SKVC

STUDIJŲ KOKYBĖS VERTINIMO CENTRAS
CENTRE FOR QUALITY ASSESSMENT IN HIGHER EDUCATION

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POLITICAL SCIENCE FIELD OF STUDY

LCC International University

EXTERNAL EVALUATION REPORT

Expert panel:

1. Panel chair: Prof. Stefan Gänzle...(signature)
2. Academic member: Prof. Anu Toots
3. Academic member: Prof. Simon Lightfoot
4. Social partner representative: Mr. Simonas Gaušas
5. Student representative: Ms. Karolina Markauskaitė

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Report prepared in 2025
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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. Stefan Gänzle
2. Academic member: Prof. Anu Toots
3. Academic member: Prof. Simon Lightfoot
4. Social partner representative: Simonas Gaušas
5. Student representative: Karolina Markauskaitė

1.3. SITE VISIT

The site visit was organised on 5th of February 2025 onsite.

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

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

There was no need for translation and the meetings were conducted in English.

1.4. BACKGROUND OF THE REVIEW

Overview of the HEI

LCC International University (LCC) is a Christian liberal arts university located in Klaipėda, Lithuania. Established in 1991 as the first private higher education institution in Lithuania, it received recognition from the Lithuanian Ministry of Science and Education as a bachelor's degree-granting university in 2000. Over its 33-year history, LCC has grown to a student body of 715 undergraduate and 49 graduate students, with more than 2,500 graduates. The university offers six bachelor's degree programs and one master's degree program, along with community-based programs in Lithuanian and English language courses and TESOL certification.

LCC follows a North American-style educational model, emphasizing a liberal arts foundation, interactive learning, and a Christian values-based approach. The university is international, with over 80% of students from 55 countries and more than 70% of faculty being expatriates. Other key features include its emphasis on relational learning, philanthropy, and peacebuilding, amongst others.

Overview of the study field

LCC offers a first-cycle (Bachelor of Arts) program in International Relations and Development (IRD), registered in 2015. LCC's educational model is rooted in the paradigm of liberal arts, with interdisciplinary learning, critical thinking, and student self-development as core components. The IRD program incorporates multicultural perspectives, in particular peacebuilding, and servant leadership, reflecting LCC's mission of preparing and transforming students for global leadership tasks.

Previous external evaluations

Following reforms in 2018 by the Ministry of Education, the accreditation system shifted from program-based to study area-based evaluations, leading to a temporary extension of existing program accreditations until the new study area accreditation process is completed. The current self-evaluation, used for this evaluation, covers the academic years 2020-2021, 2021-2022, and 2022-2023, with additional data from 2023-2024 where available. The evaluation aligns with Lithuania's updated accreditation cycle, ensuring compliance with national quality standards.

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*
- *Several additional written responses provided by LCC upon request by the panel*
- *Final theses*

Additional sources of information used by the review panel:

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

- *Site visit interviews*

II. STUDY PROGRAMMES IN THE FIELD

First cycle/LTQF 6

Title of the study programme	**International Relations and Development**
State code	612L20011
Type of study (college/university)	University
Mode of study (full time/part time) and nominal duration (in years)	Full-time, 4 years
Workload in ECTS	240
Award (degree and/or professional qualification)	Bachelor's degree in Social Sciences
Language of instruction	English
Admission requirements	High school diploma
First registration date	2015-07-08
Comments (including remarks on joint or interdisciplinary nature of the programme, mode of provision)	N/A

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	3
6.	Learning facilities and resources	4
7.	Quality assurance and public information	4
	Total:	27

[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.

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

LCCs first cycle study programme "International Relations and Development" is designed as a liberal arts programme. It aims to produce critical thinking graduates for servant leadership. The programme is aligned with the "Lithuania 2030 and 2050" strategies, especially via the strong focus on civic engagement and ethical engagement. Their graduates are trained for work in diplomacy and government service, and many go on to work in these sectors both in Lithuania and beyond. A particular strength of the programme is the preparation the programme offers for jobs in the third sector/NGO sector. The staff base has considerable experience in these fields and the students benefit from this experience in the curriculum. LCC recruits' students from a number of conflict zones and these students go back to their home country with highly relevant skills, contributing to the civic good. The support offered by the Center for Dialogue and Conflict Transformation provides LCC students with a unique learning opportunity.

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

The IRD programme aligns with the mission, goals and strategy of LCC. The mapping in Table 4 shows the connections between the courses and the Institutional student learning outcomes. The nature of LCC as Christian Liberal Arts university means that all programmes need to align with their HEIs goals. In this case the IRD programme aligns with the Institutional Student Learning Outcomes (ISLOs): Christian Worldview; Servant Leadership; Conflict Transformation: Multicultural Perspective; Intercultural Communication; Effective Communication; Community Building and Civic Engagement; Multidisciplinary Knowledge; Critical Thinking. Overall the IRD program cultivates critical thinking, multiculturally aware servant leaders, who serve the people for a better good.

ANALYSIS AND CONCLUSION (regarding 1.1.)

The LCC and the study programme has an explicit Christian mission that informs the liberal arts curricula. The programme is the third largest in the University, albeit a small specialised university. There is a strong ethos on student support and engagement. Faculty have a very open approach to students. There is a strong alignment between the programme and the ISLOs. There are good links with the local city and social partners. The panel felt that LCC could do more to exploit its geographical position as a Baltic university.

There is a strong focus on training critical thinking graduates for servant leadership and their graduates are very well prepared for future careers. Graduates go into careers in diplomacy, government services and especially NGOs. A particular strength that could perhaps be expanded/be made more visible is their work on conflict studies. The SER discusses an option to expand the current offering into a first cycle programme in Conflict Studies. The panel noted the challenge presented by students and staff numbers but this direction of travel may be fruitful for the IRD team. In the meantime, the panel recommended finding ways to integrate into the curriculum the excellent work of the Center for Dialogue and Conflict Transformation. At present the Centre and other

excellent initiatives such as the Model UN are part of the wider co-curricular offer at LCC (SER p. 10).

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

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

The programme learning outcomes align with programme aims and teaching/learning assessment methods. There is a strong ethos of quality control and student voice in the curricula. The programme could provide students with more practical experience and students were keen to see initiatives such as the model UN as part of the curricula not just cocurricular. The courses offered by the Centre for Dialogue and Conflict transformation could also offer a way to integrate more practical elements into the programme as requested by the students.The teaching is of high quality. The teaching styles are very active and as a result students say they are very engaging. The first year seminar and the peer support system are excellent ways to induct the students into the LCC system.

1.2.3. Curriculum ensures consistent development of student competences

The programme does allow a clear development of student competences. Given the flexible nature the panel did struggle to see how the team can audit skills development across the programme. While student numbers are relatively small this is not necessarily an issue but if they grow this would need addressing. That said the student body was able to confidently articulate and demonstrate the "soft" skills they had acquired from the programme.

