



CENTRE FOR QUALITY ASSESSMENT IN HIGHER EDUCATION

EVALUATION REPORT

STUDY FIELD of LAW

at Vilnius University

Expert panel:

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Study Field Data

Title of the study programme	<i>Law</i>	<i>Criminal Law</i>	<i>International and European Law</i>
State code	6011KX002	6211KX002	6211KX019
Type of studies	University studies	University studies	University studies
Cycle of studies	Integrated	Second	Second
Mode of study and duration (in years)	Full-time (5 years)	Full-time (1.5 years)	Full-time (1.5 years)
Credit volume	300	90	90
Qualification degree and (or) professional qualification	Master's Degree in law	Master's Degree in law	Master's Degree in law
Language of instruction	Lithuanian	Lithuanian	English
Minimum education required	Secondary education	Bachelors' degree	Bachelors' degree
Registration date of the study programme	19 March 2002	18 May 2012	18 March 2010

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I. INTRODUCTION

1.1. BACKGROUND OF THE EVALUATION PROCESS

The evaluations of study fields in Lithuanian Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) are based on the Procedure for the External Evaluation and Accreditation of Studies, Evaluation Areas and Indicators, approved by the Minister of Education, Science and Sport on 17 July 2019, Order No. V-835, and are carried out according to the procedure outlined in the Methodology of External Evaluation of Study Fields approved by the Director of the Centre for Quality Assessment in Higher Education (hereafter – SKVC) on 31 December 2019, Order [No. V-149](#).

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

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

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

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

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

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

1.2. EXPERT PANEL

The expert panel was assigned according to the Experts Selection Procedure as approved by the Director of SKVC on 31 December 2019, [Order No. V-149](#). The site visit to the HEI was conducted by the expert panel on *17th of October, 2023*.

Prof. dr. Bertel De Groote (panel chairperson) *Member Education Quality Board, Head of Department, Ghent University, Belgium;*

Prof. dr. Xavier Groussot, Professor of European Law and Dean for Research at the Faculty of Law, Lund University, Sweden;

Prof. dr. Mart Susi, Professor of Human Rights Law, Tallinn University, Estonia;

Ms Jurga Petniūnaitė, *Lawyer, patent attorney, AAA Law firm, Lithuania;*

Ms Vitalija Jakubaitytė, *Vytautas Magnus university, 3rd year Law and Finance student.*

1.3. GENERAL INFORMATION

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

No.	Name of the document
1.	Updates made in the study field programmes;
2.	Extracurricular activities that are recognized and for which credits are allocated to the course units of the integrated study programme Law.

1.4. BACKGROUND OF LAW FIELD STUDIES AT VILNIUS UNIVERSITY

Vilnius University, founded in 1579, is Lithuania's oldest and largest higher education institution, operating as a public entity. Governed by the Statute of Vilnius University, its self-governance involves the Senate, the Council, and the Rector. The university comprises 15 core academic units, including faculties, institutes, centres, an academy, and a business school, along with 12 non-academic units. As of October 2022, it had 3348 individuals engaged in academic activities and 23 517 students, with over 90 bachelor's and integrated study programs, 110 master's programs, and are involved in various research fields.

The Faculty of Law, established in 1641, is the country's first legal education institution, focusing on areas such as new business forms, digitization of justice, and challenges in technology and criminal justice. It has three departments, 11 science centres, and three scientific thematic groups. The faculty publishes an open-access scientific journal, and research areas include legal regulation, technology challenges, and issues of democracy and human rights.

The faculty, as of October 2022, has 184 staff members and 1443 students. It offers integrated and masters' study programs in law, with positive past evaluations and accreditations for six

years. The Faculty emphasises interdisciplinarity, collaborating with other university units on various study programs. The report covers the period from 2019-2022, with a focus on academic years 2019-2020 to 2021-2022. Additionally, the faculty adapted its study programs to meet changing demands, deregistering certain programs and introducing new specialisations.

There are 3 departments, conducting research and studies in their respective areas: criminal justice, private law and public law. 11 Science Centres and 3 Scientific Thematic Groups are responsible for research.

The Law Faculty had 3 main research areas in the period 2019-2022:

- Legal regulation of new forms of business organisation and digitisation of justice
- Challenges of new technologies and artificial intelligence to criminal justice
- Problems of democracy, the rule of law and human rights in the digital age.

For the period 2022-2024 there is a research agenda as well (from Self-Evaluation report (SER), p. 7).

