.D. programmes. The liberal arts curriculum aims to equip students with a broad worldview, analytical skills and strategic thinking that will enable them to succeed in the labour market.

There is a new programme Political Studies in the first cycle that is taught in English that merges three of the existing specialisations (International Politics and Development; World Politics and Economy; Political Science and Leadership) into a single programme. This merger is a direct response to changes in the labour market as well as internal considerations.

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

Both the first and second cycle programmes align with the mission, goals and strategy of VMU. The option to study in either Lithuanian or English aligns with the strategic objectives of an International Science University and Study 360. They also align with the Faculty of Political Science and Diplomacy's aims. The MIREES programme is hosted by the University of Bologna with limited opportunity for VMU to change the programme.

ANALYSIS AND CONCLUSION (regarding 1.1.)

In the first cycle, the merger of the three programmes into one is an area of concern. It was unclear exactly what the rationale for the new programme was and the teaching staff were unable to articulate the need for a new programme or how it was structured. Students also noted that their programmes were still changing. There are core elements of the existing programmes that the panel were unsure how the new programme would retain an advantage for VMU. For example, the main competitor for World Politics the ISM was said to be priced highly so there is a risk that the merger will reduce the visibility and thus attractiveness of the world economy which is a potential growth area in terms of students (as acknowledged in SER, p. 15). Again, International Relations is a growth subject in many countries and the loss of a distinct international relations programme may also weaken demand. The panel reviewed the website of the department and found that the visibility of the new programme was relatively low. Two elements of the programmes in English at first cycle were internationalisation and interdisciplinarity and the panel were not reassured how these would not be lost with the changes.

VMU has a strong regional identity. It has good links with social partners and graduates. The aims of the programme align with the various national strategies. In the second cycle VMU has a clear comparative advantage in public administration and this strength could be built upon.

| | |
|------|--|
| 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 |
|------|--|

FACTUAL SITUATION

1.2.1. Programmes comply with legal requirements

The programmes comply with the relevant legal requirements. They comply with the relevant field Descriptor (Political Science) and the relevant Cycle Descriptor. These include the structure of the programme, ECTS credits, total programme workload, credits for final thesis (project), contact hours and independent student work.

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

The programme learning outcomes align with programme aims and teaching/learning assessment methods. The relevant programmes have learning outcomes consistent with the overall descriptor for political science, but they are then tailored to specific programmes of study. The alignment between the programme learning outcomes and the specific modules was less clear, especially in relation to the courses. So, for example, the course introduction to political science allows political science students to undertake the following:

“They are able to work with information, define and analyse political processes, and predict the patterns of political processes. Deep knowledge of political theories and concepts; Identify and analyse political and social phenomena and their causes in Lithuania and worldwide; Explain political processes in different countries, regions and the international system around the world, and predict the specifics of their development.”

Whilst it also allows public administration students to:

“Explain and be able to apply theories and concepts of public administration and policy, international relations in preparation for specific operational functions in public and non-governmental sector institutions or organisations. To be able to theoretically define and explain the characteristics of the

political and administrative process, to identify, analyse and describe trends in politics and public policy”.

The alignment with assessment methods is also tricky to map but the document sets out very clearly how the department undertakes the alignment.

1.2.3. Curriculum ensures consistent development of student competences

The programme does allow a clear development of student competences. Given the flexible nature of the programme at first cycle the panel did struggle to see how the team can audit skills development across the programme. The career planning module is a positive although it's not clear whether this is an option for all students on all first cycle programmes or just political science. There are clear knowledge and competence learning outcomes in the second cycle programmes. There is a strong focus on knowledge acquisition with a less explicit focus on core skills and their articulation. The panel also would like to see a stronger presence of quantitative methods within the research methods offering.

The programme learning outcomes all have reference to social abilities or similar and special abilities or similar.

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

The nature of the liberal arts curricula in the first cycle allows for a large degree of flexibility and student choice and as such is positive. It does raise some challenges in relation to the cohesiveness of programmes. The personalisation also raises the question as to how a student understands/maps their competence developments across the programme.

In the second cycle some electives are not available to students due to number restrictions. This is being addressed by the faculty.

In the first cycle there are opportunities to undertake internships and study abroad although these opportunities could be expanded. In political science the internships are compulsory. There is a focus on promoting international internships. Offering a more joined up approach to internships especially in relation to compulsion, would ensure opportunities are available to all students.

In the second cycle programmes there are opportunities to take internships, but some programmes have credit limitations and for many students the option is not possible due to working alongside their studies.

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

The final theses in both cycles complies with the requirements of the field and cycle. Students are supported by research methods courses and opportunities to write research papers. The quality of the final thesis and the academic support offered by staff is high. The direction of travel regarding selecting themes relevant to social partners and the potential involvement of social partners in the process including formulating topics is to be encouraged.

ANALYSIS AND CONCLUSION (regarding 1.2.)

There is a strong narrative across all programmes around training the relevant professionals of the future. There is a key focus here on the acquisition of relevant knowledge and whilst the students do acquire the skills/competences required more work could be done to ensure these skills/competences are surfaced. There are examples of practical exercises and simulations in the

curriculum, but consideration could be given to ensure these elements are more visible and visible via assessment methods too. This relates also to a comment in the SER (p. 57).

Related to previous reviews it was not clear from the SER how previous suggestions had been acted upon and via what quality control mechanisms.

The alignment between programme learning outcomes and the courses could be reviewed to ensure the alignment remains consistent. The programme learning outcomes all have reference to social abilities or similar and special abilities or similar. Given the aims of Study 360 the programme teams should revisit the learning outcomes to ensure they map to the requirements of the strategic aims. Continuing to work with social partners in this area will ensure alignment with the competences needed for the contemporary labour market, especially to go beyond VMUs strength of public/NGO sectors to align more with other sectors.

The main challenge is to ensure the sharing of course information and good practice across the three departments and to ensure teaching staff are fully brought into discussions around the future of the teaching portfolio. There were references to the faculty being a young faculty and there is work needed to join the three departments into a more holistic entity whilst preserving their disciplinary identities.

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 | | | X | | |
| Second cycle | | | X | | |

COMMENDATIONS

1. The Liberal Arts ethos provides flexibility and choice for students.
2. The options to undertake internships and the involvement of social partners.
3. The integration of the study 360 into the curriculum shows a clear direction to produce globally informed citizens of the future.

RECOMMENDATIONS

To address shortcomings

1. To ensure that the new first cycle political studies programme does not lose the distinctive elements of the previous programmes.
2. Explore innovative ways to internationalise the curricula especially at second level.

For further improvement

1. To ensure the faculty has mechanisms to encourage information and good practice sharing across programmes.
2. Within the advantages of the liberal arts model consideration needs to be given as to how students can map the development of their competences across the programme.

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 |
|------|--|

FACTUAL SITUATION

2.1.1. Research within the field of study is at a sufficient level

Political science studies at VMU are implemented by the Faculty of Political Science and Diplomacy. Research activities are organized through priority research groups and interdisciplinary clusters. Faculty staff are engaged in four main research clusters and the Kavolis Transdisciplinary Research Institute.