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

The nature of the liberal arts curricula allows for a large degree of flexibility and student choice and as such is positive. That said the SER refers to "deepen education" in the relevant areas of IR, development conflict. The programme team needs to consider how to deepen the knowledge without losing the flexibility. The academic advisor role is a crucial one especially in allowing students to choose their 'concentration'.

There are opportunities to undertake internships and study abroad although these opportunities could be expanded for example through more Erasmus grants.

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

The requirements for final theses have been amended to comply with the requirement of field and cycle for all new students. The team needs to monitor closely the impact of the increased credits for the final theses and the move to one semester. (SER, p. 20). There is more opportunity to involve social partners in this aspect of the programme.That said the final theses seen by the panel were of high quality and the support offered by the faculty thesis advisor is excellent. The introduction of Research Methods I and II courses has improved the quality of the methodological training the

students experience. The overall scores as set out in Table 9. show the thesis final marks are above the overall university average.

ANALYSIS AND CONCLUSION (regarding 1.2.)

The programme produces high quality graduates who can articulate their skills and competences for a global labour market. The curriculum is international as is the student body. The programme benefits from being relatively small in a relatively small university.

The programme benefits from the liberal arts model. The panel did express some concerns that the concentrations and flexibility do not come at losing the core focus of the IRD programme. Concentrations on conflict studies and development align with the programme aims and learning outcomes. The programme team needs to carefully consider the alignment between the IRD programme learning outcomes with those of contemporary communication, for example.

There is a desire amongst faculty and students for a second cycle programme although current staffing levels would mean that this is not realistic at this stage. Geopolitical changes have impacted student recruitment so the University needs to market their distinctiveness.

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	

COMMENDATIONS

1. The programme produces highly articulate and committed global citizens.
2. The integration of student support into the programme (first year seminar, student success centre etc) strongly aligns with the values and mission of the university.
3. The focus on conflict and the connection with the expertise of the staff provides an excellent learning environment.
4. Excellent research methods training.

RECOMMENDATIONS

For further improvement

1. To find ways to integrate the excellent co-curricular activities (Centre for Dialogue and Conflict Transformation; Model UN) into the formal curriculum.
2. The flexibility of the programme is commended but care needs to be taken to ensure students can map the development of their skills across the programme. The relatively low

student numbers allow for a highly personalised experience at present but if student numbers grow this may need reviewing.

3. To explore whether there is opportunity to increase the number of Erasmus grants.

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

LCC developed a comprehensive Research Strategy in Spring 2024 to guide research priorities and directions. The IRD Department's strategic plan to introduce a second-cycle study program aligns with this strategy and provides additional motivation for academic staff to advance their research.

As of 2024, the department consists of nine full-time teachers of varying seniority, one research fellow, and four part-time staff members" (SER, Addendum 18). The average teaching load for full-time faculty is approximately eight courses (6 ECTS each), allowing time for research and professional development. LCC regulations require all staff to engage in research, supported by institutional resources such as the flat-rate individual research funding (€1,000), time allocation, and extensive in-house training provided by the Centre for Research.

Overall, the Department's research output has increased. Between 2018 and 2022, 22 publications were accepted by the Lithuanian Research Council, averaging four to five per year. In 2023, research productivity rose significantly to 16 publications across various categories, including highly ranked peer-reviewed journals and publishers such as Taylor & Francis, Routledge, Oxford University Press, and Brill. The number of publishing staff has also grown from 1–2 in 2018–2019 to six in 2023 (SER, pp. 25–26).

LCC's international research profile is reflected in its ties with scholars in the US and Canada. IRD faculty members have presented at conferences and published on topics including politics, international relations, peacebuilding, development, and philanthropy. However, international collaborative research remains limited. In recent years, the IRD Department's Centre for Dialogue and Conflict Transformation has applied for six institutional grants and several individual grants, though none have been successful.

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

In 2023, the principle of "Doing Research in a Research Cycle" was introduced, incorporating research into the classroom as the final stage of the research process. IRD faculty primarily contribute to political studies, with occasional research in communication, information science, theology, and history. This reflects the Liberal Arts model of education, which promotes interdisciplinarity - a core element of the IRD program.

The curriculum emphasizes general skills such as multicultural awareness and critical thinking, which are developed through active learning methods across all courses. All faculty members have published research relevant to their teaching areas. The Department's strengths lie in migration, trauma, mental health, conflict resolution, and theology - topics that align well with the program's focus. Additionally, some faculty members pursuing PhDs in peace-making, Russia's foreign policy, and Eastern Europe will further strengthen political studies and international relations within the program.

Faculty actively share their research experiences in project writing, fieldwork, conferences, and publishing. It is estimated that around one-third of faculty incorporate their own publications into course syllabi. Examples include courses on Human Rights, Modern Political Ideologies, 'Trade Not

Aid,' and EU Cohesion Policy. Staff also stay current with new research through conference participation; between 2019 and 2023, faculty presented at 17 international conferences in Western Europe and North America. The Department ensures that teaching materials remain up to date, regularly ordering new books, with core readings typically published within the last 4-5 years.

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

LCC's 2024-2029 Strategy emphasizes enhancing student research opportunities, encouraging joint research with faculty, and supporting student participation in academic conferences. Progress is measured through a Key Performance Indicator (KPI), which sets a target of at least one student or faculty-student publication or five student conference presentations per assessment period. Additionally, LCC's 2025–2030 Action Plan aims to further enrich student research experiences.

The SER and site visit interviews confirmed alignment with these strategic goals. Several IRD students have published in international journals and conference proceedings, while others have presented at academic conferences in the US and elsewhere. In the research methods course, students participated in the global project *Story in My Eyes*. Some students mentioned a visit to Brussels as part of a research seminar, where they attended a conference poster session. Others described collaborating with professors on research, conducting interviews for academic books, or participating in faculty research workshops. LCC has recently launched its own academic journal, *Philanthropia*, where students will soon have the opportunity to publish their work.

Research skill development is embedded throughout the IRD program. From early on, students learn to conduct interviews, collect and analyze data, and write reports. Faculty use a wide range of research methods - including process tracing, QCA, interviews, content analysis, case studies, and statistical analysis - giving students exposure to diverse methodologies. Software for quantitative (SPSS, transitioning to R) and qualitative (NVivo) analysis is available for student use. Faculty also guide students through proposal writing and research processes.

All courses include a research paper component, with final thesis topics allocated based on faculty expertise and students' career interests. Many final theses include applied development projects, particularly for students pursuing careers in NGOs or the voluntary sector. Further studies at the MA level are also encouraged.

