SKVC

STUDIJŲ KOKYBĖS VERTINIMO CENTRAS
CENTRE FOR QUALITY ASSESSMENT IN HIGHER EDUCATION

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POLITICAL SCIENCE FIELD OF STUDY

Vilnius University

EXTERNAL EVALUATION REPORT

Expert panel:
1. Panel chair: Prof. Dr. Tomaž Deželan
2. Academic member: Prof. Dr. Žaneta Ozolina
3. Academic member: Prof. Dr. Stefano Braghiroli
4. Social partner representative: Rimantas Dumčius
5. Student representative: Evelina Brazauskienė

SKVC coordinator: Greta Misevičiūtė

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I. INTRODUCTION

1.1. OUTLINE OF THE EVALUATION PROCESS

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

1.2. REVIEW PANEL

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

The composition of the review panel was as follows:

1. Panel chair: Prof. Dr. Tomaž Deželan
2. Academic member: Prof. Dr. Žaneta Ozolina
3. Academic member: Prof. Dr. Stefano Braghiroli
4. Social partner representative: Rimantas Dumčius
5. Student representative: Evelina Brazauskienė

1.3. SITE VISIT

The site visit was organised on 12th of December 2024 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

Vilnius University was founded in 1579 and is the oldest and largest public higher education institution in Lithuania. The university has 15 academic core units (11 faculties, 1 institute, 1 centre, 1 academy and 1 business school) and 12 non-academic core units. The University employs 5,469 staff (including 2604 teaching staff, 805 research staff and 2,060 administrative staff) and 23,579 students (including 2,133 foreign nationals studying full-time). The Institute of International Relations and Political Science (IIRPS) was founded in 1992 and has the Board of Directors, the Director and the Board of Studies in an advisory capacity. It consists of three departments: the Department of Political Behaviour and Institutional Studies, the Department of Political Philosophy and History of Ideas and the Department of International Relations, as well as three research centres: the Centre for European Studies, the Centre for Public Administration and Policy Analysis and the Centre for (Post)Soviet Memory Studies. The work of academics (researchers) representing different branches of political science and teaching staff in the field of political science is organised in the departments and research centres.

Overview of the study field

The main research areas of the Institute include (post)Soviet memory and society, political behaviour and institutions (Lithuanian and comparative perspectives), political philosophy and Lithuanian political thought, foreign and security policy of Lithuania and small countries, regional studies (with a focus on Russia, Eastern Europe, Europeanisation), public policy and governance analysis. The Institute employs 98 teaching, research and administrative staff (11 professors and research professors, 16 associate professors and senior researchers, 20 assistants and researchers, 13 junior assistants and junior researchers, 10 lecturers, 6 associate professors and associate professors, 27 administrative staff, 5 of whom are also academic staff) and has 856 students. The study area under evaluation includes 2 first level programmes (Political Science and Politics of Global Challenges) and 6 second level programmes (Politics and Media, Eastern European and Russian Studies, Contemporary Politics, International Relations and Diplomacy, Public Policy Analysis and the ARQUS Joint Master's Programme "European Studies", which is run jointly with the Universities of Leipzig, Graz and Granada). In addition, the Institute offers doctoral programmes in the field of political science.

Previous external evaluations

The field study programmes (SPs) underwent the following external evaluations: 2013-2014 Bachelor's Programme in Political Science (accredited for 6 years), 2014-2015 Master's Programme in Contemporary Politics (accredited for 6 years), 2016 Master's Programmes in Eastern European and Russian Studies (accredited for 6 years), International Relations and Diplomacy (accredited for 6 years), Public Policy Analysis (accredited for 6 years), 2016-2017 Politics and Media (accredited for 3 years). The Bachelor's Programme in the Politics of Global Challenges was evaluated in 2022 for the purpose of registration only. The Joint Master's programme "European Studies" has also been evaluated only for the purpose of registration in 2023. Previous external evaluations pointed to minor deviations at high levels of excellence and, above all, to the need to focus on advanced quality assurance and improvement tools.

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 (Annex 1-8)
- Final theses

Additional sources of information used by the review panel: university and institute's web pages.

II. STUDY PROGRAMMES IN THE FIELD

First cycle/LTQF 6

Title of the study programme	Political Science	Politics of Global Challenges
State code	6121JX017	6121JX077
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's degree in Social Sciences	Bachelor's degree in Social Sciences
Language of instruction	Lithuanian	English
Admission requirements	Secondary education	Secondary education
First registration date	1997-05-19	2022-04-25
Comments (including remarks on joint or interdisciplinary nature of the programme, mode of provision)	N/A	N/A

Second cycle/LTQF 7

Title of the study programme	Politics and Media	Eastern European and Russian Studies	International Relations and Diplomacy
State code	6211JX018	6211JX019	6211JX020
Type of study (college/university)	University	University	University
Mode of study (full time/part time) and nominal duration (in years)	Full-time, 1.5 years	Full-time, 1.5 years	Full-time, 2 years
Workload in ECTS	90	90	120
Award (degree and/or professional qualification)	Master's degree in Social Sciences	Master's degree in Social Sciences	Master's degree in Social Sciences
Language of instruction	Lithuanian	English	Lithuanian
Admission requirements	Higher education	Higher education	Higher education
First registration date	2012-06-11	2014-01-08	2014-01-08
Comments (including remarks on joint or interdisciplinary nature	N/A	N/A	N/A

of the programme, mode of provision)			

Second cycle/LTQF 7

Title of the study programme	**Contemporary Politics**	**Public Policy Analysis**	**European Studies**
State code	6211JX023	6211JX021	6281JX007
Type of study (college/university)	University	University	University
Mode of study (full time/part time) and nominal duration (in years)	Full-time, 1.5 years	Full-time, 2 years	Full-time, 2 years
Workload in ECTS	90	120	120
Award (degree and/or professional qualification)	Master's degree in Social Sciences	Master's degree in Social Sciences	Master's degree in Social Sciences
Language of instruction	Lithuanian	Lithuanian	English
Admission requirements	Higher education	Higher education	Higher education
First registration date	1997-05-19	2012-05-29	2023-05-11
Comments (including remarks on joint or interdisciplinary nature of the programme, mode of provision)			

Second cycle/LTQF 7

Title of the study programme	**European Studies**
State code	6211JX022
Type of study (college/university)	University
Mode of study (full time/part time) and nominal duration (in years)	Full-time, 2 years
Workload in ECTS	120
Award (degree and/or professional qualification)	Master's degree in Social Sciences
Language of instruction	Lithuanian
Admission requirements	Higher education
First registration date	2014-01-08
Comments (including remarks on joint or interdisciplinary nature of the programme, mode of provision)	

III. ASSESSMENT IN POINTS BY CYCLE AND EVALUATION AREAS

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

No.	Evaluation Area	Evaluation points[1*]
1.	Study aims, learning outcomes and curriculum	4
2.	Links between scientific (or artistic) research and higher education	4
3.	Student admission and support	4
4.	Teaching and learning, student assessment, and graduate employment	4
5.	Teaching staff	4
6.	Learning facilities and resources	4
7.	Quality assurance and public information	4
	Total:	28

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	4
2.	Links between scientific (or artistic) research and higher education	4
3.	Student admission and support	4
4.	Teaching and learning, student assessment, and graduate employment	4
5.	Teaching staff	4
6.	Learning facilities and resources	4
7.	Quality assurance and public information	4
	Total:	28

[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

Vilnius University (VU) actively engages with employers and other stakeholders to ensure the relevance of its political science programmes to the labour market. This engagement is facilitated through Study Programme Committees (SPCs) and thesis defence commissions, which include a wide range of relevant stakeholders. Monitoring graduates' career paths, analysing the labour market forecast for political science professionals, and monitoring public debates allow the programmes to be consistently updated with the latest developments in the labour market. VU also fosters practical skills development through various initiatives, including internships, where students can gain experience in the relevant sector. By incorporating feedback from internship providers into the curriculum design, VU ensures that graduates are equipped with the necessary skills and competencies employers demand. Using guest lecturers from relevant sectors is also an integral approach to maintaining the relationship with industry stakeholders and further improving the programmes in light of current labour market needs.