The Faculty has since 1957 an open access scientific journal and invests in initiatives to cooperate in research and disseminate results of research.

The last accreditations done by SKVC of the programmes under review took place in 2013, 2016 and 2017.

II. GENERAL ASSESSMENT

The *integrated cycle* of the Law study field at Vilnius University is given a **positive** evaluation.
Study field and cycle assessment in points by evaluation areas

No.	Evaluation Area	Evaluation of an Area in points*
1.	Intended and achieved learning outcomes and curriculum	4
2.	Links between science (art) and studies	4
3.	Student admission and support	4
4.	Teaching and learning, student performance and graduate employment	4
5.	Teaching staff	4
6.	Learning facilities and resources	5
7.	Study quality management and public information	4
	Total:	29

*1 (unsatisfactory) - the area does not meet the minimum requirements, there are fundamental shortcomings that prevent the implementation of the field studies.

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

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

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

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

The *second cycle of the Law* study field at Vilnius University is given a **positive** evaluation.

Study field and cycle assessment in points by evaluation areas

No.	Evaluation Area	Evaluation of an Area in points*
1.	Intended and achieved learning outcomes and curriculum	4
2.	Links between science (art) and studies	4
3.	Student admission and support	4
4.	Teaching and learning, student performance and graduate employment	4
5.	Teaching staff	4
6.	Learning facilities and resources	5
7.	Study quality management and public information	4
	Total:	29

*1 (unsatisfactory) - the area does not meet the minimum requirements, there are fundamental shortcomings that prevent the implementation of the field studies.

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

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

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

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

III. STUDY FIELD ANALYSIS

3.1. AIMS, LEARNING OUTCOMES, AND CURRICULUM

Aims, learning outcomes, and curriculum are evaluated according to the following indicators:

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

The study programmes that are subject to the accreditation are based on a context analysis, taking into account the needs of society. Moreover, according to the SER, the capacities of the University are taken into account (i.e., staff and other resources). Five universities, VU being one of them, offer programmes in the field of law. VU focuses particularly on the integrated study programme *Law*. Apart from that VU focuses on the promotion of the MA programme in English in *International and European Law*. The SER states that the implementation prospects of the MA study programme *Criminal justice* will depend on the number of students admitted. According to the SER there is no overlap in the target groups of the different programmes.

VU states that its 'integrated programme' has a clear and differentiated profile. The expert team notices *inter alia* the following characteristics:

- VU opts for specialisation as of semester 8 and offers 8 specialisations.
- VU allocates only 15 credits to elective courses of the general university studies (individual study course units introducing study field topics and developing general erudition chosen from the general list of elective course units for all VU students).
- VU has a specific view on 'interdisciplinarity', integrating it in course units that concern law. Issues of other disciplines related to a legal topic are analysed. According to the SER students also learn how to find and study information, allowing them to discover other study fields.
- Basic competences in relevant social sciences/humanities are integrated in compulsory course units.
- VU foresees 9 elective credits for courses in the field of law (up to semester 8) as to enable students to consider preferences before choosing a specialisation. As well 20 elective credits for courses in specialisation during semesters 8 and 9.
- To complete the studies VU adds to the master's thesis a final examination to provide a versatile assessment of competences.
- VU opts for a high amount of credits for courses concerning the fundamentals of individual fields of law.

Also, in the MA-programmes under review clear and distinctive choices are made.

In the Criminal Justice programme, a comprehensive approach to the implementation of criminal justice prevails, preparing for academic/practical activities. The programme focuses on the substantive and procedural prerequisites for the administration of justice.

The study programme in international and European Law strives for a balance between maximum individualisation and adequate attention to the most important areas of international and European law and to therewith related competences (human rights, ethics, cultural diversity). Therefore, three possible specialisation tracks (International Law and Human Rights, Technology Law or Business Law) are established.

A list of 12 course units is available for the student to address his specific interests.

As this leads to the conclusion that students have only 2 compulsory course units in common - which amount to 20 credits - the expert team raises some concern regarding the balance between possibilities to individualise the study path and a common core in the study programme. Therefore, the expert team recommends the programme management to thoroughly assess the advantages/challenges of this approach.

Lastly, it is stated that 'unique' course units are offered. Unfortunately, for the expert team it is not clear what objectives and/or strategy inspired the offered portfolio of course and what needs they want to address.