ANALYSIS AND CONCLUSION (regarding 2.1.)

LCC effectively integrates the latest research developments into its curriculum and provides students with strong research skills. Given the program's first-cycle nature and the relatively small faculty, research is concentrated on select themes, contributing to an "LCC approach" to IRD (e.g., the role of NGOs in development and peace-making). The IRD faculty has significantly increased its research output in recent years, particularly in peer-reviewed publications. However, while efforts to secure competitive research grants have intensified, they have not yet been successful. Research is well integrated into the study program. Faculty members enthusiastically share their research experiences, fostering a collaborative learning environment. Students report high satisfaction with the research skills they have acquired and value the cooperative, co-creative relationships they develop with faculty.

AREA 2: CONCLUSIONS

AREA 2	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	

COMMENDATIONS

1. There is enthusiasm and commitment of academic staff in sharing their research experiences to students, and to provoke in students desire to do research.
2. Research is widely integrated into the classrooms.
3. Strong emphasis on research methods' classes.

RECOMMENDATIONS

For further improvement

1. To develop a targeted search for such EU and regional European grant schemes where inclusion of non-academic partners is required. By relying on existing vital co-operation of the Department with the voluntary and NGO sector, this focused approach could make the fundraising more successful.
2. To provide more grant writing training to staff; to consider establishing a special unit in the LCC that supports researchers in administrative and technical aspects of grant writing.

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

LCC is a privately funded university with a majority of students from outside Lithuania and the EU. As a result, its Admissions Office handles applications directly rather than through the Lithuanian general admission system (LAMA BPO). Lithuanian and EU applicants are encouraged to apply via LAMA BPO to access government funding, but few have done so in recent years, and none have received financial aid due to reduced stipend availability and increased competition. According to the additional documents provided by LCC, 81% of students in the International Relations and Development programme are international, while 19% are Lithuanian.

LCC recruits students through various marketing efforts, including its website, social media, exhibitions, secondary school presentations, and events such as "LCC Academy" (online seminars) and "Open Door Day" (on-campus experience days).

Undergraduate admissions are based on three main criteria: academic grades (50%), English proficiency test scores (20%), and an admissions interview (30%). Applicants also submit a short English essay, which can impact borderline decisions. Conditional acceptance is possible for students needing additional studies or passing the LCC Skills and Knowledge Test. Those with lower English proficiency may be admitted into the PRIME programme to improve their academic English before starting degree studies.

Enrolment in the International Relations and Development programme has declined over the past few years. According to the SER (p. 43), this decline mirrors a general decrease across LCC due to post-COVID trends, Lithuanian visa policy changes, and migration issues, including the war in Ukraine. In the 2020/2021 academic year, there were 35 first-year students in the programme, whereas in the 2023/2024 academic year, there were only 19 first-year students.

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

Since 2018, LCC has been legally authorized by the Ministry of Education and Science to process academic recognition of foreign qualifications for incoming students. LCC follows the Lisbon Recognition Convention and SKVC guidelines, working with its Qualification Recognition Council to ensure consistency and fairness in recognition decisions. The Admissions Office manages communication, decision reporting, and data submission to SKVC for evaluation.

For credit transfers, students must provide official transcripts and course descriptions. Decisions are made in consultation with faculty and department chairs. LCC also has a structured process for transferring credits earned during international mobility programs, ensuring smooth recognition based on ECTS standards.

Additionally, LCC recognizes prior learning gained through work experience, following national guidelines. However, few students apply for this, as most LCC applicants enroll directly after high school without significant prior work experience.

ANALYSIS AND CONCLUSION (regarding 3.1.)

LCC primarily serves international students, with the admissions process managed directly by the university rather than through the LAMA BPO. Despite encouraging Lithuanian and EU applicants to

apply through LAMA BPO for government funding, this option has seen little use in recent years due to reduced financial aid and increased competition. The university recruits students through various channels, including its website, social media, and events. Admissions are based on academic grades, English proficiency, and an interview, with conditional acceptance available for students needing additional preparation. Enrolment in the International Relations and Development programme has decreased, partly due to post-COVID trends, changes in Lithuanian visa policy, and the war in Ukraine.

While LCC recognises foreign qualifications and follows national guidelines for credit transfers, few students utilise prior learning recognition, as most applicants are fresh high school graduates without significant work experience. Despite these challenges, LCC maintains a structured process for recognising qualifications and credits, ensuring fairness and consistency in its admissions and credit transfer practices.

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

LCC's Center for International Education (CIE) facilitates study, teaching, and training exchanges at 78 partner institutions. Students can participate in Erasmus+ programs in Europe or international exchanges in Chile, China, Georgia, Indonesia, Japan, South Korea, and North America.

CIE manages the promotion, organization, and selection process for mobility programs, providing information through various channels, including email, the LCC website, intranet, social media, and presentations. A selection committee, comprising academic staff, student life department representatives, and student council members, ensures a fair and transparent process. On average, 87 students apply for mobility placements annually, with applications evaluated by CIE in collaboration with academic departments. In the 2023/2024 academic year, 9 students from the programme participated in Erasmus+ exchanges.

During the visit, it was revealed that not all students wishing to participate in Erasmus+ exchanges are able to secure grants, as they are in short supply at the university.

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

LCC provides comprehensive support to students in academic, financial, social, and psychological aspects.

Academic support includes the PRIME program, which helps students develop academic English skills, as well as the First Year Orientation and First Year Seminar, which assist first-year students in transitioning to university life. The Student Success Center offers tutoring in various subjects, including mathematics, Lithuanian language, and writing. Faculty members can refer students for tutoring and struggling students may be required to attend writing sessions.

Financial support is available through scholarships, grants, and aid programs. 62% of LCC students receive financial assistance. Merit-based scholarships, need-based aid, Lithuanian government financing, deferred payment plans, and microloans help students manage tuition costs.

Personal and social development support is provided through various co-curricular programs. The Residential Life Program fosters a sense of community in dormitories, while the Spiritual Life Program offers opportunities for faith exploration and personal growth. The Intercultural Program

promotes cultural exchange, and the Leadership Development Program helps students enhance their leadership skills.

Psychological support is offered through professional counseling services, with three trained counselors providing assistance on personal, emotional, and social issues. Workshops on stress management, mindfulness, and resilience also help students navigate mental health challenges.

During the visit, it was revealed that university lecturers and staff, upon noticing students facing various difficulties, can register that in the internal We Care system to ensure they receive the necessary support.

Practical support includes assistance with migration documents through the LCC Migration Office and career development services provided by the Career Development Center. The center organizes career planning workshops, CV writing sessions, and job interview simulations. LCC also hosts Career Fairs.