The academic staff in political science programs consists of 55 teachers, almost all of whom hold Phds (SER Annex 3 and SER, p. 95). This large faculty enables coverage of a broad range of political science research areas, including comparative politics, electoral behavior, Europeanization, EU institutions, foreign policy and international relations, ethnic relations, political systems in Europe, political communication, political economy, and political philosophy. While most lecturers are engaged in political science, some are affiliated with sociology or communication science. Not all academic staff members are part of a research cluster.

In the most recent benchmarking exercise (2023), the quality of R&D at VMU Political Science was rated 4 out of 5, with the statement that "research performance is strong" (cit. SER).

In addition to publishing actively, political science faculty members participate in research projects and fundraising activities. Between 2020 and 2025, faculty members were involved in 12 international and four national projects. Currently, five international projects are ongoing, while no national projects are active. Over the past five years, 11 staff members have participated in international research projects. Since 2021, seven faculty members (13%) have been involved in such projects (SER, p. 60, table).

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

VMU political science researchers teach courses that align with their research interests. Key areas of focus include ethnic minority integration, Eastern European politics, EU policy implementation, political campaign communication, elections, public policy implementation, public administration and civil service reforms, public service delivery, and citizen engagement. When relevant, study programs benefit from research conducted within VMU's interdisciplinary research clusters.

For instance, research from the International Relations and Security Processes cluster is integrated into courses on diplomacy, international relations, and international security at both undergraduate and postgraduate levels. Similarly, findings from the European Public Space Cluster are incorporated into the Modern European Politics program through research discussions and practical student assignments (SER, p. 59).

International projects also contribute to research-based learning. For example, a Jean Monnet project led to the development of a new course, *Europeanization*, within the Contemporary European Politics program. Additionally, European Social Survey data are utilized in research methods courses in the *World Politics and Economy* and *International Politics and Development Studies* programs. Findings from the project *Representation of Lithuanian Citizens and Interests in the European Parliament* have been integrated into the courses *Politics and Institutions of the European Union* and *Mediatization of Politics and Public Relations* within the *Political Science* program.

Faculty members frequently participate in national and international conferences. The faculty also regularly invites guest lecturers and practitioners to conduct seminars and lectures, ensuring a strong connection between professional experience and study program outcomes. These interactions foster intercultural dialogue, promote a global mindset, and expose students to innovative teaching methodologies that enhance their academic and professional development.

All course syllabi are regularly updated to incorporate the latest trends in political science.

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

The primary way students engage in research is through their final theses, with academic staff using their research to suggest thesis topics. This allows students to familiarize themselves with current research developments and methodologies. Additionally, students can assist faculty members with research tasks or pursue internships at research institutions, both within VMU (e.g., the A. Sakharov Research Centre) and internationally (e.g., Turkish universities).

While student conferences are organized, participation remains limited. According to the SER (p. 63), “at least a few students from both first- and second-cycle political science programs” have presented their research. Overall, approximately 10% of political science students have the opportunity to participate in scientific activities such as research projects or academic conferences. Despite low participation rates, initiatives have been introduced to engage research-oriented students. The *Academia cum Laude* provides a platform for talented students, and the student-run *Academic Political Science Club* organizes debates, events, and discussions with diplomats, politicians, and academics.

Faculty members vary in their enthusiasm for discussing research with students. Some actively integrate their research into teaching, as reflected in one instructor’s statement: “I am most proud to bring my research back to my class.” However, the general attitude appears to be, “I’m not promoting myself” (site visit interviews). Students confirm that while instructors include their publications in course reading lists, explicit promotion of research remains uncommon.

ANALYSIS AND CONCLUSION (regarding 2.1.)

Research in political science at VMU addresses key societal issues, and the overall research output is strong. Faculty members’ research interests align well with the courses they teach. However, while international research projects are present, participation remains low, and there has been no recent growth in this area.

The faculty integrates the latest research developments into teaching and equips students with scientific research skills. However, student engagement in research remains limited and lacks a systematic approach. Similar concerns were raised in the previous evaluation, with no clear evidence of improvement.

While faculty members are highly active in research - participating in clusters, conferences, projects, and publications - they do not consistently promote research engagement among students. Individual instructors may be enthusiastic, but overall, there is little recognition of the importance or mutual benefits of involving students in research.

In summary, VMU’s political science research potential is high, but a clearer strategy and benchmarking are needed to enhance student participation in research activities.

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 | | | X | | |
| Second cycle | | | X | | |

COMMENDATIONS

1. Interdisciplinary research clusters effectively facilitate the integration of interdisciplinary thinking into subject courses and classroom practices.

RECOMMENDATIONS

To address shortcomings

1. Develop a policy to increase the participation of academic staff in research projects.
2. Establish a systematic approach to integrating and promoting faculty research achievements within the courses they teach.
3. Develop a strategic plan, incorporating relevant benchmarking tools, to enhance student engagement in research.

For further improvement

1. As part of its strategic vision, the Faculty aims to expand the international dimension of its study programs, which will result in a more diverse student body and a greater need for foreign teaching staff (currently comprising about 10-15%). In anticipation of this, it would be beneficial to consider what (re)arrangements are necessary to ensure that a diverse student body remains actively engaged in research activities. The substantial presence of Erasmus students presents additional challenges in this regard.

AREA 3: STUDENT ADMISSION AND SUPPORT

| | |
|------|---|
| 3.1. | Student selection and admission is in line with the learning outcomes |
|------|---|

FACTUAL SITUATION

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

Admission to first-cycle and second-cycle studies follows different procedures. Bachelor's admissions are managed by LAMA BPO, following unified national criteria set by the Lithuanian Ministry of Education, Science, and Sport. Admission is based on a competitive score calculated from matriculation exam results. Additional points can be awarded for specific achievements, such as prior study experience or extracurricular accomplishments.

Although the number of applicants is not small, the majority do not apply as their first choice, and the number of those admitted is not high. For example, in 2023, only 13 applicants applied as their first priority for the Political Science programme, while 158 applicants selected it as their other priority. Due to the low number of first-choice applications, no admissions were made that year. A similar situation occurred in other programmes, where, although admissions were held each year, the number of applications for lower priorities significantly outweighed those for the first priority.

As stated in SER (p. 69) interest in some first-cycle Political Science programmes has declined due to demographic shifts, competition from other programmes, and increasing preferences for studying abroad. In response, VMU has restructured its political science programmes to offer more flexibility. The programmes Political Science, World Politics and Economy, Political Science and Leadership, and International Politics and Development Studies have merged into a single programme – Political Studies. The World Politics and Economy (taught in English), Political Science and Leadership (taught in Lithuanian), and International Politics and Development Studies (taught in English) programmes have been restructured into specialisations.

It was noted on the VMU website that each specialisation within the Political Studies programme is listed as a separate programme, and the description does not indicate that it is a specialisation within the Political Studies programme.

Second-cycle studies admissions are based on competition scores, including prior academic performance, thesis grades, and motivation letters. Some programmes require a minimum English proficiency level.