According to the SER harmony between the academic and applied nature of the studies and the structure of the study programmes, allows for the adaptation to the constantly changing conditions of modern life. Moreover, the programmes are taught by researchers, following the latest scientific achievements and being actively involved in the life of society.

Referring to the applied nature of the studies, the analysis didn't bring the conclusion that the 'applied nature' of the studies can be seen as a clear characteristic of the study programme. If this characteristic is focal for VU, the expert team recommends to clearly define the concept and consequently, to scan its programmes in this regard. This will allow the HEI to address this characteristic explicitly and to structurally approach its role in the study programmes at stake.

Regarding the adaptation of the study programmes, the expert team recognizes the opportunities at hand. Nevertheless, it is not fully clear to the team how the adaptation of the study programmes to actual and future needs of society are structurally safeguarded.

The SER refers to the possibility to design a new bachelor study programme in English. Though this track may be worthwhile - for instance in the framework of 'internationalisation' - it doesn't affect the relevance of the need to give 'internationalisation' a structural role in all of the study programmes under review.

The expert team recommends the HEI to prominently assess the role of 'internationalisation' in its study programmes, thereby addressing all relevant measures to allow students to broaden their perspective. Exchange opportunities for outgoing and incoming students, as well as guest lecturers, initiatives limited in time and instruction language are only some of the opportunities

that have to be taken into account. A policy in this regard can at best be established, embedded and monitored.

The study programmes lead to the qualifications that are required for 'traditional' legal professions. In this regard, they answer a regulatory labour market requirement. The integrated study programme (Law) enables alumni to practise in the 'traditional' legal professions and paves as well the path to any other legal professional activity. For the MA Criminal justice an analogous conclusion may be drawn. The MA International and European Law allows one to work as a legal expert and legal service professional in public and private sectors, also as researchers and in international/European organisations.

With regard to the learning outcomes, the SER states (p. 11) that they are designed to correspond to the applicable Qualifications Framework, the learning outcomes of the specific Study Cycle and the specific learning outcomes for the field of law.

Learning outcomes are formulated in view of the development of science and are subject to benchmarking.

Contacts with social partners - amongst them FL (faculty of law) lecturers, practitioners - must guarantee the relevance of the programmes for the labour market, which is the responsibility of the Study Programme Committee.

For the expert team it is not clear how structurally the input from various perspectives and stakeholders is integrated in decisions on design of the programmes and learning outcomes. The same goes for the role of benchmarking (eg. by foreign peers). It is recommended to explore the needs and possibilities to structurally integrate relevant perspectives in curriculum development and document this integration.

According to the SER the learning outcomes of the programmes under review address the description of legal professionals in the Lithuanian Classification of Occupations, regarding the areas of professional activity and the abilities mentioned therein. With regard to the integrated study programme Law, students are trained to be secure in the legal fundamentals in the main fields of law (from a Lithuanian and EU/international point of view). The programme addresses subject-specific and general competences and deals with doctrine and practices. The MA in Criminal Justice covers issues of criminal law, policy, procedure as well as punishment enforcement and pre-trial investigation. The MA International and European Law develops competences in the context of the international and European framework and the norms influencing the most important areas of national legal systems. Students have to work in cross-cultural groups.

In all programmes the ability to carry out research in a broad sense of the word, to give advice, act as a law-maker, be innovative and assess potential social, ethical and legal implications, is foreseen. Moreover, scientific activities/practices have to be based on the requirements of professional ethics.

For the expert team it was hard to discern how all these roles are addressed in the study programmes and had the idea that VU could be more explicit in this regard. Apart from that, it

leads no doubt for the expert team that the study programmes are up to the academic standards.

Aims and learning outcomes are not substantially updated after previous external evaluations (SER, p. 12). A relevant change goes alongside with the updating and change of title of the programme International and European Law that was previously focused on the EU. The change answered geopolitical changes and the necessity to analyse topics that go beyond the EU.

The programme committees decided to align the definition of the competences to be developed and to introduce almost identical learning outcomes covering general competences. Moreover, there is a harmonisation regarding the outcomes concerning the competences of a legal researcher. The coherence this leads to is recognised by the expert team.

Although there is not an automatic need to update study programmes on a regular basis, it is, according to the expert team, recommendable to review the study programme on a regular basis, taking into account the perspectives that were mentioned above, and to document this assessment. Stakeholders representing society, labour market, students, foreign peers can all play a role in this regard.