During the visit, it was revealed that students receive not only official support defined by regulations, but also daily assistance when unexpected issues arise. Students can turn to the university for help in case of sudden financial, psychological, or other difficulties, and immediate support is offered based on their needs.

3.2.3. Higher education information and student counselling are sufficient

International Relations and Development students are assigned an academic advisor who helps them plan their studies according to the program's four-year curriculum. Advisors assist with course selection, student mobility opportunities, practicum planning, and other academic matters. Students refer to the LCC Academic Catalog for course options and use the Course Schedule, published before each registration period, to plan their semester.

Academic advisors receive regular training and have access to necessary resources, including the LCC Academic Advising Handbook, to ensure quality guidance. They collaborate closely with Department Chairs and the Registrar when needed. Senior student surveys indicate that the majority of students are highly satisfied with academic advising services.

During the visit, students stated that they receive all the necessary information and know who to turn to with any questions or issues related to their studies. Since the LCC community is small, everyone knows each other and is aware of who handles specific matters. Stakeholders also noted that LCC operates very efficiently, but its relatively small student body contributes to this dynamic. While this close-knit environment has clear advantages, it is important to ensure that structures remain robust as the university grows.

ANALYSIS AND CONCLUSION (regarding 3.2.)

LCC offers students the opportunity to participate in Erasmus+ exchanges in Europe and other countries, such as Chile, China, and South Korea. However, not all students wishing to take part are able to secure grants, as they are in short supply at the university. Despite this, LCC provides extensive support across academic, financial, social, and psychological areas. Academic assistance includes the PRIME program, orientation activities, and tutoring services offered by the Student Success Center. Financial aid, including scholarships, grants, and other support programs, helps students manage tuition costs, with 62% of students receiving financial assistance.

Beyond academics, LCC promotes personal and social development through co-curricular programs like residential life, intercultural exchange, and leadership development. Psychological support, including counseling and workshops on stress management, is also available. Practical support is offered through the Migration Office and Career Development Center, which assist students with migration documents and career planning. The strong sense of community at LCC ensures that

students know who to turn to for help and that immediate support is available for any unforeseen challenges they may face. If the university grows, it will be important to ensure that student support services expand accordingly to maintain this high level of accessibility and assistance.

AREA 3: CONCLUSIONS

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

COMMENDATIONS

1. Good, effective, and multifaceted support for students on all matters, ranging from academic advising, psychological counseling to financial difficulties.

2. A sense of community and warm relationships between students, lecturers, and staff.

RECOMMENDATIONS

For further improvement

1. It would be beneficial to explore ways to provide more students with the opportunity to participate in at least short-term exchanges, such as through projects or Blended Intensive Programmes.
2. It would be beneficial to attract more students, including Lithuanians, to the programme.
3. To support future growth, the university should ensure that student support services expand accordingly to maintain the current level of accessibility and assistance.

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 teaching and learning approaches in the IRD programme are student-oriented and actively promote student participation. The programme employs diverse, interactive methods beyond traditional lectures, such as round table book discussions, debates, simulations, group problem-solving exercises, campaign creations, and panel presentations, fostering engagement and collaboration. Students are encouraged to participate through discussions (both in-class and online), questioning, and constructive feedback. The variety of writing assignments and assessments, including essays, research papers, and reflective responses, develops critical thinking. Additionally, while expected learning outcomes are specified for each course of the programme (addendum 19), instructors have flexibility in selecting instructional methods in accordance with their experience, strengths, and educational philosophy and tailoring them to student needs. Syllabus is shared with students at the start of each course.

Assessments include both formative and summative approaches, incorporating projects, presentations and portfolios alongside traditional tests and exams. This demonstrates a commitment to student-centred learning and participatory education. Assessment methods are tailored for each course (addendum 19).

A graduate in IRD is prepared for further studies in political science subfields and related social science programmes (e.g., political science, international relations, political economy). The university does not currently have either second or third cycle programmes thus graduates continue their studies in other universities in Lithuania or other countries.

Internships (referred to as practicums) are mandatory and supported by staff securing placements. Opportunities exist through various organizations, including the U.S. Embassy. Although all students secure placements, international opportunities are limited due to migration document restrictions. Typically, 7–9 placements abroad are available, mainly during summer, with additional traineeships offered post-graduation.

Internships are assessed through employer evaluations and student documentation of their experiences. Student feedback highlights challenges in finding ideal internships but praises strong communication with professors. The first practicum focuses on theoretical knowledge under professor supervision, while the second combines theory with practical exercises such as CV writing and guest lectures. Students have access to three internship opportunities, including Erasmus plus placements.

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

LCC provides academic support and accommodations for students with disabilities through its Student Success Centre, The disability support committee and Registrar. Students can request individualised support based on documented verification of their needs, including academic and technical assistance. While LCC currently supports 12 students with disabilities, this number is expected to grow as awareness increases. Efforts to improve accessibility have included faculty training on Universal Design for Learning and a review of existing support structures in 2023. Additionally, staff participates in regular training on mental health, psychological emergencies, and trauma recovery, ensuring an inclusive learning environment.

A significant number of the programme's students come from war affected regions (according to the SER, 80 percent of the student body are non-Lithuanians, and most come from Ukraine, Georgia and Armenia). LCC provides various support measures to alleviate traumas of such students. Support may include financial assistance (e.g., an emergency fund for war-affected Ukrainian students; scholarships covering 10% to 100% of tuition and housing discount for students from Syria and Iraq; according to management representatives, 55% of students receive needs-based aid and 45% could be considered socially vulnerable), counselling services and resilience-building programmes, including listening circles through the Centre of dialogue and conflict transformation. These initiatives ensure that students facing personal or external challenges receive the necessary support to succeed academically.

LCC also fosters student integration through strong faculty-student relationships, which students identify as essential for emotional and psychological well-being. The university offers structured and informal support, including mentorship, counselling and students assigned as resident assistants in dormitories. The fact that most of the teachers and 70-80% of students are on campus further facilitates these processes. The above-indicated programmes addressing war-related trauma allow students to connect and build resilience together. Regular staff training on student well-being ensures that faculty and support services are equipped to handle diverse student needs, further strengthening the academic community's inclusivity.

ANALYSIS AND CONCLUSION (regarding 4.1.)

Teaching and learning very well address the needs of students and enable them to achieve intended learning outcomes. Most of the teachers are present onsite and actively engage with students. This proximity of students to the faculty creates a very dynamic and academic atmosphere that fosters student learning. However, the first cycle programme is very small in terms of student body. It remains to be seen whether the quality of counselling and assessment remains the same while the student numbers increase. Study processes for socially vulnerable groups and students with individual needs is very well ensured inter alia via individualised approach. The university uses efficient methods to fully integrate students into the community. The awareness of the access-related issues is clearly visible at the level of management and teaching staff.