Employer satisfaction with VU graduates is high, as evidenced by positive feedback from social partners and organisations offering student internships. Employers commend graduates for their critical thinking, communication, and organisational skills, indicating a strong alignment between programme learning outcomes and employer expectations. In particular, it has been noted that graduates can make decisions and take responsibility. The ethical code of graduates, which is an integral part of the study programmes, is also valued by institutions engaged in analytical activities.

VU's political science programmes are popular among Lithuanian and foreign students, contributing to a competitive admissions process. Programmes like the Bachelor's in Political Science consistently rank among the top choices for state-funded places in Lithuania, indicating high demand and selectivity. Introducing the English-language Politics of Global Challenges programme has broadened the appeal to international students, aligning with the university's internationalisation goals. The competitive nature of admissions ensures that the programme can cater for high-achieving students with a strong aptitude for political science. The new ARQUS Joint Master's Programme, European Studies, has further enhanced the international attractiveness of VU's political science programmes.

VU political science graduates enjoy high employment rates, reflecting the programmes' success in preparing them for the job market. Data from the Education Management Information System (EMIS) indicates that a significant percentage of graduates are employed or self-employed within one year of graduation. The Master programmes achieve above 90% employment rate, exceeding even the high employment rate of the Bachelor programmes (80%). Graduates pursue diverse career paths in public sector institutions, international organisations, NGOs, think tanks, public management consultancies, and media outlets, often holding positions as advisors, analysts, specialists, and project managers. There is a strong indication that VU's political science graduates are advancing to top leadership positions in government, academia, and media, strongly influencing Lithuania's social and economic development, public debates, and foreign policy.

VU offers a balanced portfolio of political science programmes at both the Bachelor's and Master's levels, catering to a wide range of student interests and career aspirations. Each Master's programme focuses on a different object or area of study. It, therefore, does not compete with each

other, and there are two English-language Master's programmes to cater for non-Lithuanian speakers. Launching new programmes, such as Politics of Global Challenges and the joint European Studies Master's, demonstrates a proactive approach to meeting emerging societal needs and global challenges.

Internationalisation is a key priority for VU, reflected in the English-language programmes, joint degree offerings, and the increasing number of international teaching staff. Opportunities for student and staff exchange programmes further contribute to internationalisation, creating a diverse and enriching learning environment. Students have access to international exchange programmes such as Erasmus+, which provides students with opportunities to gain experience in an international environment. The inclusion of English-taught courses and internationally focused content further enhances the international appeal and competitiveness of VU's political science programmes.

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

The aims and learning outcomes of Vilnius University's (VU) political science programmes are intrinsically linked to the university's broader mission, strategic goals, and operational strategy. VU's mission centres on strengthening Lithuania's cognitive and creative potential while nurturing academic, spiritual, and social values, ultimately educating responsible and engaged citizens. The political science programmes directly contribute to this mission by equipping students with the knowledge, skills, and critical thinking abilities necessary to understand, analyse, and address complex societal challenges, domestically and globally. The programmes aim to create graduates capable of addressing global transformations, applying research methods to investigate social, political, and economic processes, and solving intricate political challenges. The programmes are fully aligned with this endeavour, as graduates are expected to contribute to the country's well-being and act in a way that adheres to academic ethics and moral responsibility.

VU's political science programmes contribute to several key objectives of the university's strategic directions. First, the programmes contribute to improving the quality of studies by using active, individual, and interdisciplinary approaches based on scientific knowledge. Secondly, the programmes help to strengthen research activities. VU IIRPS invests in employees and fosters their expert influence on state policy. It works to equip political science graduates with skills to solve the problems of society at a local, national, regional, and global level, due to their extensive training in understanding the theory of social sciences, applying research methods, and building general skills such as communication, leadership, and cooperation. The political science study programmes integrate interdisciplinary knowledge and international content, helping VU realize its mission and strategic objectives.

ANALYSIS AND CONCLUSION (regarding 1.1.)

Vilnius University (VU) ensures the alignment of its political science programmes with societal and labour market needs through continuous stakeholder engagement and curriculum refinement. This approach strengthens the programmes' relevance, equipping graduates with essential competencies and enhancing their employability. The high employment rates and positive employer feedback further confirm the programmes' effectiveness. The competitive nature of VU's political science programmes reflects their strong national and international appeal. Strategic internationalisation efforts reinforce VU's academic presence by integrating diverse perspectives and fostering global engagement.

These programmes are closely aligned with VU's broader mission and strategic goals. They contribute to intellectual and social development by cultivating analytical and decision-making skills. They enhance academic quality and support informed policymaking through interdisciplinary and research-driven teaching. IVU's political science programmes effectively integrate academic excellence with labour market relevance, ensuring graduates are well-prepared for complex professional and societal challenges.

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 VU programmes assessed comply with legal requirements by adhering to Lithuanian and European higher education standards. They align with the Lithuanian Qualifications Framework and European Qualifications Framework, ensuring appropriate levels of complexity, autonomy, and variability of activities for each study cycle. The curriculum design adheres to the Description of Study Cycles and the Description of the Study Field of Political Science. Study programmes meet the required ECTS credits, distribution of contact and self-study hours, and guidelines for internships and theses. Regular updates and external evaluations ensure compliance with evolving legal and academic standards.

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

The programme aims, learning outcomes, teaching/learning, and assessment methods are systematically aligned to ensure coherence and effective competence development. Aims focus on preparing graduates with theoretical knowledge and practical skills in political science, international relations, and public policy. Learning outcomes emphasize critical thinking, research, and problem-solving skills. Teaching methods, including lectures, seminars, group work, and independent research, are designed to facilitate active learning and practical application of knowledge. Assessment methods, such as written assignments, presentations, examinations, and final theses, directly measure the achievement of learning outcomes. This alignment ensures students develop the competencies needed for academic and professional success

1.2.3. Curriculum ensures consistent development of student competences

The curriculum ensures consistent development of student competences by structuring courses progressively across study cycles. Initial semesters focus on foundational knowledge in political science, research methods, and critical thinking. Advanced courses introduce specialized topics, interdisciplinary knowledge, and applied skills such as public speaking, leadership, and teamwork. Elective modules allow students to tailor their studies to individual interests, while internships and final theses integrate theoretical knowledge with practical application. Regular assessments and feedback loops ensure alignment with learning outcomes and enable continuous skill refinement.

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

Students can personalize their curriculum through elective modules, interdisciplinary courses, and individual study components tailored to their interests and career goals. Opportunities include selecting specialized topics within the programme, participating in internships, and engaging in international exchange programmes. Students can also choose research topics for their final thesis, aligning with their personal academic and professional objectives. The inclusion of optional modules from other fields and access to over 20 foreign language courses further supports individual learning paths. These options ensure alignment with both personal learning goals and intended programme outcomes.