According to the SER (p.12) the number of law professionals is not excessive (see the 2022 Eu Justices Scoreboard showing the Lithuania ranks the 23rd qua number of lawyers per 100.000 inhabitants, lagging behind the EU-average). The SER states that the strategic objective to train specialists for the main legal professions (regulated by legal norms in Lithuania) is in accordance with the needs of the legal system.

The FL sees coherence between the knowledge/abilities provided to students (see: learning outcomes) and the labour market in the employability of graduates. Moreover, the students of VU have a fair share in the numbers of recognised persons in legal professions.

The SER also states that the number of employed persons in the occupational group Legal, social and cultural will grow 1,2% each year between 2021 and 2030. A higher growth is projected for the slightly lower-skilled occupational group of Legal, social, cultural and related associate professionals.

The expert team found out that students often start a career in the latter sector during their studies. The expert team is well aware of the fact that this can lead to mutual reinforcement of the student's skills. On the other hand, it may affect study progress, student involvement or could hamper participation in internationalisation. The expert team recommends the University to closely monitor this balance and to carefully address the issue if disadvantages may prevail.

Based on the information the expert team has no concerns regarding the conformity of the study programmes with societal needs. Moreover, the programmes answer the expectations of the labour market. The latter was also a clear baseline in the interview of the expert team with alumni and labour market representatives.

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

Aims and intended learning outcomes of FL study programmes are designed to implement the VU mission. VU intends to strengthen the cognitive and creative powers of Lithuania and the world, to foster academic and other spiritual and social values, to educate active and responsible leaders of society).

Moreover, the learning outcomes are in line with the strategic directions, provided for the implementation of the mission in the Vilnius University Strategic Plan (2021-2025). The latter are creating society and the state, and being a collaborative university.

The SER maps the long-term objective 'graduates capable of solving societal problems' of the strategic directions 'creating society and state' to learning outcomes aimed at in study programmes of the law faculty.

In the SER the FL expresses that the intent of the programmes is to make graduates able to solve problems of legal nature or to make proposals for their solution, in order to build the society of the future, by being active in the community.

By training qualified professionals/experts in the field of law, the FL also aims to contribute to the long-term objective (of the university) to develop growing influence in society and state. Therefore, alumni must be capable to take leadership and to participate as experts in policy-making.

In focusing on the integration of interdisciplinary knowledge into individual legal research the FL strives for the strategic directive of the VU on collaborativeness (long-term objective 'interdisciplinary and international research and studies - being as well linked to outcomes concerning the international content of studies, the ability to communicate at an international level, and the ability to build on the principles of respect for cultural differences).

The latter idea allows the expert team to recommend the FL to consider 'internationalisation' as a key yard.

Apart from that, the findings described above bring the expert team to the conclusion that in developing the programmes under review, the strategic options of VU and the FL are given the necessary consideration, whereby alignment is sufficiently guaranteed.

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

Underneath, the study programmes are evaluated in further detail.

In 3.1.3 the expert team, based on the study programme plans, came to the conclusion - as to be seen in the tables - that the study programmes are compliant with the legal requirements, regarding type of course units and the number of credits attributed to them.

Comparing the first and second cycle courses one notices a reduction of the percentage of the

volume of contact study hours. This reduction is logical, according to the SER, since students develop and deepen their theoretical knowledge and improve their research abilities as well as their ability to plan and organise their individual work, they work more independently. Since later years of the studies take place in smaller groups, lecturers have more opportunities to provide students with feedback. Such is a key to more successful self-study.

For the master's thesis (eventually combined with the final exam) students have a semester to devote to independent work.

On the basis of long-term practice and experience, as well as annual monitoring, the teaching staff assess the proportion between self-study and contact-study. They most often adjust self-study tasks and their scope if required.

Table No. 1 Study programmes' **Law** compliance to general requirements for *integrated cycle study programmes (integrated studies)*

Criteria	General legal requirements	In the Programmes
Scope of the programme in ECTS	300 or 360 ECTS	300
ECTS for internship	No less than 15 ECTS (Law study field descriptor)	15 ECTS
ECTS for final thesis (project) or the final thesis (project) and final examination	No less than 30 ECTS	30 ECTS
Part of integrated study programme which corresponds to the first-cycle studies contact hours	No less than 20 % of learning	39.21 percent
Part of integrated study programme which corresponds to the second-cycle studies contact hours (non-distance contact hours)*	No less than 10% of learning	16.25 percent

* 21.2. the number of contact hours of other programmes and the remaining share of integrated study programme (including distance contact hours) shall be no less than 10%, the scope of learning with direct participation of teachers and students (non-distance learning) shall be no less than 5%, and the scope of student's individual learning shall be no less than 50%, unless otherwise stated in the descriptor of study field.