Applicants to the Contemporary European Politics programme must hold a university bachelor's degree in social or humanities sciences. Graduates with a bachelor's degree in other fields or applicants with a professional bachelor's degree can be admitted if they have completed related studies in political science, public administration, communication, or journalism, or an additional programme. Graduates with a professional bachelor's degree who have not completed the full additional programme may be admitted on the condition that they complete the missing courses during the first semester of their master's studies. To apply for the Diplomacy and International Relations programme, applicants must hold a Bachelor's degree in one of the following fields: political science, public administration, communication, or journalism. Graduates with a university bachelor's degree in other fields, as well as those holding a professional bachelor's degree, may be admitted upon completion of relevant studies in political science, public administration, communication, journalism, or a complementary programme. Additionally, applicants must demonstrate a minimum of B2 level proficiency in English. The East European Studies and Research programme admissions are handled by the University of Bologna.

The difference between applicants choosing VMU as their first priority and those selecting it as a lower priority for second-cycle studies is not as significant as in first-cycle programmes, and in some cases, there are even more applicants who choose it as their first priority. For example, in 2023, 15 applicants chose the Diplomacy and International Relations programme as their first priority, while 9

selected it as a lower priority. This suggests that second-cycle programmes attract more motivated students.

Non-Lithuanians can apply for full-time studies at VMU in the autumn and spring semesters through the DreamApply platform. Detailed information on study programs, entry requirements, qualification recognition, tuition fees, and application steps is available on the VMU website and VMU International Facebook page.

The Faculty Admissions Committee evaluates applications within five working days after receiving and marking documents on DreamApply. The final decision, including the competition score, is submitted to the TRD, which then issues the official acceptance letter.

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

The VMU Policy on Academic Recognition of Competences and Qualifications defines the principles and procedures for assessing and recognizing prior learning, whether acquired formally, non-formally, or informally.

The recognition of foreign qualifications is managed centrally by the International Cooperation Department in accordance with national regulations and quality assessment criteria. Each year, the university updates and approves admission rules for individuals with foreign education.

Recognition of partial studies follows a decentralized approach, where faculties evaluate and convert acquired credits into ECTS, provided they align with pre-agreed study plans. Students participating in exchange programs must obtain official academic certificates to ensure recognition of their coursework upon return. For those transferring from other institutions without pre-agreed study plans, learning outcomes are assessed for compliance with the intended study program, with a maximum of 75% of a program's credits being eligible for recognition. Final theses and final exams are not validated.

Additionally, the recognition of competences acquired through non-formal and informal learning, such as work experience, internships, training, or self-learning, is regulated by university policies. If these competences align with the learning outcomes of a study course, they may be recognized as part of a study program. The International Politics and Development Studies program regularly accepts transfer students from both Lithuanian and international universities, with their applications assessed by a specialized commission.

In the past three years, VMU has not rejected any applications for recognition of prior learning.

ANALYSIS AND CONCLUSION (regarding 3.1.)

The admission processes for first-cycle (bachelor's) and second-cycle (master's) studies at VMU follow distinct procedures. First-cycle admissions are managed by LAMA BPO, based on a competitive score from matriculation exam results, but a significant issue is the low number of first priority applications, leading to missed opportunities for admission. In contrast, second-cycle admissions are based on a competitive score that includes previous academic performance, thesis grades, and motivation letters, with some programmes requiring proof of English proficiency. While many programmes face a trend where lower-priority applications significantly outnumber those for first priority in first-cycle studies, the situation for second-cycle studies is different. The difference between applicants choosing VMU as their first priority and those selecting it as a lower priority is not as significant, and in some cases, more applicants choose it as their first priority.

VMU has responded to declining interest in some programmes, particularly in political science, by restructuring its offerings to create more flexibility. Several related programmes were merged into a single Political Studies programme. This change is aimed at streamlining the admission process and

offering more comprehensive study options. However, some issues, such as unclear descriptions of specialisations on the university website, still need to be addressed to ensure transparency.

Additionally, VMU's recognition of prior learning policies and the centralised handling of foreign qualifications provide a flexible and inclusive approach for students with diverse educational backgrounds.

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| 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

VMU offers extensive academic mobility opportunities through Erasmus+ and other exchange programs. Students can study for a semester or academic year at one of 440 partner institutions in the EU, EEA, or candidate countries, as well as 118 institutions outside the EU. Additionally, Erasmus+ internships are available, including for recent graduates. Since 2022, short-term mobility opportunities (5 to 30 days) have gained popularity.

Beyond Erasmus+, VMU offers exchange opportunities with scholarships at 200 universities outside the EU/EEA, internships abroad lasting 1 to 3 months, participation in short-term courses, and specialized internships in Lithuanian schools and communities abroad.

As stated in the SER (p. 78), 6.16% of students in the study field participate in exchange programs. However, separate data on the number of first-cycle and second-cycle students going on exchange is not provided. Therefore, when considering both cycles together, the number of students going abroad is not significant. The VMU states in SER (p. 78) that the reason for students' lack of interest in exchange programs is that students often decline this opportunity, citing concerns about working during their studies and the fear of losing their job, or they are unable to assess the benefits of the opportunity.

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

VMU provides comprehensive academic and social support to students, ensuring they have access to essential information, guidance, and financial assistance. Students receive timely and easily accessible information about study programs, university rules, mobility opportunities, extracurricular activities, and career possibilities through various communication channels, including Moodle, the student portal, email, and social media. Faculty members and administration staff regularly meet with students to discuss study-related matters, academic progress, and career opportunities. Teachers offer consultations both face-to-face and online, ensuring students can receive help with assignments and coursework.

In terms of financial support, the university offers fee reductions, reimbursements, and the possibility to postpone or extend tuition payments upon a reasoned request. Students representing the university at conferences or events may also receive financial reimbursement for their expenses. Social support is coordinated through the Student Affairs Department, which manages accommodation, scholarships, and financial assistance for students based on social status or academic achievement. Additionally, the university offers various scholarships, including those for scientific achievements, and professional internships.

Support extends to students' well-being, with free psychological counseling available through the university's Psychology Clinics, and spiritual support provided by the Academic Chaplaincy. Students with disabilities receive personalized assistance from a disability coordinator, who helps

with study-related issues and environmental adjustments. The Career Centre offers career planning support through workshops, consultations, and alumni meetings, fostering students' professional development.

Lastly, the university provides opportunities for students to engage in entrepreneurial studies and gain advanced knowledge through specialized programs, ensuring a well-rounded academic experience and reducing dropout rates.

During the visit, students stated that they receive sufficient academic, social, psychological, and other types of support, and that it is provided in a timely manner.

3.2.3. Higher education information and student counselling are sufficient

At VMU, students receive comprehensive information about their studies and related activities through various channels. First-year students are introduced to the university during the annual "Introduction to Studies" event, which covers essential topics such as faculty and staff presentations, study options, foreign language opportunities, study abroad programs, and the use of campus facilities. This event helps students familiarize themselves with the university environment, their chosen program, and the resources available to them. Additionally, the Faculty Day provides more detailed information about the study program for first-year students, which serves to motivate them and encourage high academic achievement. For potential master's students, the university organizes an "Information Week" to help them explore master's programs and choose their specific study tracks.

Information about study programs is available on the VMU website, with detailed descriptions of courses, including their aims, expected learning outcomes, assessment methods, and recommended literature. Students can access this information through Moodle, the university's virtual learning environment, where they can also register for courses. To ensure timely communication, students receive personalized emails and have access to a dedicated student portal, where they can receive updates about their studies. The university also has a centralized Student Centre, which provides direct support through various means such as phone, email, or social media. Further updates can be found on the Faculty of Political Science and Diplomacy's website and social media pages.