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

Final theses comply with field and cycle requirements by adhering to established national and university standards, including the Lithuanian Qualifications Framework and European Qualifications

Framework. They demonstrate students' ability to conduct independent research, critically analyze political phenomena, and apply theoretical knowledge to practical issues. Theses are prepared under close supervision, follow a structured process with interim evaluations, and meet the required ECTS credits. The public defense of the thesis before a committee ensures academic rigor and transparency. The process is aligned with the specific learning outcomes of each programme cycle, ensuring that the final thesis reflects advanced competencies in political science.

ANALYSIS AND CONCLUSION (regarding 1.2.)

The VU programmes comply with Lithuanian and European standards, ensuring legal and academic alignment through regular updates. Programme aims, learning outcomes, and teaching methods are well-structured, fostering critical thinking and practical skills. The curriculum combines core knowledge, specialization, and applied learning, with options for electives, internships, and exchanges.

Final theses meet academic and professional standards, following a structured process with supervision and public defense. Overall, the programmes are well-designed, with ongoing updates ensuring continued relevance and quality.

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. VU IIRPS demonstrates active and diverse engagement with employers, social partners, alumni, and international academics through Study Programme Committees and other channels. This ensures curricula are continuously informed by evolving societal and professional needs. This enhances the development of practical skills students through highly relevant internships, guest lectures from industry professionals, and simulated activities.
2. VU has made substantial advances in the internationalisation of political science studies in Lithuania with a choice of first and second-cycle political science programmes delivered in English, including joint degree offerings with strong international partners. An increasing number of international teaching staff, international research publications, and active participation in student and staff exchange programmes further contribute to internationalisation, creating a diverse and enriching learning environment.
3. In all the VU programmes evaluated, we observed a well-structured and effective process supporting students in their thesis writing, including colloquia and advisors who guide the appropriate configuration of each student's curriculum. This system is thoroughly embedded among faculty and management and is highly valued by students. It appears to play a pivotal role in fostering high-quality theses at both the MA and BA levels.
4. We observed a consistent and well-developed system of peer review and feedback integration, ensuring constructive alignment across courses and programmes. There is also

strong attention to, and broad awareness of, Bloom's taxonomy, reflected both in course syllabi and in the articulation of the programmes' learning objectives.

5. An effective horizontal dialogue between teaching staff and management has been clearly observed. In particular, the generally flat hierarchy between administrative and academic staff, combined with open and frequent communication, provides a strong foundation for evaluating, updating, and revising curricula as needed.

RECOMMENDATIONS

For further improvement

1. Both in the context of the scholarship of teaching and learning and in study activities, the management might want to increase the focus on the smart and ethical use of AI. While students generally perceive that the emphasis is primarily on limiting AI usage, shifting towards a more proactive approach can help them harness AI technologies responsibly and effectively.

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

The Institute achieves outstanding research outcomes, demonstrated by its publications, conference participation, international collaborations, and research projects. Its teams are dedicated to advancing internationalization, both geographically and thematically. Notable achievements include articles in international peer-reviewed journals and monographs, with a commendable balance of single-authored and collaborative works, reflecting a diverse and inclusive academic approach.

The administration ensures a balanced teaching load, fostering an environment conducive to research. A dedicated Department supports the development and management of research projects. International mobility is actively promoted through partnerships, enhancing research quality. Staff participation in national and international grant competitions has yielded excellent results.

The Institute's annual political science conference provides a valuable platform for exchanging ideas, aligning research themes, and encouraging collaboration. To further bolster research, the Institute has implemented an in-house system to support the scholarly activities of its teaching staff.

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

The research agenda and teaching staff research performance are closely linked to the curricula. This alignment ensures that academic content is directly informed by the latest advancements and priorities in different fields of political science. A notable strength of the Institute is the direct integration of findings from research projects into teaching courses.

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

The Institute prioritizes student engagement in research activities, investing in the academic and professional growth of the next generation of academics. Students develop their skills through traditional methods, including attending lectures, participating in conferences, and completing course papers and theses.

To further support student research, the Institute has established a dedicated fund for small-scale student-led projects. Internships offer students the opportunity to focus on research as part of their practical training. Teachers are also encouraged to involve students in their research projects, with such efforts considered in the annual evaluation process.

The Students' Research Society plays a key role in fostering diverse research opportunities and promoting academic engagement. However, students have expressed a desire for more active involvement in research, including receiving information about national and international conferences and greater participation in the Institute's annual political science conference.

ANALYSIS AND CONCLUSION (regarding 2.1.)

The Institute has an impressive track record in terms of internationalisation and research excellence. This is also reflected in the study programmes and their focus on ongoing research at the institute. However, student engagement in the faculty's research activities could be strengthened by first creating new opportunities, raising awareness and incentivising students to participate. Collaboration between faculty members and with other faculties at the university was also highlighted as an area for improvement.

AREA 2: CONCLUSIONS

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

COMMENDATIONS

1. The Institute has attained a high degree of internationalization in its research endeavours, as evidenced by its exceptional record of publications in esteemed peer-reviewed journals and monographs. This achievement reflects the Institute's commitment to producing high-quality, impactful research.
2. There is a strong alignment between the Institute's research outputs and its academic programmes, ensuring that research informs and enhances the curriculum, providing students with access to the latest knowledge and methodologies in their respective fields.

RECOMMENDATIONS

For further improvement

1. Consider innovative approaches to engaging a broader student audience in research activities, beginning from the first year of their studies.

2. Efforts should be made to synergize the diverse research agendas within the Institute to produce groundbreaking multidisciplinary studies. Establishing dedicated interdisciplinary research clusters and partnerships will lead to more impactful and creative outcomes.
3. Establishing more focused research priorities would enhance the development of a cohesive, long-term, and high-quality research agenda. By concentrating efforts on strategic areas of excellence, the Institute can achieve greater depth, foster stronger collaboration, and amplify the impact of its research outputs on both academic and societal levels.
4. The Institute should continue to prioritize the acquisition of competitive external research funding at a high level.
5. While striving for international excellence, the Institute as a leading body in the country should also actively position itself as a central hub for collaboration with Lithuanian institutions teaching political science. By fostering stronger partnerships at the national level, the Institute can contribute to the development of a cohesive and robust academic community within the country.

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

The programme description indicates that admission to undergraduate programmes is by general admission in accordance with the laws and procedures of the Republic of Lithuania. Admission is based on the procedures approved by the University Senate, which are published on the University's website, in AIKOS, in the media, in publications and at events promoting the programme. Admission is based on a selection procedure in which applicants are ranked according to their competition score. In addition to the competition score, which is made up of the marks obtained in the examinations and the annual marks calculated according to the formula, additional points may be awarded to the winners of prizes in the international Olympiads and competitions mentioned in the description of the procedure for drawing up the competition queue, and the winners of the first or second school-leaving examination with the corresponding grade, foreign Lithuanians who have completed vocational training programmes in the same field of education with distinction in accordance with the established procedures, who have completed basic military training or compulsory military service and who have participated in international or national volunteer programmes of the prescribed duration.