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

Instructors use rubrics to communicate grading criteria to students and align grading practices across sections. Formative assessments, such as essay drafts and projects, include extensive feedback to help students improve their work. Summative assessments, including tests and final exams, determine final grades based on performance throughout the semester. The registrar's system automatically calculates semester and cumulative grade point averages (GPAs), with the Committee on Academic Standing (CAS) reviewing students whose GPA falls below 6.0. To identify academic struggles early, mid-semester grades are reported for first year and probationary students, and those at risk of failing receive intervention from the Student Success Centre.

Students receive continuous feedback through LCC's online learning management system, Moodle, which displays running grade averages. Instructors provide detailed comments on assignments, particularly in formative assessments, to support student improvement.

LCC also has an early intervention system where instructors send alerts to the "WeCare" preventive support system, which proactively reaches out to students in need of academic or personal support.

This comprehensive feedback structure helps students understand their performance, address challenges early, and plan their learning progress effectively to achieve academic success.

Finally, new students take a one-semester, non-credit first-year Seminar where groups of 15 students meet weekly with upper-class mentors and instructors. The programme follows a peer-education model to help students take ownership of their learning, develop self-awareness, and engage with campus resources beyond the classroom.

4.2.2. Graduate employability and career are monitored

LCC monitors the employability of its graduates through both informal and formal tracking methods. Informally, the university stays connected with alumni via personal conversations, correspondence, and social media platforms. Formally, LCC conducts annual graduate surveys, collecting, among other things, data on graduate employment from first-cycle program alumni. Out of 12 alumni survey respondents in 2023, 6 (50%) confirmed that they have been employed, 5 (42%) have pursued further studies, and only 1 (8%) has not been employed yet.

Graduate satisfaction with their education at LCC is consistently high, indicating strong employability outcomes. In the most recent graduate survey, 6 out of 7 respondents reported being satisfied or very satisfied with their education. In 2023, 100% of respondents expressed satisfaction. These results suggest that LCC graduates feel well-prepared for the job market, reinforcing the university's effectiveness in equipping students with relevant skills and competencies for their careers. All interviewed students would pay for their studies if they had to. They emphasized the quality of university lectures.

Social partners contribute to programme development through guest lectures, volunteer opportunities, and real-world projects, such as prison workshops and refugee support. They collaborate with faculty and students on training, research, and grant applications. The university also engages social partners via career fairs, business plan competitions, hands-on workshops and alumni networks. Alumni stay engaged through mentorship, networking, and career guidance, fostering strong professional connections beyond graduation.

All students receive career guidance. The LCC Career Development Centre offers frequent career counselling as well as concrete employment support through career planning workshops, career counselling, seminars on job searches, personal CV writing, and job interview simulations.

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

LCC's recently adopted Code of Academic Ethics sets clear expectations for students and faculty to maintain trust-based relationships. Students are required to avoid plagiarism (e.g. interviewed students were aware of academic standards regarding plagiarism), cheating, and other forms of misconduct, with serious violations resulting in disciplinary actions. Substantial plagiarism or cheating results in a zero grade and an Academic Misconduct Incident Report. Repeated offenses within a course lead to failure, while multiple incidents trigger a warning letter, a disciplinary meeting, and ultimately, dismissal if violations persist. Since 2016, LCC has used Turnitin to check students' written work for originality.

The Code of Academic Ethics also ensures that faculty members grade students fairly, without discrimination based on religion, ethnicity, or other characteristics. No complaints of discrimination have been recorded in recent years. In the fall of 2023, LCC reported no cases of cheating and four cases of plagiarism in the IRD program, all of which were investigated and upheld in disciplinary meetings. However, no students were dismissed for academic misconduct during this period, indicating a strict but supportive approach to upholding academic integrity.

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

LCC provides students with the right to appeal their final grades through the Final Grade Appeal Process, as outlined in the 2023-2024 Undergraduate Academic Catalogue. Additionally, students can appeal dismissal or suspension decisions made by the Committee on Academic Standing (CAS). If dissatisfied with CAS's ruling, they may escalate their appeal to the Academic Vice President, whose decision is final.

Over the past three academic years, only one student successfully appealed a CAS dismissal decision. Across the entire institution, 32 CAS appeals were submitted during this period, with 18 being granted, demonstrating a selective but fair review process. From interviewed students none submitted a complaint or appeal, but they admitted knowing how this is done.

ANALYSIS AND CONCLUSION (regarding 4.2.)

Monitoring of learning progress and feedback to students to promote self-assessment and learning progress planning is systematic. It is very good that LCC uses both formative and summative methods to assess student performance. Students seem to be highly satisfied with teacher feedback and overall quality of their learning process. "WeCare" support system is highly relevant as it prevents student learning failures instead of merely reacting to them. Graduate employability and career are monitored well. Students receive good career guidance from student services, while social partners and alumni are very actively engaged by the university in the programme – this ensures the programme's tighter links with the labour market. However, career tracking relies on surveys with rather limited response rates. Policies to ensure academic integrity, tolerance, and non-discrimination are implemented well. Few cases of plagiarism were sorted smoothly without expelling students. However, the university needs to pay more attention to the use of AI by students as this may significantly endanger principles of academic integrity. Procedures for submitting and processing appeals and complaints seem to be effective since appeals and complaints are both submitted, and some were granted what signals fairness and procedural justice

AREA 4: CONCLUSIONS

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

COMMENDATIONS

1. Most of the teachers and students are onsite that greatly improves the quality and effectiveness of teaching and learning. Faculty members are very approachable (e.g. there are social activities where students and faculty can meet informally).
2. Specific guidelines are developed to address the needs of students with disabilities. In addition, the university deserves praise for its extensive and intensive integration of students from war affected regions incl. such as counselling services and listening circles through the Centre of dialogue and conflict transformation.
3. LCC's learning support systems including: (1) a preventive "WeCare" support system, including Student success centre and Student Life staff, helping students (esp. first-year students) who do not submit acceptable assignments, participate in class, or who struggle in areas of wellness; and (2) a one-semester, non-credit first-year Seminar where groups of 15 students meet weekly with upper-class mentors and instructors.

RECOMMENDATIONS

For further improvement:

1. The programme is rather small in terms of student body. Management and administrative as well as learning and teaching processes need to be carefully planned to ensure the same level of quality of studies and overall programme sustainability in case student numbers in the programme significantly increase.

2. To ensure further opportunities for graduate education by creating second and maybe even third cycle programmes in the political science field.

3. Increasing response rate of its surveys (e.g. graduate survey) or, instead, completely moving towards qualitative data collection methods to obtain higher quality data from respondents. Response rate improvement for surveys was also recommended in the previous evaluation report.