Students are regularly informed about their study schedules, timetable changes, and other important updates through Moodle and email. They can also consult their lecturers during designated office hours, where full-time lecturers dedicate at least one hour per week for consultations. Additionally, students can contact tutors through email or Moodle for assistance with coursework or other academic inquiries.

ANALYSIS AND CONCLUSION (regarding 3.2.)

VMU offers a wide range of academic mobility opportunities through Erasmus+ and other exchange programmes, enabling students to study abroad at numerous partner institutions within the EU and beyond. However, participation remains relatively low, with only 6.16% of students engaging in exchange programmes, as many students decline these opportunities due to concerns about balancing work and studying abroad. There is potential to increase participation by addressing students' concerns and highlighting the long-term benefits of studying abroad.

The university provides comprehensive support to students, ensuring they receive timely information about study programmes, academic guidance, and financial assistance. Additionally, students have access to psychological counselling, spiritual support, and career development services.

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 | | |
| Second cycle | | | | X | |

COMMENDATIONS

1. A well-developed system of academic, social, financial, and other support for students.
2. Response to changes in applicants' needs and adaptation of programmes.

RECOMMENDATIONS

To address shortcomings

1. To communicate more clearly on the website about the new programme and its specialisations. Additionally, increase the programme's visibility overall and engage with the target audience to attract more motivated students who would choose to study at VMU as their first priority.

For further improvement

1. To encourage students to participate more in exchange programs and provide more opportunities for short-term visits, allowing students to gain experience without giving up their commitments in Lithuania.

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

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| 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

Teaching and learning methods vary by format: lectures involve explanation and summaries, seminars focus on problem analysis and case studies, and laboratory work includes experimentation and report preparation. Practical work and professional practice emphasize task-solving, professional analysis, and report presentation. Seminars and workshops encourage active participation through assignments, discussions, debates, case studies, and projects, often using interactive tools like Mentimeter and Padlet. Guest lectures are a key method during the academic year. The interviewed teachers also pointed to some innovative methods such as creating documentaries, simulations, co-teaching in case of a few courses, project-based learning, AI-assisted tasks, hackathons with practitioners. Meanwhile the interviewed students highlighted some repetition across courses (e.g. very similar content in course on political systems and that on comparative politics). Others emphasized the need for stronger quantitative research training of students and better integration of foreign students into the community.

VMU applies the accumulative system for the assessment of learning achievements. Students' learning achievements are assessed in midterms, another intermediate work and examination or defence of students' projects. The final mark integrates the intermediate work assessment and examination marks. The examination mark makes up 30-60% of the final mark. The structure of the accumulative system is presented in the description of each study course.

The teaching methods are also applied in VLE, using MS Teams, Adobe Connect and BigBlueButton software. VMU Innovative Studies Institute (ISI) provides user guides, methodological recommendations, and consultations for teachers, along with a user guide for students. During quarantine (March 2020 – July 2021), all courses and student evaluations were conducted remotely ensuring seamless student online participation. VMU Political Science field programmes continuously work to improve teaching methods, with teachers regularly participating in training courses organised by the Centre for the Development of Professional Competences. In 2023, about 10 Political Science teachers (around ¼ of all field's teachers) participated in the "Digital Transformation of Education (EdTech)" project, creating digital learning tools aimed at fostering active student participation in collaboration and problem-solving.

There are no clear links between teaching and learning methods and learning outcomes in different study programmes – the SER does not provide a clear list of methods per course or the programme.

Students' internships in the field's programmes (esp. first cycle) are supported by a dedicated coordinator who advises and connects students with suitable institutions. The two compulsory internships focus on different areas: the first introduces students to political organisations, NGOs, public institutions, and research bodies, while the second focuses on the civil service, including municipalities, ministries, the Parliament, Lithuanian embassies, and international organisations working on development cooperation projects (UNESCO, Transparency International). Both internships help students build skills in analysis, document preparation, data synthesis, and organisation, preparing them for future careers.

Internships face some challenges. First, providing practical experience places for students (esp. foreign students) is still a challenge. VMU is engaged in discussions to encourage companies to integrate migrant students into workplaces. Second, the interviewed local students reported that although financial support for internships abroad is available, the opportunities were missed due to a lack of timely information.

VMU management and administration actively promote internationalisation by increasing foreign student intake and offering four out of seven political science field programmes in English. They also encourage interdisciplinary programmes.

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

Support to socially vulnerable groups and students with individual needs includes tuition and dormitory fee discounts, scholarships, and guidance from a disability coordinator. Disability-friendly infrastructure, such as parking near university buildings and adapted classroom furniture, supports students with disabilities. Libraries and classrooms are equipped with specialised equipment to facilitate learning.

VMU's International Office offers pre-boarding and onboarding for foreign students, multilingual support and collects their feedback to improve integration. Teachers also try to adapt to varying students' needs (e.g. they offer hybrid teaching to accommodate international students arriving in VMU at different times). Student Support Services also provide spaces for prayer and psychological clinics, ensuring inclusivity for diverse student needs (e.g. students of various religions, students coming from war zones).

VMU's Disability Policy – “University of Inclusive Opportunities” – was approved in 2021. Socially vulnerable students and those with special needs can follow an individual study schedule, regulated by university procedures. Individual counselling is available, and study content is adapted when needed, such as extended exam time for dyslexic students, tailored explanations for visually impaired students or alternative assignment formats.

The university is also carrying out other activities to better integrate socially vulnerable groups and students with individual needs into the academic community. For example, data on students with disabilities is integrated into university database systems to streamline support.

VMU is organising disability educational campaigns and events that promote inclusivity within the academic community. Finally, faculty and staff are trained to work with students with disabilities, ensuring an inclusive learning environment.

ANALYSIS AND CONCLUSION (regarding 4.1.)

Teaching and learning address the needs of students well and enable them well to achieve intended learning outcomes for both first and second cycle programmes. However, a high number of political science programmes and increasing number of international students in the field do not allow teachers to fully tailor teaching and learning methods so that they duly match all student needs. Fragmentation in the delivery is felt. It was also present also during the evaluation meeting – when asked about possible future merge of study programmes management and administration did not provide a concrete answer, while SER representatives informed the evaluation team about the university's 2024 decision to merge three BA programmes. Teaching and learning methods and learning outcomes in different study programmes still need to be more clearly linked. Some challenges also exist in securing internship opportunities (i.e. internship places for foreign students and timely information).

Access to higher education for socially vulnerable groups and students with individual needs is well ensured for both first and second cycle programmes. All the necessary systemic provisions have been implemented to cater for socially vulnerable groups and students with individual needs. The awareness of the issues is clearly visible at the level of management and teaching staff. Study processes are sufficiently individualised. Methods for integrating students into the academic community seem effective. The key remaining challenge is ensuring, in equal terms, the same access to higher education to foreign student population at the university.