Admission to the postgraduate programme is based on the rules approved by the Senate of the higher education institution. The admission score is made up of various components depending on the degree programme. The admission score for the joint Master's programme is calculated on the basis of an agreement between the consortium partners. Information on the structure of the admission score and the admission procedures is published on the university's website, AIKOS, in the media, in publications and at events to publicise the degree programme. In addition to the usual components of the selection procedure (grade point average and grade of the final thesis in the Diploma Supplement), applicants for the Master's degree programme in International Relations and Diplomacy must take an entrance examination and will be excluded from the selection procedure if they do not pass. For applicants to the ARQUS MA in European Studies, the score for the selection procedure is calculated on the basis of an agreement between the consortium partners.

Over the three-year reporting period, the number of first-year students on the BA Political Science programme has fallen due to the demographic situation in the country and the attractiveness of foreign universities for applicants, which has had a corresponding impact on the competition score, with the maximum score for state-funded places falling by almost half a point. However, the total number of applicants for Bachelor's degree programmes has increased. In the context of the subject area, the university leads the field.

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

The higher education institution carries out the recognition of previously acquired qualifications on the basis of the right to do so. In the period, 147 applications for credit were submitted, of which 141

were accepted. The recognition of formally acquired qualifications and results be based on a prior agreement or on non-agreed learning content, whereby the results are recognised following an assessment of the relevance of the learning outcome to the formal requirements or to the competences.

For those who have studied at a university abroad and wish to continue their studies at a university, it is possible to continue their studies in the field of study after the transfer of results and the fulfilment of the formal and technical requirements of the degree programme has been verified. The credit transfer procedure is carried out on the basis of an application in the university's study information system to the head of the department whose employee is responsible for the results evaluated documents are then submitted to the chair of the committee, who assesses the relevance of the results and makes a proposal for the recognition of the results.

Non-formal and/or informal qualifications are recognised in accordance with the procedures laid down by the higher education institution - the candidate must submit a portfolio and an application for recognition. Recognition of non-formal and/or informal qualifications and results at a meeting open to the candidate for recognition to ensure fairness and to allow the candidate to answer questions from committee members at the meeting. If you disagree with the results, you may appeal the decision. No more than half of the study programme can be credited. During the assessment period, 197 students applied for recognition of formal, non-formal and informal learning competences, with the most common application being for credit of formally acquired results, which in the majority of cases were satisfactory and results.

ANALYSIS AND CONCLUSION (regarding 3.1.)

The higher education institution's selection and admission procedures are well structured, transparent and compliant. The admission process is fair and equal in terms of opportunities. The criteria and assessment methods are clearly defined and publicly accessible. These measures contribute to the credibility of the admissions process. Despite fluctuations in the number of admissions, the institution maintains a strong position in the area of student admissions. Recognition of foreign qualifications, previous studies and periods of study is carried out in accordance with established procedures.

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

FACTUAL SITUATION

3.2.1.   Opportunities for student academic mobility are ensured

The university offers opportunities for academic mobility for students at all levels. Students have the opportunity to participate in exchanges for internships, studies and graduate placements under the following programmes: Erasmus, Erasmus+, ISEP, Nordplus and participation in mobilities under bilateral co-operation agreements. The Institute of Higher Education, which runs study programmes in the field of political science, has 143 Erasmus and other agreements with foreign universities that allow students to participate in exchanges. Students can also participate in ARQUS Alliance activities

such as part-time studies, short-term exchanges, summer/winter schools, international conferences, etc. Students also have the opportunity to go to universities that are part of the COIMBRA network.

During the period under review, 271 students benefited from the Erasmus+ programme. The most active exchange students are BA students. The decrease in the number of students going on internships is noticed, which was explained during the visit as being due to the bureaucratic complexity of the process, and therefore students are more likely to go on study exchange. The most frequent destinations chosen by both incoming students and HEI students are France and Italy.

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

The university provides students with access to various forms of support, such as academic information and counselling, which is implemented both in each academic unit and centrally, career and mentoring services, information technology services, library services, financial support, accommodation, cultural, sports and leisure services, opportunities to participate in student activities, psychological services, academic pastoral care, and support and services for special needs students. The institute places great emphasis on the successful integration of students at the start of their studies.

The institute runs a mentoring programme where every student has the opportunity to develop and learn from a mentor, which consists of volunteer lecturers, who help the student to develop various competences, and alumni, who help the student with career and personal development matters. Academic support and professional development is provided to students in the form of courses. Social support is provided financially, and students have the possibility to receive scholarships for good academic performance, one-time social grants, and scholarships set up by the higher education institution, grants for students with disabilities. Meetings with students have revealed that these types of support are available to students and are effective.

3.2.3. Higher education information and student counselling are sufficient

The university organises events for enrolled students to introduce the study programmes to new students. This is followed by an integration week for students, which includes meetings with members of the curriculum committee, a separate lecture on the study programme and separate presentations to introduce the various forms of support and leisure activities. Information about the programme of study is provided on a regular basis, some centrally, specific information is provided in the unit study directory, at meetings with academic advisors or subject tutors in the unit and by the Students' Union. Students will also be advised on programme learning outcomes, course content and career opportunities by participating lecturers and staff designated to provide this support at the individual level. To ensure that the guidance provided during the programme is sufficient, lecturers are encouraged to repeatedly ask students if the information provided is adequate. Students give their feedback in surveys at the end of each semester.

ANALYSIS AND CONCLUSION (regarding 3.2.)

The University offers academic mobility opportunities for students at all levels of study in a variety of destinations. The University provides students with a wide range of academic, financial, social, psychological and personal support: academic information, counselling, career and mentoring

services, IT and library services, financial support and other forms of support that are sufficient and confirmed by student surveys. The university provides sufficient information and counselling to students. It organises events for student representatives and an integration week. Information is regularly provided by the central administration, study units, academic advisors and the Students' Union.

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. Students have a wide range of mobility opportunities to various destinations to suit their needs and interests. The Institute has taken advantage of university alliances to offer students an additional dimension of internationalisation, in particular through the ARQUS alliance.
2. An organised induction phase at the beginning of the course helps students to integrate successfully into their studies, become aware of the opportunities available and learn about the regulations relevant to their studies.
3. A motivational mentoring programme involving alumni is well implemented and effective, as is guidance on students' educational pathways, which excels in this area.

RECOMMENDATIONS

To address shortcomings

For further improvement
1. The opportunities for students to benefit from internship mobility should be further explored.
2. A commitment to attracting sufficient numbers of high calibre entrants (with high enrolments) is critical to maintaining the institution's status as a key benchmark in this area domestically and as a relevant HE institution in the field internationally.

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

4.1.	Students are prepared for independent professional activity

FACTUAL SITUATION

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

The forms and methods of teaching and learning, as well as the way in which knowledge is assessed, enable the achievement of learning outcomes. Each course begins with an introduction to the objective, the learning outcomes, the study procedure, the teaching and learning methods, the organisation of self-study and the assessment of performance. The teaching and learning methods are aligned with the general and subject-specific competences. The main study methods are contact hours (lectures, seminars, consultations, workshops) and non-contact study hours for self-study (literature research, preparation of written work, working on specific assignments given by teachers, etc.), contact hours can also be organised remotely. The quality of students' participation in seminars is also ensured by relatively small groups of students, students are also encouraged to actively participate.