Table No. 2 Study programmes' ***Criminal Justice*** compliance to general requirements for *second cycle study programmes (master)*

Criteria	General* legal requirements	In the Programmes
Scope of the programme in ECTS	90 or 120 ECTS	90 ECTS
ECTS for the study field of Law	No less than 60 ECTS	90 ECTS
ECTS for studies specified by University or optional studies	No more than 30 ECTS	20 ECTS
ECTS for final thesis (project) or the final thesis (project) and final examination	No less than 30 ECTS	30 ECTS
Contact hours	No less than 10 % of learning	19.08 percent
Individual learning	No less than 50 % of learning	80.9 percent

Table No. 3 Study programmes' ***International and European Law*** compliance to general requirements for *second cycle study programmes (master)*

Criteria	General* legal requirements	In the Programmes
Scope of the programme in ECTS	90 or 120 ECTS	90 ECTS
ECTS for the study field of Law	No less than 60 ECTS	90 ECTS
ECTS for studies specified by University or optional studies	No more than 30 ECTS	20 ECTS
ECTS for final thesis (project)	No less than 30 ECTS	30 ECTS
Contact hours	No less than 10 % of learning	15.83 percent
Individual learning	No less than 50 % of learning	84.17 percent

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

The study programmes meet the requirements applicable to the type of university studies, integrated or master studies, as well as academic and professional requirements in terms of their aims, learning outcomes, curriculum design and content of course units.

Therefore, the programmes are based on the most recent fundamental and applied research, which is (inter alia) carried out by the teaching staff.

The integrated study programme is in line with the applicable legal acts. As they regulate the programme's structure, they guarantee that students acquire an understanding of law as a theoretical discipline and get fundamental knowledge of the main fields of law, learn to analyse and assess legal norms, case law and legal doctrine. The internship allows students to develop practical skills and apply acquired knowledge. In the second cycle research competences in law are emphasised, mainly in the master's thesis. Moreover, studies are based on the results of research and on analytical abilities. Students are prepared to be independent, professional or as scientific staff, with a specialisation in a specific area of law.

The MA programmes Criminal Justice and International and European Law meet the legal requirements for second-cycle studies as well.

The scope of the study programmes is sufficient to achieve the learning outcomes specified according to legal acts and subject field specifics.

Teaching staff are active researchers and practitioners.

The integrated programme Law meets the requirements set for the judicial position in terms of its structure and content, whereas other main legal professions do not have detailed requirements for structure/content of study programmes.

Taking into account the available information and gathered information during the visit to Vilnius University, the expert team shares the opinion that the programmes under review meet the requirements set out in this criterion.

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

Regarding the study programme's curriculum design and the consistency of the content, the SER states that content and arrangement in semesters of course units guarantee consistency in the competence-development.

Regarding the integrated study programme Law, the principle 'from the general to the specific' is on the foreground.

The first seven semesters are the first study cycle. They deal with fundamental course units of law studies as well as the studies of the main field of law and the fundamentals of procedure. During the semesters 8 to 10, students opt for specialisation in a specific branch of law. The programme is 'tied' by course units as Legal Profession, History of Law and Legal Theory (the latter focusing on methodology). Apart from those students that are eligible for 25 credits

introduced in social science/humanities and can choose units of general university studies for 15 credits.

The expert team, taking into account the scheme of the integrated study programme (as outlined on pp. 16-17 of the SER) still wonders what philosophy the programme committee wanted to embed in the programme and its structure, apart from the idea that basics come before specialisation. For now, the scheme is somewhat 'eclectic'. Therefore, the expert team should have preferred to have more insight into the reasons ('rationale') that inspired the educational choices, choices regarding content etc. that tied the 'bricks' that constitute the integrated study programme. After having consulted figure 7 on p. 16 of the SER, the expert team is still in search of the vision the programme committee has and how that vision contributed to the study programme. In view of the list of specialisations, the expert team wonders whether the broad field of Business Law and Civil Law can be captured in one specialisation and recommends the programme committee to reflect on this. Moreover, the expert team recommends the programme management to reflect on the balance between compulsory and elective law courses and consider in this regard what, taking into account nowadays' society, the status of courses like conflict of laws or taxation ought to be. Lastly, one might consider whether certain obligatory subject fields could be usefully taught in a foreign language as part of a global/international strategy.