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| 4.2. | There is an effective and transparent system for student assessment, progress monitoring, and assuring academic integrity |
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FACTUAL SITUATION

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

Student learning progress at VMU is monitored according to university regulations and procedures. This includes analysing first-year students' preparation, course registrations, participation in assessments, exam results, survey data, and overall study experiences. Faculty administrators and the vice-dean oversee Political Science students' progress, offering support such as additional consultations for those struggling and rescheduling exams for students with valid reasons. Student learning progress is also monitored using the following measures: mandatory course evaluations completed by students at the end of each course; and employer feedback on internships influencing curriculum updates.

Feedback is systematically provided to students after midterms and exams. Assessment results, along with comments on performance, are discussed in lectures within two weeks. Final exam results are posted on the university intranet within three working days and reviewed in student groups. Lecturers also organise discussions on assignments and assessments, offering feedback verbally, via email, or through MOODLE forums. Some courses also offer practical and immediate feedback, particularly in negotiation, political communication, and finance courses, where practitioners are involved. While participation in consultations is optional, students are always informed of these opportunities and can request individual feedback as needed.

The interviewed students confirmed that feedback is timely and helpful, especially during mid-term evaluations and final exams. Communication with lecturers is frequent, and students feel supported in consultations.

4.2.2. Graduate employability and career are monitored

Employment data is gathered from alumni surveys, the Employment Service, and the Government Strategic Analysis Centre. From 2020-2022, 22-34% of International Politics and Development Studies graduates worked in Lithuania post-graduation, with many foreign students likely returning home. The 12-month post-graduation employment rates for Political Science fields were: 66% for Political Science, 80% for Public Administration, 45% for Diplomacy and International Relations, and 93% for Contemporary European Politics. Alumni valued the knowledge and skills gained through study sessions and independent tasks. Challenges exist in monitoring international graduates due to limited access to employment data. International alumni face additional hurdles due to visa and work permit restrictions, affecting their study and career trajectories.

Employers, through for example participation in study committees, contribute insights on labour market needs, guiding curriculum adjustments to align with job market demands. Employer feedback on graduates, gathered through trainee evaluations and thesis defences, was generally positive, particularly regarding theoretical knowledge, organisational and social capital skills. However, employers highlighted that some students lack hands-on practical experience (particularly for roles requiring immediate industry experience), suggesting that work-based learning components could be enhanced.

VMU collaborates with alumni through clubs and university departments, providing newsletters and cultural or educational guidance via an Alumni Coordinator. Alumni clubs organise events such as lectures, discussions, and company visits, and members actively contribute as consultants in study programme committees. The university supports the annual VMU Alumni Day. Each year, the VMU Career Centre conducts an online survey to assess alumni employment and satisfaction. The Centre maintains strong relationships with employers, who provide feedback on graduates' skills and career

readiness. Internship evaluations also serve as an informal mechanism for tracking employability, as many graduates transition from internships to full-time roles.

Many alumni offer informal career mentorship, advising students on opportunities in diplomacy and international organisations. VMU also invites graduates to join the *Idialogue* career mentoring platform. However, access to employment guidance and mentorship is not fully utilised by all students. For example, none of the interviewed students has received mentorship by alumni.

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

VMU's principles of integrity are outlined in the university's Statute, Code of Academic Ethics, Study Regulations, and Plagiarism Prevention Provisions. Non-discrimination policies are covered under the Code of Academic Ethics, while the Gender Equality Plan (2021-2025) promotes institutional and departmental cultural change. Policies promoting diversity and tolerance are embedded in faculty composition, with an increasing share of international academic staff.

The Plagiarism Prevention Provisions define plagiarism types, detection methods, and appeal procedures. All final theses are checked using iThenticate and OXSICO, with no plagiarism detected in Political Science theses during the analysis period. Academic dishonesty during assessments results in immediate termination of the exam and formal reporting to faculty leadership. However, no academic integrity, tolerance, or non-discrimination violations were recorded among Political Science students from 2020-2023.

International students seem well-integrated, with Erasmus students often participating in mentorship programs and cultural events. Student representatives and debate clubs contribute to open discussions on academic integrity and tolerance. The interviewed students reported no significant cases of discrimination. However, some alumni raised concerns about bias in thesis topic selection (e.g. some students were discouraged to undertake non EU topics).

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

Until 2023, study-related appeals were regulated by the Regulations for Submission of Appeals Regarding Evaluation of Learning Outcomes, now replaced by the Regulations of the Dispute Resolution Commissions. Additional provisions are outlined in the Plagiarism Prevention Provisions and Study Regulations. Appeals may result in grade changes, test retakes, or dismissal, and any unrelated violations found during the review are reported to university administration.

In 2023, two student appeals were lodged regarding thesis assessments—one in Diplomacy and International Relations (May 2023) and one in Contemporary European Politics (January 2023). A faculty-appointed commission, including student representation, investigated both cases. Overall, during the 2020-2023 period and across all seven study programmes seven appeals were received and considered. Among them, two appeals were granted, three were partially granted and two were not granted. This signals of a selective but fair review process.

The interviewed students were aware of the process of how to submit an appeal or complaint and would know how to proceed if needed.

ANALYSIS AND CONCLUSION (regarding 4.2.)

Monitoring of learning progress and feedback to students to promote self-assessment and learning progress planning is sufficiently systematic for both first and second cycle programmes. Overall student satisfaction with the monitoring of learning progress and feedback system is high. No significant deficiencies or needs for improvement in this area were observed.

Graduate employability and career are sufficiently well monitored for both first and second cycle programmes. Employers and alumni assess the competencies of graduates well, also expressing the need for stronger practical skills. More efforts could be devoted to monitoring employment of foreign students (esp. considering that their population in the relevant programmes increases). Also,

career guidance services are not sufficiently systematic and comprehensive, and could make better use of alumni potential.

Policies to ensure academic integrity, tolerance, and non-discrimination are implemented well for both first and second cycle programmes. No violations of the principles of academic integrity/honesty, tolerance and non-discrimination recorded among the students during the evaluation period. Occasional concerns about bias in topic selection for these were observed.

Procedures for submitting and processing appeals and complaints are effective for both first and second cycle programmes, with multiple layers of proactive engagement from both staff and students. The institution's clear communication regarding how to submit complaints or appeals is evident, as students are aware of the process even if they have not used it.

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 | | |
| Second cycle | | | x | | |

COMMENDATIONS

1. Developing unique digital learning tools for the subjects (e.g. virtual teacher's offices and simulation companies, practice of artificial intelligence tools, escape rooms and other unique and innovative tasks) in the project "Digital Transformation of Education" ("EdTech").
2. System of two compulsory internships for first-cycle students that may lead to more opportunities compared to systems foreseeing only one compulsory internship.

RECOMMENDATIONS

To address shortcomings;

1. Streamlining first cycle programmes would help to strengthen teaching and learning methods and also overall organisation processes. It should also help to enhance interdisciplinary course coordination, establish clear links between methods and learning outcomes in study programmes, better adapt these methods considering increasing number of foreign students, strengthen the teaching content (e.g. reinforced teaching of quantitative methods) and further improve access to higher education for foreign student population in the field.
2. Employability of university graduates (esp. of first cycle graduates) could be further increased through more systematic and comprehensive provision of career guidance services so it covers all students as early as possible in their study trajectories. The need for a mentoring programme to increase alumni participation in the study programme was also emphasized in the previous evaluation.