Self-study includes research-based teaching and learning methods: independent search for information, analysing and summarising the content of scientific sources, etc. To ensure that students' self-study is well organised, teachers prepare assignments for self-study, monitor the way students work on them and provide formative feedback to students. In some courses, group consultations also take place, usually focussing on the self-study assignments and feedback. Field studies integrate experiential teaching and learning to enable students to acquire practical knowledge and skills. Many courses also include simulations, in addition faculty invite guest practitioners, there is also ongoing collaboration with social partners in developing specific practical assignments for students (e.g. with the Ministry of State Security) as well as a professional internship that can also be completed abroad. The introduction to research is ensured through the preparation of final theses and research seminars.

The procedure for assessing student performance is institutionally regulated and is planned and organised by the coordinating teacher of a course as part of the course unit. During the first lecture, students are familiarised with the intended methods of assessing their academic performance, their application and the deadlines for mid-term and final assessments. All of this will be detailed in the course unit descriptions. The teaching, learning and assessment methods of the second cycle focus more on integrative, problem-based teaching and independent research. A summative assessment of the competences developed during all study programmes is carried out through the assessment of the final thesis. During the learning process, students receive feedback on their performance to ensure consistent and in-depth student learning.

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

The adaptation of the study process to socially vulnerable persons and students with special needs is set out in the Diversity and Equal Opportunities Strategy 2020-2025 of Vilnius University, which provides for the adaptation of the study process to socially vulnerable groups through the adaptation

of infrastructure, access to compensatory aids, counselling of students and teaching staff on accessibility issues and the possibility to study on the basis of individual study plans. VU's Department of Community Welfare has a Disability Coordinator who is responsible for analysing and monitoring the needs of members of the university community. He/she organises and coordinates inclusion and the provision of appropriate teaching, learning and working conditions. Each semester, the coordinator invites prospective and current Vilnius University students with disabilities to counselling sessions on admission, studies, internships and other issues. Information on financial support, adapting the teaching and learning process to individual needs and available compensation resources can be obtained from the relevant contact persons in the core academic areas. Decisions on individualisation of studies are made on the basis of the "Description of the procedure for individualisation of studies at Vilnius University according to individual needs due to disabilities". During the assessment period, 6 persons with disabilities opted for this option. In order to adequately integrate students with various disabilities, seminars are regularly held for the university community on different types of disabilities

Other socially vulnerable groups receive appropriate financial support, including various other services such as psychosocial support and counselling. In addition, VU offers Belarusian students who are persecuted for civil and political reasons the opportunity to re-enrol at VU and continue their studies in Lithuania. After the outbreak of the war in Ukraine, students from Ukraine were admitted to study free of charge and teaching staff were recruited from Ukraine.

In accordance with the 2021-2025 Gender Equality Plan of Vilnius University adopted in 2021, which aims to ensure the effective and continuous implementation of gender equality, the formation of a network of gender equality coordinators at the university was initiated and the Board of the Institute adopted the first Gender Equality Plan in 2021. This plan makes it possible to institutionalise norms and values of gender equality and ensure their sustainability in the long term. The plan sets out formal guidelines and areas of responsibility for implementing the principles of gender equality for staff and students.

ANALYSIS AND CONCLUSION (regarding 4.1.)

The teaching and learning methods as well as the assessment methods demonstrate the aim to achieve the intended learning outcomes of the programme and to follow the principles of student-centredness and professional relevance. This is also achieved in particular through summative and formative assessment methods that support continuous progression through the courses and the programme itself. Access to study for disadvantaged groups of students is ensured through a framework of centralised instruments and decentralised adjustments that include both infrastructural elements and support services provided by staff and students.

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

FACTUAL SITUATION

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

Study progress of students in the study field is monitored at several levels through courses, year of studies, and programmes.

Student feedback and the results achieved are the basic information for the faculty to introduce improvements. Delayed feedback and automated knowledge testing systems are used to assess student performance, enabling objective and rapid assessment of acquired knowledge and competences. Assignments are created in the system and students can track their own progress, while teachers receive information on the distribution of learners. Thus, formative and summative assessment is guaranteed. In this way, teachers can customise the content and assessment of their module. The core academic unit also analyses the students' performance in VUSIS and the data from the course unit assessment questionnaires and talks to the lecturers of the course units about possible changes.

The progress of all students in a given year is monitored by the Study Administration Unit. If there are recurring trends in student assessment, student performance assessment results will be discussed with the core academic unit's administrative staff conducting the studies and with the degree programme committee. The Student Services and Career Department monitors the number of dropouts and implements a dropout prevention action plan. At the end of the examination period, the final data on student performance in that particular semester is analysed.

At the level of a field study programme, student progress is monitored by the Study Programme Committee. Once per academic year, the committee assesses student progress, evaluates the distribution of final learning outcome results across the course units included in the curriculum, and evaluates the number of students who have interrupted or dropped out of the programme. Student satisfaction with the degree programme is surveyed to varying degrees: Surveys are initiated both by the university and by a separate academic core or branch unit. On the basis of this data, the necessary decisions and measures are taken in consultation with the core academic unit's administration.

The university provides regular feedback to students. The provision of feedback is also part of the University's programme regulations. Teaching staff provide information on the continuous and interim assessment of student performance and utilise various forms of feedback on student performance. Feedback is given during contact sessions both individually and to the whole group or in writing through written assessments, individual and (or) joint discussions, consultations, work on assignments in the classroom, tests during classes, during internships, etc. Students have the opportunity to consult with course unit teachers during the time allocated for consultations and via video conferencing platforms. Feedback is also given to students at group level, via the programme and institute committees and via the student representatives. However, discussion with students revealed that students are not entirely satisfied with the feedback provided on the basis of student surveys and that they also feel that not all issues raised in the surveys are adequately addressed.

4.2.2. Graduate employability and career are monitored

Centralised career monitoring is carried out for university graduates. The data comes from government information systems that monitor the professional success of graduates and various forms of employment, as well as from university surveys on the careers of graduates. Graduates are surveyed one year, three years and five years after graduation. Elements of horizontal and vertical matching are analysed and the results show comparatively good results (for political science), with noticeable room for improvement in terms of vertical matching. According to the survey data, these

graduates stand out for their argumentative writing and critical thinking skills, as well as for the interdisciplinarity that allows students to master a broad range of knowledge that can be applied at work. At the same time, the information obtained through existing government services and surveys only covers certain aspects of graduates' employability and career success, while others are obtained through informal exchanges with social partners and other relevant stakeholders, as well as through the use of existing data in the institution's information system. This prevents the institution from obtaining a systematic, robust and reliable overview of graduates' careers.

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

To ensure diversity of opinion within the academic community, the University Statute, the Academic Code of Ethics and the Diversity and Equal Opportunities Strategy is in place at University level. Cases of violations of the principles of academic integrity, tolerance and non-discrimination are dealt with by the university committees in accordance with internal university regulations. Teachers and students of the University must abide by these codes, which define cases of cheating, plagiarism, fabrication, bribery and aiding and abetting dishonest academic activities. Vilnius University's study regulations stipulate that students who violate academic ethics may be censured or expelled from the university. The teaching staff applies a number of measures to ensure that students adhere to the principles of academic integrity in the evaluation of their performance (e.g. a cumulative evaluation system, an "open book" exam, an electronic exam, evaluation of answers by several teachers, etc.). During the final examination, Honestly programme members (students and faculty) can impartially monitor the examination procedures and help foster a culture of honesty in the academic environment. Thesis and research papers are checked electronically for plagiarism. The need for this system and its effectiveness is evidenced by the cases of dishonest behaviour sanctioned by the University (7 field students were expelled from VU for dishonest behaviour in the assessment of their academic performance or plagiarism in the preparation of written work and 8 other field students were reprimanded).