There is a strong focus on the main fields of law and procedural law. For consistency, studies in procedure follow substantive law. Since knowledge of international and EU-law - and the ability to apply this in an integrated way - are essential for solving legal issues, 13 credits deal with fundamentals in EU and international law. In Semester 6 and 7 students are able to model their studies by choosing course units in the areas of their interest.

Specialisation of professional activities require specific knowledge and abilities. The programme part attributed to second cycle studies offers the opportunity to choose a specialisation (subject-specific studies and internship). Regarding the latter, the expert team strongly advises to guarantee in the setting of the tasks as well as in the evaluation that the internship clearly contributes to the master level, i.e. regarding the academic level of the tasks the student has to fulfil. The expert team also recommends the programme management to focus on the role 'internships' can play in the internationalisation strategy.

Regarding specialisations, the expert team noticed that 'public law' is not that popular. As it is a specialisation that is at least equally relevant to others, the expert team recommends the programme management to properly address this issue.

The specialisations are revised in view of the recommendations during the last evaluation (in view of student preferences and consultations with social partners). In general, two additional electives (each 5 credits) are added.

Regarding research skills, 3 course papers as well as research papers are mentioned. Study completion is subject to the successful writing of a master's thesis and a final examination. Unclear to the expert team is whether courses on methodology in se are part of the compulsory track.

The MA study programme Criminal Justice is designed for deeper specialisation in the field of law. It is built upon the first-cycle studies' knowledge in criminal law/procedure. It is aimed at additional abilities/scientific qualification in view of professional activity (to solve complex theoretical and practical legal issues). The programme is built around a core course (10 credits) per semester, related to important more profound topics in criminal justice. 2 relevant courses units are compulsory added per semester (10 credits), focusing on case law and criminal prosecution practice. Elective units allow students to model their studies to their own interests (two electives of 5 credits from a list of 9 units, also addressing practical knowledge). The list of elective courses is updated to address students' preferences and observations of the labour market about preparedness for job. The master thesis and the final examination count for 30 credits.

The FL changed the structure of the MA International and European Law. A stronger focus is given to competences that can be used for broader international cooperation and integration in their students' countries of origin. Moreover, new course units relate to innovation and are more relevant for operation in global space.

There is still a strong interest in the impact of international and European law on national legal systems but students need, according to the SER, the opportunity to more extensively shape their studies' content. The programme is, regarding the fundamental compulsory units, reduced to two courses of 10 credits each. Thereby fundamental legal values and principles are pushed forward as well as the ability to approach complex 'unprecedented' legal issues. The other course deals with international dispute resolution. Students can individualise their studies since three options are available (4 compulsory units of 5 credits per specialisation), allowing students to deepen their knowledge in a specific subject field. Lastly 20 credits are given to 4 elective courses (from a list of 12). Students also prepare an individual research paper and devote their last semester to prepare a master's thesis and develop the skills of a legal researcher.

Taking into account the choice of the compulsory courses - 'Global Law and Legal Ethics' as well as 'International Dispute Resolution' are compulsory courses, common to all specialisations - and the corresponding credits (both compulsory courses have a high number of credits and consequently a major weight in the programme), as well as the name and content of the 'specialisations' (International Law and Human Right, Technology Law and Business Law), the expert team shares the opinion that a thorough assessment of the study programme and its name (International and European Law) is strongly recommended. One hereby has to mention that the compulsory courses for the specialisation count for 20 credits and students pick 4 elective units from a list of 12 for 20 credits (See SER p. 4. All in all, the expert team advises the management to assure that the programme's name and content are sufficiently in line.

On an overall basis, taking into account all the considerations set out above, the expert team is convinced that the requirements of this criterion are sufficiently met.

The study plan/the competence matrices are reviewed whenever necessary to ensure that all learning outcomes of the programme are sufficiently and evenly covered. It is, according to the HEI, assessed whether appropriate teaching-learning methods are chosen. When

designing/updating course unit descriptions, teaching staff are guided by the intended competences and learning outcomes of the study programme, in order to ensure its overall aim. Teaching staff select learning methods and assessment forms that enable them to measure the correspondence of student's achievements to the specific learning outcomes of the study programme. They do so at their own discretion (using Bloom's cognitive taxonomy). The Study Programme Committee takes the responsibility of approving the cohesion.