4. Practical work elements in the programme could be further strengthened (e.g. stronger links with social partners with respect to ensure future employment of students; more internship (practicum) opportunities abroad).

5. Alumni community could be further strengthened by organising formal gatherings, reunions, etc. Also, consider creating an additional key performance indicator to measure satisfaction of social partners with university's graduates.

6. Pay more attention to the use of AI by students through active reinforcement of generative-AI task force recommendations and other university policies. This should also help limit cases of plagiarism that happen at the university.

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 of the IRD programme consists of 12 faculty members and one research fellow contributing to the program as of Spring 2024. Eight faculty members are classified as permanent, having served at LCC for at least three years with a workload of 0.5 FTE or higher. Three other faculty members have varying workloads and tenures of one semester to three years. The programme includes a mix of academics and practitioners (in the field of studies), with most faculty actively engaged in research and practical initiatives, enriching the curriculum and fostering a diverse learning environment.

Faculty qualifications meet Lithuania's legal requirements, with 54% of IRD courses taught by faculty holding terminal degrees and 67% of teaching staff holding PhDs. Three additional faculty members are pursuing doctoral degrees. All courses are conducted in English, with more than 75% of faculty being native speakers and others holding C2-level proficiency.

The programme maintains a student-faculty ratio of 7.25:1 for IRD-specific courses (9:1 for the entire LCC), facilitating close interaction and small class sizes. Faculty turnover is low, with nine members having served between three and 16 years. New faculty receive strong support during onboarding, and younger members are encouraged to pursue doctoral studies, with workload reductions provided for research.

Overall, the IRD faculty is characterized by its qualifications, commitment to research and education, and a supportive environment for professional growth.

ANALYSIS AND CONCLUSION (regarding 5.1.)

In line with the tradition of liberal arts colleges, LCC is strongly focused on providing a holistic perspective to the education and training of their diverse student body. Concern for student-focused, problem-based, and varied teaching is high. This certainly puts the relation between teaching and research in a different balance than at "classical" university institutions where research often is prioritized over teaching (quality). This approach has been expanded systematically in the past years to embrace International Relations and Development in its entirety.

During the site visit management expressed that there are some considerations to eventually dividing both disciplines. Thus IRD teaching staff has found its "niche" in terms of research. Last year, core faculty members collaborated and eventually launched a journal "Philantrophia" (https://philanthropia.lcc.lt/index.php/1) which may in the longer run contribute to sharpening the profile of the academic staff even further. The staff, in general also functions very much as a coherent team with collegial supervision, co-teaching – which is an asset in terms of applying a wide set of methods and teaching tools as well as, most importantly, learning from each other.

Towards that end, it can be concluded that the teaching staff meets the requirements in terms of number, qualification, and competence. The main shortcoming for the time being is that these positive developments need to consolidate further in order to establish LCC more prominently on the international map of studies and research in their respective field. It may therefore be an asset to continue collaboration with other partners on establishing secondary and, possibly, tertiary cycles of studies to improve the base for research and research collaboration.

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

LCC encourages faculty professional development through opportunities like the Erasmus+ program, which supports both incoming and outgoing faculty mobility. Faculty members can visit partner institutions to teach, give seminars, and engage in research, contributing to personal and professional growth. In the 2023-2024 academic year, three IRD faculty members participated in mobility, with travel to countries such as Georgia, Hungary, and the Czech Republic. The low number of participants in recent years has been partly due to faculty commitments to teaching and the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic. In addition to outgoing mobility, incoming faculty from countries like Georgia and Finland have taught at LCC, enriching the academic experience. The purpose of these mobility programs is to internationalize the academic environment, foster research collaborations, and bring in expertise, as demonstrated by several visiting scholars which are renowned in their respective field of expertise.

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

All LCC faculty members holding a doctorate are given 1/3 of their load as release to conduct research, the rest of their load is designated for their work with students. Faculty holding MA degrees are not required to conduct research, however, they have a right to apply for research-release if they are willing to conduct research. Currently, two out of three IRD faculty with MA degrees have taken research-releases.

Professional development is emphasized, with opportunities for academic mobility through programs like Erasmus+. These exchanges support individual growth and enhance LCC's global reputation. Furthermore, LCC offers funding internally for publication support, conference participation and other research-related activities (ca. 1000 Euro per academic staff).

LCC prioritizes the continuous professional development of its faculty, supported by the strategic goals outlined in its plan. Faculty development begins with a three-day orientation and a faculty retreat, followed by individual meetings between department chairs and faculty to discuss goals for teaching and research. Faculty also engage in annual performance evaluations and set objectives for the upcoming year. Workshops and seminars on various pedagogical topics are organized to enhance teaching skills and foster a learning community. IRD faculty collaborate to share best practices, while LCC also provides resources like the Faculty Professional Development Moodle page and funding for attending conferences and research activities. The institution supports faculty through policies for sabbaticals, course release time, and promotion based on teaching, research, and service. This aligns with the Lithuanian Ministry of Education's guidelines to improve faculty competence in teaching, research, and general skills such as leadership and digital competence.

ANALYSIS AND CONCLUSION (regarding 5.2.)

LCC provides various opportunities for both academic and professional development. Whilst professional development opportunities have been seized by a growing part of the academic staff, inbound mobility and outbound mobility has remained rather low. To some extent this was the consequence of disruptions caused by the COVID-19 pandemic and the outbreak of the Russian war in Ukraine. Yet, as maintained by the SER, there is room to grow international exchange at the faculty level, to expand the network of international collaboration and exchange. This is particularly important as LCC is not part of major schemes such as the European Universities Alliance to which many other universities in Lithuania adhere. In-house offers for growing and development in terms

of teaching and research – at the level of the programme and department itself –, in turn, are varied given the teaching philosophy and student-centred work of staff. We assume this to be very positive.

AREA 5: CONCLUSIONS

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

COMMENDATIONS

1. The LCC IRD is characterized by an esprit de corps amongst staff which contributes positively to the coherence of the study programme. Several staff members have the knowledge and skills to bridge the discipline and professional life to which the programme may prepare.
2. The teaching staff has a balanced age and gender base.
3. The student-faculty ratio is very good for BA studies, allowing students the attention they need (which is particularly important given the composition of the student body, in which many are coming from war-torn countries).

RECOMMENDATIONS

To address shortcomings

1. To consolidate and strengthen further the ongoing efforts in building core specialisation in terms of LCC-based research.

For further improvement

1. To develop sustainable research networks by engaging external funding from different sources.
2. To grow the international research base and networks on the specific academic niche that is being developed by the academic staff of the International Relations and Development programme.