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

If a student is not satisfied with the final grade, he/she has the right to appeal against it by sending a reasoned letter to the dispute resolution committee of his/her core academic unit. Similarly, in the case of procedural breaches, a student has the right to send a reasoned letter to the Dispute Resolution Committee. The decision of the Dispute Resolution Committee on the examination grade is final, while other decisions of the committee can be appealed to the University's Central Dispute Resolution Committee. The Core Academic Unit's Dispute Resolution Committee also deals with other complaints relating to research and teaching and learning activities. Any student who feels that their rights have been violated can address their complaint to the committee. The committee consists of 6 members, three of whom are student representatives. During the assessment period, the committee received 9 complaints, all of which related to the final assessment of their performance within a course, and three of them were upheld.

The Academic Ethics Committee deals with complaints about actions by members of the academic community working or studying in this unit that violate academic ethics, with the exception of complaints about possible violations of research ethics, which are reviewed by the Central Academic Ethics Committee. It consists of 6 members, two of whom are student representatives. During the evaluation period, the committee received 24 requests for unethical behaviour. 22 complaints

concerned students and 2 concerned teaching staff. The University also has a special line of confidence to which any member of the University community can turn if the principles of academic ethics, tolerance and non-discrimination are violated. Applicants receive psychological and legal support, which is confidential.

ANALYSIS AND CONCLUSION (regarding 4.2.)

The study progress of students in the study field is systematically monitored at various levels and well supported by the institution's monitoring systems and services. Different checkpoints allow for a detection of continuous patterns and adequate reactions to them. Graduate employability and careers are monitored, demonstrate valid results and also allow for programmes' reactions to the situation in the labour market. However, the data on various dimensions of employability could be more robust and should better inform programme stakeholders on a broader scope of relevant aspects of employability and career success of graduates. Academic integrity, tolerance and non-discrimination policies are regulated by university regulation and put in place by relevant bodies at various levels. The track record indicates that the system is functioning adequately and so are the procedures of submitting and processing appeals and complaints. The Trust Line and the Honestly programmes make the institution an environment attentive to the needs of individuals as well as overall culture of quality and enhancement.

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. The teaching staff and the institution as a whole prioritise student excellence and progression, which is reflected in the application of teaching, learning and assessment methods. The excellence of the students is also recognised by the social partners representing the country's major institutions.
2. Programmes such as *Honestly* and *Trust line* create an environment in which the quality culture can be improved and maintained, also paying attention to those who need support

due to causes rooted in the institution itself. This allows for institutional self-reflection and growth.

RECOMMENDATIONS

For further improvement

1. The employability and graduate tracking system is in place, but the institution itself recognises its limitations and room for improvement. There needs to be continuous investment in improving this system to create a robust and reliable tool that provides appropriate value to programme developers and implementers.
2. The student survey system and the way in which the institution responds to it appears to be working well. However, to counter the perception that certain criticisms and initiatives from students and their representatives are not being acted upon, the institution should invest more in informing students of the steps being taken based on the evaluations, criticisms and initiatives arising from the feedback systems, and respond more concretely where necessary so that students take more ownership of the system and the resulting changes.

AREA 5: TEACHING STAFF

5.1.	Teaching staff is adequate to achieve learning outcomes

FACTUAL SITUATION

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

The teaching staff at the Institute are employed in accordance with the University's regulations, specifically the *Regulations for Organising Open Competitions for Teaching and Research (Artistic) Staff of Vilnius University and Their Attestation*, ensuring a transparent and competitive selection process. To support the internationalization of study programs, open calls for applications are published in English, attracting foreign academics and enriching the educational experience for students through diverse perspectives.

The attestation process for teaching staff occurs every five years and is guided by well-defined, transparent, and consistently communicated criteria. Since 2020, the Institute has implemented annual one-on-one interviews between academic staff and the administration. These meetings provide a structured platform to address individual needs, resolve concerns, and promote professional development.

The Institute's study programs are delivered by 84 teaching staff members, with a strong commitment to gender balance. Approximately 71.43% of the faculty hold doctoral degrees, ensuring academic rigor and depth. Their research interests and activities are closely aligned with the course units they teach, maintaining relevance and enhancing the overall quality of education. Notably, 11 faculty members have defended their doctoral theses or completed their habilitation procedures at foreign higher education institutions, bringing valuable international experience and diverse perspectives to the academic environment.

Additionally, the Institute employs a system of partnership professors, which fosters collaboration with seasoned professionals from various sectors. This initiative broadens the scope of learning, bridges theory and practice, and enriches the educational journey for students.

ANALYSIS AND CONCLUSION (regarding 5.1.)

The Institute ensures a transparent and competitive selection process for its teaching staff, adhering to Vilnius University's regulations. Its commitment to internationalization is evident through open calls in English, attracting foreign academics and enriching the student experience. Regular attestation and annual one-on-one interviews provide a structured framework for faculty development and support. To further improve, the Institute could expand efforts to attract a more diverse international faculty and strengthen interdisciplinary collaboration to keep pace with evolving academic trends.

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

FACTUAL SITUATION

5.2.1.   Opportunities for academic mobility of teaching staff are ensured

The Institute actively supports the mobility of its teaching staff through a variety of programmes, extending beyond the well-known ERASMUS+ initiative. Programmes such as NORDPLUS, ISEP, and bilateral agreements offer a broad spectrum of exchange opportunities, facilitating academic and professional growth.

A clear and transparent administrative system governs the allocation of mobility grants, ensuring fairness and accessibility. In addition to these structured programmes, additional mobility grants are available through EU funding schemes and the University's internal resources, further enhancing support for academic exchanges.

While the geographical scope of mobility opportunities is extensive, there is a recognized need to provide more targeted support for lecturers and junior assistants. These groups, in particular, benefit greatly from gaining international experience, acquiring practical skills, and developing professional networks early in their careers. Expanding mobility opportunities for these staff members will not only enhance their personal development but also contribute to the internationalization and competitiveness of the University as a whole.

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

The Institute employs a comprehensive approach to the continuous professional development of its teaching staff, ensuring a consistently high level of professional qualification. For younger staff members, specialized training sessions are organized by the Educational Excellence Centre of the University. These sessions offer a variety of programs aimed at enhancing pedagogical competencies and equipping new educators with the tools they need for effective teaching.

Additionally, the Institute implements its own best practices for all staff members. One notable initiative is peer-to-peer teaching, which pairs experienced educators with younger colleagues to foster mutual learning and professional growth. Furthermore, each semester, the teaching staff convenes to share innovative teaching methods and successful classroom strategies, creating a collaborative environment that promotes the exchange of expertise.

The opportunities for professional development extend beyond the Institute as well. Teaching staff are encouraged to participate in international programs, such as the ARQUS Alliance Online Course (MOOC). These initiatives provide educators with access to cutting-edge methodologies and global perspectives, enabling them to refine their skills in an international context.

ANALYSIS AND CONCLUSION (regarding 5.2.)

The Institute demonstrates a strong commitment to academic mobility and professional development, offering diverse exchange opportunities beyond ERASMUS+ through programs like NORDPLUS, ISEP, and bilateral agreements. A transparent administrative system ensures fair access to mobility grants, supplemented by EU and internal funding. While the geographical reach of mobility programs is extensive, additional support is needed for lecturers and junior assistants to enhance their international experience and professional growth. The Institute also prioritizes

continuous professional development through structured training sessions, peer-to-peer teaching, and collaborative knowledge-sharing initiatives. Participation in international programs further enhances faculty skills. However, increasing tailored training for emerging pedagogical trends and interdisciplinary approaches could further elevate teaching quality and innovation.