For further improvement:

1. More systematic monitoring of employment statistics incl. carrying out regular employer surveys and ensuring better access to employment data of foreign graduates.
2. Work-based learning components of esp. first-cycle programmes could be enhanced by strengthening partnerships with employers for practical work activities incl. internships, collecting detailed employer feedback and using this feedback to further improve practical work activities.
3. Addressing thesis topic diversity concerns.

AREA 5: TEACHING STAFF

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| 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

According to the SER and Annex 3, the political science faculty at Vytautas Magnus University (VMU) comprises 55 academics: 27% are professors, 44% associate professors, 25% hold PhDs, and 4% are lecturers without doctoral degrees. VMU academic staff teaching in the first and second cycle studies under evaluation come from different departments. Almost all of the teaching staff meet the minimum B2 English proficiency standard. Most lecturers have over 10 years of experience, combining academic expertise with practical insights in political science, public administration, and related fields. There are several notable and renowned faculty members whose contributions encompass teaching, research, and participation in national and international advisory roles. The workload is structured by university policy, covering contact teaching, preparation, research, and organizational activities. Staff qualifications and activities are monitored annually and evaluated every five years.

The staff composition has been relatively stable, though changes have occurred due to personal and career decisions. Replacements align with program needs and objectives, ensuring continuity and innovation. Young academics, often Ph.D. candidates, are integrated into the teaching staff, creating some kind of pipeline for future educators. Co-teaching and collaboration on course delivery between senior and junior staff were mentioned during the site visit as ways to facilitate mentorship and smooth transitions.

Class sizes average 20 students per lecturer. Instructors apply different teaching methods, including simulation, case study analysis and problem-based learning. Yet, the use of quantitative methods seems to be marginal. Some academic staff bring “real-life” experience to the classroom as they are engaged in NGOs, occasionally involving student trainees. Several academic staff have advisory tasks outside academia, including membership in the Lithuanian OSCE Chairmanship, Caritas, the Research Council of Lithuania etc. demonstrating both external demand for expertise available at the department as well as the ability of staff to balance several duties. During the site visit, some students expressed the wish that the academic staff were more physically present in VMU.

Research draws from the individual strengths of researchers but is also supported by research clusters. Innovative teaching and research is being recognized by awards, such as an university prize for innovation recently bestowed on a member of the department.

ANALYSIS AND CONCLUSION (regarding 5.1.)

The VMU political science faculty demonstrates strong qualifications, significant teaching and research expertise, and a commitment to fostering critical thinking in line with the descriptor for the implementation for studies (see chapter VI) issued by the Lithuanian government. The academic staff strikes a balance between highly qualified researchers and experienced professionals, including part-time lecturers and guests from social partners, who mainly teach practice-oriented subjects. The fact that academic staff originate from different departments and fields of political science and public administration seem to contribute to interdisciplinarity and interdisciplinary collaboration. Academic staff is actively engaged in various scientific activities at the national and international level; they also engage in collaborative research projects and were awarded amongst other things, a prestigious Jean Monnet Chair.

The student-teacher ratio and mentorship opportunities are such as to ensure a supportive academic environment, fostering deeper engagement of students in theoretical and practical coursework. For thesis supervision, a 2-6 students per lecturer ratio ensures individualized mentorship.

The interplay of staff retention and dynamic renewal maintains program quality and innovation. Internationalisation of academic staff certainly is constrained by various factors, but needs to be improved in the medium-term, also with a view to expand the international student base amongst applications. The European Universities Initiative – Transform4Europe (T4EU) – is an interesting tool for achieving some of these objectives (e.g., the T4EU Chair Call), but these opportunities have not yet been fully seized.

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| 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

VMU promotes academic mobility and international collaboration through extensive participation in the Erasmus+ programme and other mobility initiatives. VMU is a member of Transform4Europe (T4EU) involving eleven partners from all of Europe.

During 2020-2023, Political Science teachers completed 59 outgoing Erasmus+ visits to partner universities in Italy, Poland, Latvia, Austria, Canada, and Japan. These visits are typically short-term but occasionally extend to longer durations, such as faculty traineeships at prestigious institutions like the Aleksanteri Institute at the University of Helsinki. Mobility visits not only foster international cooperation but also expose educators to diverse perspectives on global political issues, which they integrate into their teaching and research. This exchange subsequently enriches students' learning experiences by incorporating comparative insights and fostering critical thinking. (Section 2?)

In 2020- 2023, 37 guest lecturers and researchers visited VMU under Erasmus+ and other agreements, hailing from Canada, Japan, Ukraine, and Bosnia and Herzegovina. Visiting lecturers contribute by delivering specialized lectures on topics like conflict resolution, regional politics, and human rights. These interactions enhance cultural awareness, foster intercultural dialogue, and expose students to innovative teaching methodologies, furthering their academic and professional development. (Section 2?)

VMU facilitates mobility and research through its Science Foundation, which allocates significant funding to promote research, international collaboration, and competence development. Funding increased from €178,000 in 2018 to €374,000 in 2022, providing more opportunities for VUM staff in general and Political Science educators in particular to engage in international projects and disseminate their research.

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

The professional development of teaching staff at VMU is comprehensively structured and supported, with activities governed by the *Description of Procedure for Professional Development of Academic and Non-academic Staff at VMU*. Faculty members are encouraged to enhance their competencies in three key areas: general, professional, and personal. A minimum of 20 academic hours per year is recommended for professional growth, focusing on areas such as foreign language proficiency, innovative teaching methods, digital skills, and research-related expertise.

The VMU Professional Competence Development Centre plays a pivotal role in organizing and tailoring professional development opportunities to the needs of the staff. On-campus training sessions are abundant and free for VMU staff. Teachers can also pursue external training funded

through departmental resources, Erasmus+ programs, or other initiatives. January is a month designated for intensive professional development.

VMU places a strong emphasis on enhancing didactic skills, with training on engaging students, distance learning tools, and integrating technology into education. Language development is also prioritized, with courses offered in academic English and informal conversation hubs fostering linguistic growth. Key initiatives include digital transformation projects like "EdTech," which provide teachers with intensive digital skills training. Teachers developed innovative tools, such as virtual simulations and AI-based learning activities.

Feedback mechanisms ensure that professional development remains relevant. Instructors' complete evaluations post-training, and their input, alongside recommendations from faculties and program committees, shapes future training topics.

International collaborations, notably through the T4EU alliance, whose current president is VMU-based Prof. Juozas Augutis (<https://transform4europe.eu/about-us/>) have expanded opportunities for professional growth. T4EU initiatives include guidelines for innovative teaching, international training sessions, conferences and opportunities for more structured exchange for both faculty and students. Topics range from digital storytelling to teaching multilingual groups.

ANALYSIS AND CONCLUSION (regarding 5.2.)

Academic exchanges strengthen professional networks, inspire new research collaborations, and enhance the curriculum. Lecturers' interactions with international peers foster a global intellectual community, supporting the European educational framework. Furthermore, the participation of foreign academics enriches the local academic environment, contributing to the university's international visibility and prestige. Overall, VMU's emphasis on mobility and international collaboration significantly enhances the quality of Political Science education and research, fostering global engagement and preparing students for international careers.

Rates of participation have steadily increased, with over 34% of teachers engaging in 2023. VMU also incentivizes professional growth through annual evaluations that tie bonuses and wage rates to development activities and scientific output.