AREA 6: LEARNING FACILITIES AND RESOURCES

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

FACTUAL SITUATION

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

The LCC campus is located on the outskirts of Klaipėda and consists of several buildings. As the university is relatively small, all facilities are shared across departments. Teaching primarily takes place in the DeFehr Centre, which houses 14 classrooms (each with an average capacity of 25 seats), a lecture hall (80 seats), and two computer laboratories (with capacities of 14 and 34 seats per room). The Balčiūnai Library is also located within this building. For larger classes, meetings, and events, the Neufeld Auditorium, which accommodates 234 people, is available in a separate building.

Academic staff typically share offices, with each space accommodating two workstations. Additionally, a common room is available for student consultations.

All 14 classrooms, the lecture hall, and the auditorium are equipped with permanent sound systems, desktop computers with DVD players, smart boards, web cameras, and microphones. These facilities create an interactive teaching and learning environment suitable for both in-person and remote instruction. The Neufeld Auditorium is also equipped for simultaneous interpretation in two languages. The computer labs feature modern hardware and software, including SPSS and R Studio for statistical analysis. Students can access the labs with their ID cards daily until 22:00 on weekdays and until 21:00 on weekends. Moodle serves as the primary Virtual Learning Environment (VLE), supplemented by Microsoft Teams, and is used in all IRD courses.

The Balčiūnai Library also provides several open-access computers for student use. Its collection includes over 3,800 printed books covering topics in politics, international relations, conflict studies, and development, among other fields supporting the IRD programme. This collection includes more than 1,200 textbooks, with approximately 95% of the materials in English.

As a member of the Lithuanian Research Library Consortium (LMBA), LCC offers remote access to a wide range of online databases via a proxy service. Students and faculty in the IRD programme have access to JSTOR, EBSCO, SAGE, and Taylor & Francis. Additionally, as a member of the Lithuanian Library Association (eLABA), LCC utilizes the Primo virtual tool, which allows for the development of a database of LCC-produced research publications as well as an electronic repository of final student projects.

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

The library's resources are updated annually through collaboration between the library staff and academic departments to ensure that each course is supplied with up-to-date textbooks and supplementary reading materials. The Panel had the opportunity to review the IRD literature acquired for the library in the past month, which included approximately 30 high-quality and relevant books for the programme.

Decisions regarding the acquisition of new textbooks are made by academic departments in accordance with their annual budget allocations. The IRD library's annual budget is €2,000, with the possibility of temporary increases in cases of new course introductions or significant student enrollment growth. The regulations for database subscriptions are more flexible, as they are

subsidized by the Lithuanian Government at a rate of 70-75%. Nevertheless, the department regularly assesses the usage of subscribed databases and makes adjustments as needed.

As LCC's student population continues to grow, the need for expanded campus space has become increasingly evident. Based on an internal assessment, LCC launched the *Flourishing Community Capital Project*, which includes the renovation and expansion of classrooms and faculty offices, the construction of a new student center and cafeteria, and the development of a new library. The construction of the new library building is expected to be completed in 2025. The LCC's financial policy requires that all necessary funds be secured before construction begins. As a result, and in line with previous capital projects, LCC will incur no debt for this expansion.

ANALYSIS AND CONCLUSION (regarding 6.1.)

The facilities, informational resources, and financial support available to IRD programme students and staff are sufficient to meet their academic needs. Classrooms are well-equipped with modern technology, and the library maintains an up-to-date collection of books and e-resources to support the achievement of learning outcomes. The spatial design of classrooms and other learning spaces is well-suited to the interactive teaching approach that defines the programme.

With a growing student body and the adoption of innovative teaching and learning methods, the need for expanded physical space has become increasingly urgent. The Panel was impressed by the LCC leadership's systematic, thorough, and responsible approach to addressing these challenges. The interests and needs of the academic community are taken into account while ensuring the university maintains fiscal prudence. This balanced approach is reflected not only in capital investments but also in the acquisition of library and technological resources.

AREA 6: CONCLUSIONS

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

COMMENDATIONS

1. LCC leadership demonstrates strong fundraising efforts, enabling capital development, including new building construction, and supporting an extensive scholarship system (both merit-based and need-based).
2. The campus offers multiple, albeit small, spaces for student group work and social interaction.
3. High-achieving students and distinguished alumni are prominently showcased throughout campus buildings through exhibitions, mural displays, and other forms of recognition.

RECOMMENDATIONS

To address shortcomings

Not applicable

For further improvement

1. The new library building has significant potential to elevate research activities for both staff and students, fostering a more advanced academic environment.

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

LCC's internal quality assurance system is managed by the President's Cabinet, with the Academic Vice President overseeing academic programmes and department chairs responsible for quality at the programme level. Since 2019, LCC has been a non-voting member of the Lithuanian University Rector's Conference thereby acquiring "a voice […] in higher education legislation" (SER, 77). The decision-making process involves department faculty, with proposals for programme development reviewed at multiple levels. Department chairs handle faculty recruitment, performance reviews, course syllabi, and student evaluations. Faculty members also contribute to governance through involvement in various councils and taskforces. Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) assess internal quality, including student body metrics, admissions, financial aid, faculty numbers, and operational stability. These KPIs are evaluated annually and inform strategic decisions. LCC also uses external metrics, such as Lithuania's SVIS reports as well as SKVS's methodology, for comparative analysis.

While the IRD programme has seen a decrease in student numbers (-22%) and post-graduation employment (-3%), this is attributed to external factors like the war in Ukraine, which has affected student admissions.

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

From 2020-2023, the IRD programme engaged various stakeholders, including faculty, alumni, students, and social partners, through Programme Committees (introduced in 2020 following a suggestion of the previous evaluation) to evaluate and improve the programme. These committees provided feedback on programme goals, curriculum, and the preparedness of graduates for the job market. The 2020-2021 committee, for example, discussed the programme's depth and ability to prepare students for further studies or careers, prompting discussions about adding more specialized courses. The following year, students expressed the need for more guidance in choosing areas of focus, which led to changes in academic advising and the introduction of first- and second-year meetings to help students identify specializations. In 2022-2023, the focus shifted to the Development offerings, with students requesting more practical training and courses on sustainability. These discussions resulted in the development of new courses and a system to better guide students in their academic journey and specialization choices.

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

The IRD programme at LCC collects and publishes key information about its structure, admission requirements, and accreditation status through the university website and the Academic Catalogue. Accreditation results are also publicly available after evaluations. Course evaluations, a major tool for programme improvement, are collected by the registrar's office at the end of each semester. These evaluations focus on course-specific aspects such as the instructor, resources, and quality of instruction. Faculty review the feedback with the department chair and use it for their professional development and course improvements. Examples of changes based on feedback include adjustments in reading materials, the introduction of advanced assignments, restructuring course objectives for clarity, and implementing more in-class discussions and interactive activities. Additionally, faculty have modified course pacing, reduced reading loads, simplified materials, and

introduced engaging teaching methods like debates and simulations to enhance student learning experiences.