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. The teaching staff is highly motivated and mission-oriented, driven by a clear vision to excel and establish their presence in the transatlantic academic and professional arenas. Their dedication to continuous improvement and global engagement reflects commitment to excellence in education and research.
2. At the Institute, a strong sense of collaboration fosters a vibrant and supportive atmosphere, promoting synergy among faculty, students, and researchers. This cooperative spirit not only enhances the quality of teaching and learning but also drives diverse and innovative research.

RECOMMENDATIONS

For further improvement

1. Pursue the most innovative and efficient methods to foster synergies within the Institute and the broader University by establishing cooperative structures that bring together lecturers and professors from diverse disciplines. Such collaboration can be facilitated through interdisciplinary research clusters, joint teaching initiatives, and the development of cross-disciplinary academic programmes.

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

HEI occupies premises in two buildings. All classrooms are equipped with multimedia equipment and internet access. Workstations are equipped with the necessary software: Microsoft Office, R, SPSS, Python, MAXQDA, Gephi, Tableau, RAWGraphs, Excel 3D Maps, QGIS, ImagePlot. Equipped with space for teachers and administration. There is an open space for informal socialising. There is a psychologist's office available to lecturers for individual student counselling when the psychologist is not available. There are rooms for student organisations. The material resources used in the auditoriums are suitable for students with special needs, and efforts are made to ensure the accessibility of the premises for students with reduced mobility, but it was noted during the visit that not all premises can be easily accessible for students with reduced mobility.
All equipment used in classrooms and in the study process is at least 5 years old. The facilities include a library reading room, which also includes computerised and collaborative workstations, and an Open Access Centre for students and lecturers.
Students and lecturers have access to printed publications and digital publications in subscription databases, and access to various databases such as Academic Search Complete (EBSCO), SAGE Journals Online, Taylor&Francis, JSTOR, Science Direct, Springer LINK, Wiley Online Library, eBooks on Cambridge Core (Cambridge University Press), Oxford Scholarship Online, Academic Complete (ProQuest Ebook Central), all of which are relevant to students of political science. A total of 94 databases are subscribed to.

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

Planning of the resources needed for studies is carried out annually, with a plan of the resources to be acquired or updated. This estimate shall be discussed and approved by the Council on the recommendation of the Head of the KAP. Every five years, an effort is made to renew resources. In the event of a shortage of classrooms for a large number of students, solutions are sought in cooperation with the municipality.

ANALYSIS AND CONCLUSION (regarding 6.1.)

All classrooms at the Higher Education Institution are equipped with multimedia equipment and internet access, and the necessary software is installed. There are spaces for lecturers and administration. There is also an open space for informal student interaction and assignments. The material resources used in the classrooms are adapted for students with special needs, but it was noted that not all rooms are easily accessible for students with limited mobility. The number of resources and subscription databases available in the library is sufficient. Resource planning and updating is ongoing.

AREA 6: CONCLUSIONS

AREA 6	Unsatisfactory - 1	Satisfactory - 2	Good - 3 Meets the requirements,	Very good - 4	Exceptional - 5

	Does not meet the requirements	Meets the requirements, but there are substantial shortcomings to be eliminated	but there are shortcomings to be eliminated	Very well nationally and internationally without any shortcomings	Exceptionally well nationally and internationally without any shortcomings
First cycle				X	
Second cycle				X	

COMMENDATIONS

1. All classrooms are equipped with the material resources needed for successful studies.
2. Material resources are continuously renewed, so that all resources meet changing needs.

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 internal quality assurance system for the programmes is guaranteed through a structured framework that integrates stakeholder feedback, regular monitoring, and compliance with national and European standards. The Study Programme Committees (SPCs) oversee programme content, student feedback, and external evaluation recommendations. Feedback from surveys, social partners, and alumni is analyzed and used for continuous improvement. The system aligns with the Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area (ESG) and is supported by external evaluations from the Study Quality Assessment Centre (SKVC). Transparent reporting ensures accountability and alignment with institutional goals.

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

Their participation is ensured through diverse and structured mechanisms. Students participate via surveys, focus groups, and representation on Study Programme Committees (SPCs), where their feedback shapes curriculum updates and teaching improvements. Social partners, alumni, and employers contribute through consultations, internships, and thesis evaluations, providing practical insights for programme enhancement. Regular meetings and open communication channels further encourage stakeholder engagement. This inclusive approach ensures that the programmes remain aligned with academic standards, societal needs, and labour market expectations

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

Information on programmes, their external evaluations, improvement processes, and outcomes is collected through surveys, Study Programme Committees (SPCs), and external quality evaluations. Feedback from students, staff, social partners, and graduates is analyzed to inform programme updates. External evaluations by the Study Quality Assessment Centre (SKVC) ensure compliance with national and European standards. Improvement actions and outcomes are documented in reports and published on the university's website. Regular communication with stakeholders ensures transparency and alignment with societal needs.

7.1.4. Student feedback is collected and analysed

Student feedback is systematically gathered through regular surveys conducted after courses and during programme evaluations. Additional input is collected via focus groups, direct consultations, and student participation in Study Programme Committees (SPCs). This feedback is analyzed by the SPCs and university quality assurance bodies to identify strengths and areas for improvement. The findings are shared with teaching staff and administrative units to implement necessary adjustments in teaching methods, curriculum design, and learning environments. This continuous process ensures that the student experience and programme quality are consistently enhanced.

ANALYSIS AND CONCLUSION (regarding 7.1.)

The internal quality assurance system ensures continuous improvement through stakeholder feedback, regular monitoring, and compliance with national and European standards. Study Programme Committees oversee programme content and integrate feedback from students, alumni, and social partners.

Stakeholders actively participate through surveys, focus groups, and consultations, shaping curriculum updates and teaching improvements. Programme information, evaluations, and updates are publicly available, maintaining accountability. Student feedback is systematically collected and analyzed to enhance teaching, curriculum, and learning environments, ensuring ongoing quality improvement.

AREA 7: CONCLUSIONS

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

COMMENDATIONS

1. We observed a strong and effective connection between alumni, current staff, and students, supported by a vibrant community within the institute. This environment facilitates constructive interaction and exchange of information and ideas among students, management, faculty, alumni, and stakeholders, all underpinned by a genuine sense of belonging.
2. We also noted a robust feedback system, demonstrating strong foundations for a well-functioning quality assurance framework. This system effectively collects, processes, and integrates insights from current students, alumni, and other stakeholders, ensuring that the institute remains responsive to evolving needs and fosters an ongoing culture of improvement.
3. We identified teachers and managers who clearly stand out as examples of educational innovation and quality enhancement. Through their proactive leadership and commitment to pedagogical improvement, they drive meaningful change and continually elevate the overall learning experience.

RECOMMENDATIONS

For further improvement

1. Furthermore, it would be beneficial to make integrity mechanisms more accessible, particularly for sensitive feedback and ethical matters, thereby fostering an environment of transparency and trust. Similarly, raising awareness of the institute's gender equality policy - which is in place but not widely known - would help ensure that all members of the academic community can actively engage with and benefit from it.