In summary, VMU demonstrates commitment to fostering professional development, equipping faculty with the skills needed to innovate in teaching, research, and digital education, ultimately enhancing the university's academic and professional standards. However, shortcomings remain with regards to internationalization and mobility of academic staff.

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 | | |
| Second cycle | | | X | | |

COMMENDATIONS

1. Research cluster create a promising base for multi- and interdisciplinary research and teaching
2. Wide variety of in-house training for professional development of staff and due emphasis on this aspect.

RECOMMENDATIONS

To address shortcomings

1. To develop the use and application of quantitative methods both in research of academic staff and in teaching of the second cycle courses of all three programmes.
2. To foster internationalization of academic staff also with a view to meeting university strategic objectives in expanding the applicant base internationally.

For further improvement

1. To use opportunities provided by the Transform4EU membership of VMU for faculty exchange more strategically.
2. To support highly qualified staff to apply for grants with the ERC-pillar of the EU's research programme.
3. To elaborate co-teaching practices further in order to transform the multidisciplinary teaching into interdisciplinary one.

AREA 6: LEARNING FACILITIES AND RESOURCES

| | |
|------|---|
| 6.1. | Facilities, informational and financial resources are sufficient and enable achieving learning outcomes |
|------|---|

FACTUAL SITUATION

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

The Faculty of Political Science and Diplomacy is housed in one of the university's newest buildings, offering state-of-the-art facilities that support innovative and modern teaching methods. Lecture schedules are carefully planned based on class size and available classroom space, with rooms accommodating between 36 and 180 students. All classrooms are equipped with essential technology, including computers, internet access, audio-video systems, and multimedia equipment. Additionally, the faculty building features two computer labs (with 18 and 25 workstations, respectively) and a media lab, where students can engage with cutting-edge technologies, applied policy analysis, and media-related work processes. Moodle serves as the primary virtual learning environment (VLE).

The Faculty Library offers a high-quality physical infrastructure with ample workspaces, including 17 individual study rooms and group study areas with a total of 72 seats. These rooms can be reserved in advance through the library's website. The library is also designed to accommodate visitors with disabilities, providing 17 workstations adapted to various special needs. Its extensive resources include nearly one million printed items and 800,000 electronic resources, accessible through 63 licensed databases - with approximately 76,400 print and 82,000 electronic resources dedicated to political science. The availability and use of electronic resources are continuously expanding.

To further enhance research and academic work, a new-generation cloud platform was introduced in 2022. The VMU Research Management System (CRIS) consolidates all study and research outputs at VMU, making them openly accessible beyond the university.

Beyond its own facilities, VMU's extensive partner network provides students with a wide range of infrastructure and opportunities for internships, further enriching their academic and professional experience.

6.1.2. There is continuous planning for and upgrading of resources.

The physical infrastructure is modern and does not require significant investment in the near future. IT and library resources are continuously reviewed and updated to ensure they meet academic and technological needs. Approximately 20% of computers are replaced annually, and software undergoes audits every six months to be updated or supplemented as necessary. Commercial software used in the study process, such as SPSS, is provided under educational licenses.

The L. Donskis Library at the faculty actively updates its collections by compiling annual lists of the latest publications and gathering faculty requests for new acquisitions. In 2023, over €8,000 was allocated for the purchase of printed books, while approximately €96,000 was dedicated to acquiring access to electronic resources for the study field (SER, 110, Table 6.1).

ANALYSIS AND CONCLUSION (regarding 6.1.)

Political science students have access to excellent study facilities, including well-designed physical spaces, advanced technology, and extensive literature resources. The infrastructure meets the highest national and international standards.

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 |
| Second cycle | | | | | X |

COMMENDATIONS

1. The university provides an outstanding learning environment with state-of-the-art facilities and modern infrastructure that support both teaching and practical training.
2. The physical and digital infrastructure is designed to be inclusive, offering special software, technical equipment, and adapted workstations for users with disabilities.
3. VMU leverages its partner network to offer a wide range of internship opportunities.

RECOMMENDATIONS

To address shortcomings

Not applicable

For further improvement

Not applicable

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 |
|------|--|

FACTUAL SITUATION

7.1.1. Internal quality assurance system for the programmes is effective

The VMU's quality assurance system for studies is organised to meet higher education priorities, legal requirements, and stakeholder needs. It is guided by documents such as the VMU Statute (2018), Quality Manual (2022), and specific procedural descriptions. These documents outline processes for study planning, implementation, evaluation, and improvement, with all materials publicly accessible in Lithuanian and English.

The University Senate and Rectorate handle strategic decisions, while the Study Quality Unit develops quality strategies and monitors implementation. Faculty councils, programme committees, and other university bodies manage specific aspects of study programmes, supported by input from students, lecturers, alumni, and social partners.

Study Programme Committees coordinate curriculum implementation, perform internal quality assessments, and gather feedback for programme improvement. Regular evaluations are conducted using statistical data, surveys, and external reviews. Recent examples include course updates, incorporation of blended learning models, and adjustments to reflect labour market demands. Processes aim to continuously align programmes with institutional and stakeholder requirements.

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

Stakeholders at VMU are involved in study quality assurance through structured participation mechanisms.

Teachers provide input via department meetings, surveys, and course-level actions, focusing on teaching improvements and curriculum adjustments. Students contribute through their representatives in programme committees, councils, surveys, and group discussions. They also engage in planned programme improvement actions and provide feedback on individual study experiences. Social partners participate in curriculum committees, offering recommendations on labour market relevance and practical skills. Their feedback is collected through surveys, Career Day discussions, and internships, where evaluations are incorporated into quality assessments. Alumni provide suggestions via surveys and meetings organized by faculty or alumni associations.

Surveys gather stakeholder input on teaching quality, programme relevance, and labour market preparedness. Data from surveys is analyzed and shared through university systems. Committees review this information and use it for programme development. Feedback processes are documented in university regulations and involve coordinated roles across university divisions.

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

Evaluation and improvement of study programmes at the university involve systematic data collection and analysis through annual reviews and external evaluations. The annual analysis identifies areas such as alignment with research trends, market demands, resource adequacy, and student progress. Feedback is gathered via surveys targeting students, alumni, and faculty. For instance, students in the Master's programme in Contemporary European Policy Studies rated the programme highly, with feedback prompting the implementation of hybrid teaching methods from 2024 onwards.

Programme-specific surveys ensure targeted improvements, like adding a course on Information and Cyber Security based on student input. Quality evaluations of teaching are addressed through discussions between lecturers and departmental heads, and persistent issues may lead to staffing changes, exemplified by improvements following a lecturer replacement in the Contemporary European programme.

Decisions and improvements are communicated through committees, student representatives, and public channels, ensuring transparency and stakeholder involvement in quality assurance efforts.

7.1.4. Student feedback is collected and analysed

The evaluation of political science programmes at VMU relies on student surveys conducted each semester, where students rate teaching quality on a ten-point scale. Results from 2020-2023 indicate consistently high scores, with averages ranging from 8.24 to 9.78 across undergraduate and postgraduate programmes. Specific aspects like clear presentation, course content supplemented with examples, and adherence to professional ethics received particularly high ratings.