7.1.4. Student feedback is collected and analysed

Students at LCC contribute substantially to programme evaluation and development through various channels. They can directly voice concerns to instructors or the department chairperson, and participate in course evaluations each semester, which are used to improve teaching methods and course content. The results of these evaluations are shared with instructors and the department chairperson, who use the feedback to refine the programme. Students also have representation in key university bodies such as the Academic Council and the Board of Directors, providing input on the programme at the institutional level. Additionally, student feedback has led to changes, such as the introduction of new courses like "Development and Sustainability." The university also informs students about modifications based on their feedback via emails, MS Teams, and academic catalogues. The Senior Survey, conducted annually, shows high levels of student satisfaction, particularly regarding the quality of instruction and preparation in their major, though there is less satisfaction with opportunities for research collaboration. The programme continues to work on improving these aspects, with plans for greater student involvement in research as this has been identified as desirable in several rounds of student feedback.

ANALYSIS AND CONCLUSION (regarding 7.1.)

Following the SER, the internal quality assurance is well-structured following a set of internal, national and international rules and adhering to European standards. Student feedback is ensured through various channels and evaluations show high levels of satisfaction with the study programme. The program exhibits strong departmental/study program leadership as high levels of faculty engagement in ensuring top-level quality at the course and programme levels. This tradition of "caring for students", which characterises Liberal Arts Colleges, provides the backbone for strong institutional leadership based on a clear distribution of tasks of management and stakeholders involved as well as robust strategic planning for the long-term. There is a proven track record of recommendations from social partners, alumni and students alike that have contributed to improve various aspects of the programme.

According to information provided as a part of the site visit, the LCC Student Council is currently working on documentation required to join Lithuanian Student Union. It is expected that LCC Student Council will start its membership in the Lithuanian Student Union in Fall 2025, and by that gain a louder voice in Lithuanian student life activities. This membership will also allow the LCC Student Council to participate in Lithuanian Student Union meetings and get detailed results from the National Student Survey. This will ultimately help to put the student evaluation results more "into a national perspective".

AREA 7: CONCLUSIONS

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

COMMENDATIONS

1. Evaluation intrinsically seen as positive and a tool for continuous adaptation and improvement.
2. Strong institutional and departmental leadership in the governance architecture of evaluation and provision of feedback.
3. Openness to recommendations from external and internal stakeholders, in particular students.

RECOMMENDATIONS

To address shortcomings

Not applicable

For further improvement

1. The response rate in programme evaluation has been declining LCC-wide. There is need to develop new tools for assessment.
2. Contribute to the development of the national database on student satisfaction (National Student Survey).

V. SUMMARY

The expert panel conducted an evaluation of the first-cycle (BA) programme in International Relations and Development (IRD), which was established in 2015 and had not been assessed since due to the transition from a programme-based to a field-based evaluation policy. The panel was impressed by the programme's structured development and the thorough implementation of recommendations from its initial evaluation eight years ago. The measures and actions taken in teaching, research, and institutional development align closely with the university's strategic objectives, contributing to the positive developments observed during the 2021-2023 evaluation period.

LCC International University (LCC) follows a liberal arts educational model that emphasizes interdisciplinary learning, critical thinking, Christian values, and student self-development. These principles are well integrated into both strategic and regulatory documents and are consistently reflected in the everyday practices of the university community. The IRD programme fully embodies these institutional learning objectives, making it unique within Lithuania and the broader Baltic (sea) region. Its strong focus on peacebuilding, civic engagement, and community development further distinguishes it from similar programmes. Graduates demonstrate strong employability in the third sector, diplomacy, and government services, underscoring the programme's relevance to the job market.

The research interests of the academic staff align well with the programme's content and teaching philosophy. Several faculty members are pursuing PhD.s in fields such as peacebuilding, Russia's foreign policy, and Eastern European studies, which will further strengthen the programme's international dimension. While the IRD programme primarily focuses on applied and developmental research at the undergraduate level, faculty members have significantly increased their research output in recent years, particularly in peer-reviewed publications. This progress reflects the ambition to eventually establish a second-cycle programme in political science.

The expert panel was particularly impressed by the faculty's commitment to student-centred and collaborative teaching and learning. This dedication is evident in the programme's diverse and active learning methods, well-developed quality assurance mechanisms, and structured performance monitoring systems. Students play an integral role in curriculum development, and faculty members enthusiastically share their research experiences, fostering student engagement in research. The programme's strong emphasis on research methodology provides a solid foundation for teacher-student research collaboration, with several notable successes.

Beyond academics, LCC's strong ethos of student support contributes to high academic performance, student satisfaction, and competitiveness in the job market. The university's cohesive campus environment fosters a dynamic academic atmosphere, with most faculty members and approximately 70-80% of students residing on-site. This close-knit setting is particularly beneficial for students from war-affected regions, as LCC provides both material and psychological support to help them overcome trauma. Faculty members also receive regular training in mental health and trauma recovery to better support students in need.

As LCC's student population continues to grow, the university has launched the "Flourishing Community Capital Project," aimed at expanding and modernizing its infrastructure. This initiative includes the renovation and expansion of classrooms and faculty offices, as well as the construction of a new library and student centre. The panel was impressed by the leadership's strong fundraising efforts and its systematic, responsible approach to capital expansion, ensuring that the interests and needs of the academic community are carefully considered while maintaining fiscal prudence.

Overall, the first-cycle IRD programme at LCC provides significant value to global society and the job market. It upholds a strong academic and community ethos, with both staff and students deeply committed to peacebuilding and community development. The research potential of political science at LCC, particularly in international relations, is promising.

However, several challenges remain.

The IRD programme is currently relatively small in terms of both staff and student numbers. While this allows for a personalised approach and flexible study plans - hallmarks of the liberal arts model - student enrolment must increase to ensure long-term economic sustainability. The challenging geopolitical situation has significantly impacted enrolment, necessitating a more agile approach to admissions campaigns that target new geographical regions. Additionally, increasing the programme's visibility and attractiveness among Lithuanian students could be beneficial. The expert panel strongly supports the LCC Student Council's plan to join the Lithuanian Student Union, as this initiative could help attract prospective students while also strengthening connections with Lithuanian society, potential employers, social partners, and development cooperation initiatives.

To maintain academic sustainability, it is crucial to ensure that the flexibility and freedom inherent in the liberal arts approach do not dilute the core focus of the IRD programme. As student numbers grow, a more structured framework for potential concentrations or specialisations may be necessary. An expanding student body will also require an increase in faculty members. When recruiting new staff, LCC should seek to maintain its existing strengths while strategically broadening expertise in key areas such as conflict studies and foreign policy.

VI. EXAMPLES OF EXCELLENCE