V. SUMMARY

The Institute has a number of elements of academic excellence that need to be recognised and promoted. It maintains an active and diverse collaboration with employers, social partners and alumni through various channels and ensures that the curriculum is continuously adapted to evolving societal and professional needs. It focuses on the labour market relevance of its programmes through highly relevant internships, guest lectures by industry professionals and simulated activities. It has made significant progress in the internationalisation of political science programmes in Lithuania and offers a number of first and second cycle programmes in English, including joint programmes with strong international partners within the ARQUS alliance. A growing number of international teaching staff, international research publications and active participation in student and staff exchange programmes further contribute to internationalisation and create a diverse and enriching learning environment. Internationalisation also demonstrates a strong research dimension, which is reflected in the exceptional number of publications in prestigious peer-reviewed journals and monographs. This success reflects the Institute's commitment to conducting high quality and impactful research.

The Institute has a well-structured and effective process of supporting students in the preparation of their theses, which also influences the curriculum of each student. It plays a central role in promoting high quality theses at both MA and BA levels. The Institute also has a well-developed system of peer review and feedback integration that ensures constructive alignment between courses and programmes. Effective horizontal dialogue between teaching staff and management is also clearly evident. In particular, the generally flat hierarchy between administrative and academic staff combined with open and frequent communication. The Institute's research outputs and academic programmes are closely aligned. This ensures that research enriches the curriculum and provides students with access to the latest knowledge and methods in their respective fields.

Students have numerous mobility opportunities to various destinations and renowned Western European institutions. The Institute has taken advantage of university alliances to offer students an additional dimension of internationalisation within the framework of its own European University Alliance. This begins with a well-thought-out introductory phase to the study programme, which helps students to integrate successfully into their studies. This is supported by a motivational mentoring programme to guide students through their educational journey, as well as the full support of the teaching staff and the institution as a whole, which places student excellence at the forefront.

There is a strong and effective connection between alumni, staff and students, supported by a vibrant community within the Institute. This environment facilitates constructive interaction and sharing of information. We also noted a robust feedback system that provides a solid foundation for a well-functioning quality assurance framework. We also identified teachers and managers who clearly stand out as examples of pedagogical innovation and quality enhancement. Through their proactive leadership and commitment to pedagogical improvement, they are driving meaningful change and continually improving the overall learning experience along with positive and inclusive tools such as Honestly and Trust line.

At the same time, there is room for improvement and institutions imbued with the culture of quality are constantly looking for ways to improve and become more efficient, effective, ethical, inclusive and overall excellent. In the case of the Institute of International Relations and Political Science, these are more effective use of the opportunities presented by increasing internationalisation, particularly by fostering robust interaction between domestic and international students. Exploring

scenarios for more extensive use of mobility opportunities for internships abroad would also strengthen internationalisation and the international relevance of graduates. Greater consideration and integration of methodological content and courses would increase the relevance of the European Studies and International Relations and Diplomacy programmes, as the employability track record also shows that these elements play an important role in the success of graduates in the labour market. AI and its use is also an area in which most universities are currently investing a lot of energy. A particularly intelligent and ethical use of AI in relation to teaching and learning would be beneficial to lecturers and students, as would a continued investment in the professional development of lecturers to explore and promote pedagogical innovation and strengthen their teaching, learning and assessment arsenal.

The involvement of students in the research activities of staff and in student research projects can never be too extensive. This also applies to the Institute, where innovative approaches could be considered to involve a wider student audience in research. This could be more easily achieved if the various agendas of the faculty were more clustered, which would also create greater synergies. More focussed research priorities could help with this process and would encourage the development of a robust and comprehensive research agenda that also focuses on strategic areas of excellence of particular importance to the department and greater collaboration between faculty members and teams within the university. The focus on competitive international research funding (Horizon, ERC, etc.) always strengthens these priority areas. As a pioneer in this field in Lithuania, the Institute should also invest in becoming a central hub for collaboration with other relevant Lithuanian institutions in the field of political science and international relations in order to increase the competitiveness and reputation of the entire field.

These processes go hand in hand with continuous investment in high-performing first-year students, as they are what enable the institution to have the impressive track record on the labour market that it currently has. To achieve this, valid, reliable, comprehensive and up-to-date data on graduate employability and career progression is crucial and should therefore be identified as one of the priority areas for improvement. Alongside the powerful student survey system, this also forms the core of the evidence base that other stakeholders will want to consider when reflecting on practises within the institution and developing future policies. Therefore, strengthening the feedback system based on relevant and reliable evidence is also a way to increase acceptance of the overall quality assurance framework and strengthen ownership of the actions taken. In addition, making integrity mechanisms more accessible, especially for sensitive feedback and ethical issues, would be beneficial in fostering an environment of transparency and trust. Similarly, raising awareness of the Institute's equality policy - which is in place but not widely known - would help to ensure that all members of the academic community can actively engage with and benefit from it.

To summarise, the Institute is a high quality institution with impressive staff and incredible students, where the investment of time and energy of the entire academic community in excellence is widely visible. To stay on this path and even strengthen it, the change agents who invest time and effort in institutional excellence – sometimes at the expense of individual research and teaching performance – should be recognised and celebrated. The team behind the Institute's robust quality assurance system is certainly one of them.

VI. EXAMPLES OF EXCELLENCE

VU IIRPS demonstrates active and diverse engagement with employers, social partners, alumni, and international academics through Study Programme Committees and other channels. This ensures curricula are continuously informed by evolving societal and professional needs. This enhances the development of practical skills students through highly relevant internships, guest lectures from industry professionals, and simulated activities.

VU has made substantial advances in the internationalisation of political science studies in Lithuania with a choice of first and second-cycle political science programmes delivered in English, including joint degree offerings with strong international partners. An increasing number of international teaching staff, international research publications, and active participation in student and staff exchange programmes further contribute to internationalisation, creating a diverse and enriching learning environment.

In all the VU programmes evaluated, we observed a well-structured and effective process supporting students in their thesis writing, including colloquia and advisors who guide the appropriate configuration of each student's curriculum. This system is thoroughly embedded among faculty and management and is highly valued by students. It appears to play a pivotal role in fostering high-quality theses at both the MA and BA levels.

We observed a consistent and well-developed system of peer review and feedback integration, ensuring constructive alignment across courses and programmes. There is also strong attention to, and broad awareness of, Bloom's taxonomy, reflected both in course syllabi and in the articulation of the programmes' learning objectives.

The Institute has attained a high degree of internationalization in its research endeavours, as evidenced by its exceptional record of publications in esteemed peer-reviewed journals and monographs. This achievement reflects the Institute's commitment to producing high-quality, impactful research.

A motivational mentoring programme involving alumni is well implemented and effective, as is guidance on students' educational pathways, which excels in this area.

Programmes such as Honestly and Trust line create an environment in which the quality culture can be improved and maintained, also paying attention to those who need support due to causes rooted in the institution itself. This allows for institutional self-reflection and growth.

VU IIRPS has a robust feedback system, demonstrating strong foundations for a well-functioning quality assurance framework. This system effectively collects, processes, and integrates insights from current students, alumni, and other stakeholders, ensuring that the institute remains responsive to evolving needs and fosters an ongoing culture of improvement.

Teachers and managers were identified who clearly stand out as examples of educational innovation and quality enhancement. Through their proactive leadership and commitment to pedagogical improvement, they drive meaningful change and continually elevate the overall learning experience.