However, participation in these surveys is often limited, with smaller programmes like Contemporary European Politics receiving fewer responses, which may skew results. EXIT surveys of master’s programmes also show positive evaluations, with students appreciating access to resources, balanced course loads, and effective supervision during thesis preparation. Improvements noted include better organisation and hybrid learning adaptations.

While student feedback indicates strong overall satisfaction, efforts to enhance survey participation and representativeness continue. Some programmes, like World Politics and Economy, are yet to undergo external evaluations, leaving gaps in peer-review-based recommendations.

ANALYSIS AND CONCLUSION (regarding 7.1.)

Overall, students seem to be very satisfied with the programs taught in the political science field. Yet, the programmes currently undergo some changes. In light of these developments, it is important that the internal quality assurance system is effective and ensures participation of different stakeholder groups. Feedback is primarily collected via survey and some programs suffer from survey fatigue. Still, communication and feedback is disseminated in a way showcasing that suggestions are being discussed and eventually taken up and implemented by study programs. Teaching staff has access to course evaluations via the intranet. There are no substantial differences in terms of feedback between the first and second cycle, with the exception of MIREES, an international MA program taught at the MA-level involving various international partners. (3,1 overall exit satisfaction, SER, p. 121). Still, the challenge is that both feedback from students, graduates and alumni is rather limited, challenging the level of representation of these surveys.

AREA 7: CONCLUSIONS

| | 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 |
|--------------------|---|--|--|---|--|
| AREA 7 | | | | | |
| First cycle | | | | X | |

| | | | | | |
|---------------------|--|--|--|---|--|
| | | | | | |
| Second cycle | | | | X | |

COMMENDATIONS

1. A substantial number of teaching staff is involved in the study programme committee ensuring broad internal quality assurance.
2. The quality assurance system is responsive to needs by students and social partners.
3. The political science programmes receive very good scores indicating high levels of student satisfaction.

RECOMMENDATIONS

To address shortcomings

Not applicable

For further improvement

1. Survey participation varies across VMU programmes in political science. This could be addressed by introducing some small rewards for participation or by close cooperation of student associations.
2. Strategic alumni involvement could be improved by offering some more strategic relationships involving them e.g. more actively in some of the research associated with the programmes.
3. Informal (oral, in-class) mid-term evaluation could be introduced in order to implement course-level improvements "on-the-go".
4. Develop systematic "Study Barometers" to gather comprehensive data over time.

V. SUMMARY

Within the first- and second-cycle political science programmes at VMU, the expert panel found that all evaluation areas have been developed systematically, in compliance with legal requirements, and aligned with both academic training needs and labour market demands. The panel noted that recommendations from the previous evaluation had been addressed, with corrective actions taken where necessary. While the evaluation highlights several strengths, it also identifies areas requiring strategic improvement.

VMU maintains a strong regional identity, fosters good relationships with social partners, and aligns well with national higher education strategies. Although its programmes aim to equip students with relevant knowledge and skills, improvements are needed in articulating and assessing competences. The merger of three bachelor's programmes into a single Political Studies programme remains an issue. The rationale for this restructuring was not clearly communicated to the expert panel, and faculty and administration provided inconsistent responses regarding future programme mergers. This indicates a need for better alignment between learning outcomes and teaching methods. Additionally, students reported ongoing curriculum changes, raising concerns about programmes' stability. Core strengths from previous programmes, such as International Relations and World Politics, risk being diluted.

At the second-cycle level, the faculty's expertise in public administration is a notable strength with significant potential for further development. However, the alignment between programmes' learning outcomes and courses should be reviewed to ensure consistency with strategic goals and labour market needs. Improved communication across departments and increased faculty engagement in shaping the teaching portfolio are necessary to foster a cohesive academic environment while maintaining disciplinary identities. Furthermore, the panel found that the programmes' online visibility is low, which may impact its attractiveness to prospective students.

VMU's political science research effectively addresses societal issues, and faculty members demonstrate strong research output. However, participation in international research projects remains low and stagnant. While faculty members engage in research clusters, conferences, and publications, student involvement in research remains inconsistent. Although research is integrated into teaching, student participation remains unsystematic. Previous evaluations noted similar concerns, and no clear improvements were evident. A strategic approach is needed to enhance student research engagement.

The restructuring of the political science study field aims to enhance flexibility and appeal, yet unclear specialisation pathways on the university's website remain an issue. While students have access to extensive academic mobility opportunities, including Erasmus+, participation in exchange programmes remains low. Many students struggle to balance work and study abroad, and addressing these challenges while emphasizing the long-term benefits of mobility could help increase participation. VMU provides strong student support services, including academic guidance, financial aid, counselling, and career development, fostering an inclusive academic environment.

Teaching and learning methods effectively support student achievement. However, the increasing number of international students and the diversity of political science programmes create challenges in adapting teaching approaches. Internship opportunities also present difficulties, particularly regarding the timely dissemination of information, which needs improvement to enhance accessibility. While support for socially vulnerable and special-needs students is strong, ensuring equal access for foreign students remains a challenge. Student progress monitoring and feedback mechanisms are systematic, with generally high satisfaction levels. Graduate employability is well-tracked, and employer and alumni feedback on competencies is positive, though practical skills could be further strengthened. Tracking foreign graduates needs improvement, given the rising number of international students. Career guidance services, while available, could be more comprehensive and better utilise alumni networks. Academic integrity, tolerance, and non-discrimination policies are effectively implemented, with no recorded violations. However, occasional concerns regarding bias

in thesis topic selection were noted. The appeals and complaints process is transparent and accessible.

VMU's political science faculty consists of highly qualified academics with significant teaching and research expertise. The faculty maintains a balance between full-time researchers and part-time lecturers from social partners, ensuring both theoretical and practical dimensions. Interdisciplinary collaboration strengthens academic offerings, and favourable student-to-teacher ratios allow for individualised mentorship, particularly in thesis supervision. Staff retention supports a dynamic academic environment, yet faculty internationalisation remains limited and requires improvement. The European Universities Initiative (Transform4Europe – T4EU) presents an opportunity for international engagement, but its potential remains underutilised. Academic exchanges foster research collaborations and enrich curricula, while foreign academic engagement enhances VMU's international reputation. Faculty participation in international activities has recently increased, and continuous professional development of teachers is incentivised through evaluations linking bonuses and salaries to academic growth. However, faculty internationalisation remains an area requiring further attention.

VMU provides excellent study facilities, including modern physical spaces, advanced technology, and extensive academic resources, meeting both national and international standards.

Students express overall satisfaction with political science programmes. However, the restructuring of programmes requires a robust internal quality assurance system. Feedback collection relies mainly on surveys, though survey fatigue and low response rates are issues. While feedback is integrated into programmes' development, graduate and alumni engagement in surveys remains limited, raising concerns about representativeness. The MIREES international master's programme reported slightly lower exit satisfaction.

Overall, VMU's political science programmes demonstrate strong academic potential, active research engagement, and a commitment to inclusivity. However, key challenges remain in programmes' restructuring, research engagement, and internationalisation. Addressing these through strategic planning, clearer communication, and enhanced participation in research and mobility initiatives will strengthen VMU's academic standing and ensure long-term success.

VI. EXAMPLES OF EXCELLENCE