Neither in the documents that were provided nor during the interviews, the expert team found indications that outcomes, taught content, teaching methods and evaluation of the acquired competences are on an overall base not sufficiently in line.

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

For the evaluation of criterion 3.1.6 the expert team takes into account the information that was as well referred to under 3.1.1, 3.1.4 and thereby concludes that there are ample opportunities for students, within the programmes under review, to personalise their study programme. The expert team in some instances, as set out under 3.1.4 as well, shares the opinion that a sufficiently broad 'core' even has to be guaranteed or that the qualification of some subjects as 'elective' needs to be assessed.

Nevertheless, according to the expert team, it brings a fragile balance with the need for a 'core' in the study programme and the importance of crucial study fields that the degree in law has to cover.

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

In all study programmes a master's thesis is prepared and defended. It is guaranteed that the thesis is in line with the study field of law.

The principles and requirements are laid down in formal regulations and guidelines. This framework concerns the choice and approval of the topic, the preparation, the role of the supervisor, the submission, the authenticity, the review, the commission, the defences, as well as the rule and recommendations on structure, form, presentation, citation etc. The relevant documents are available on the website of the FL.

There is a clear view expressed in the SER on the objectives of the master's thesis, focused around the idea that the student has to prove to be able to carry out individual research. The master's thesis - especially the phase of preparation - also brings the development of general and subject-specific competences.

A (complex) process for the choice and approval of topics and the preparation of the final thesis is installed. It balances pertinence and student preferences in an academic dialogue. There is a mix between proposed topics by lecturers and by students;

Students are obliged to fulfil a thorough bibliographical research (national/international sources), which adds up to its relevance.

There is a clear view on the role of ‘supervisors’, who also have to make sure that the thesis complies with the requirements in the specific field of law.

Authenticity is a core value and theses’ authenticity are verified with a computer-based system in order to avoid plagiarism.

Reviewers and a final thesis defence commission guarantee the compliance of the content of the thesis with the study field. The feedback and assessment procedure as well as the composition of the commission are clearly regulated. The assessment criteria are laid down in the course unit description.

Strengths and weaknesses of this evaluation area:

(1) Strengths:

1. According to the expert team VU makes clear choices in designing its study programmes, opting for academic quality that is recognised by society.
2. The programmes focus on fundamental legal knowledge that have to allow students to answer to ever changing needs of society. Moreover, the programme is embedded in an academic, research-oriented, tradition.
3. The programme is aware of the importance of individualisation and provide to the study programmes and their students.

(2) Weaknesses:

1. The fact that, though the programme is aware of the importance of ‘internationalisation’ for the quality of education, students integrate only limited ‘international’ experiences in their study programme, is a point in need of little improvement.
2. It is unclear to the expert team whether all the valuable input the FL disposes of (internal and external stakeholders, academic network, etc.) are structurally gathered and used for systematic assessment of the study programmes.

3.2. LINKS BETWEEN SCIENCE (ART) AND STUDIES

Links between science (art) and study activities are evaluated according to the following indicators:

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

The research activities at the HEI have increased in the last years with 97, 88 and 98 articles published in peer-reviewed journals in respectively 2019, 2020 and 2021. The research activities of the HEI in the field of law received the highest number of points among the universities analysed in the 2019 annual assessment and were ranked 2nd in the 2018 and 2020 assessments. An incentive program (with an increasing budget) was created to reward the publications with the highest scores attributed to chapters in monographs and books

published by internationally recognized scientific publishers and for research articles in the journals in the database Thomson Reuters Web of Science and / or SCOPUS. The HEI reward program has created very good conditions for the development and increase of scientific publications. In turn, the scientific publications can also be used to improve the quality of the education and teaching at the HEI.

The expert panel can conclude that the scientific output related to the field of law and implemented study programmes is very good, only suggestion is to further increase the output and keep the quality that is currently at Vilnius University.

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

Four scientific thematic groups (Human rights and technology, systematic changes of administrative law, Data ownership and E-justice and ADR) were set up in 2019) to stimulate internationalisation. The faculty of law approved general research areas in 2019-2022 related to digitalization focusing on legal regulation, challenges in criminal justice and problems of democracy, the rule of law and human rights in the digital age. Specific research topics and indicators are not distinguished or planned in the faculty of law. Priority is given to the interests and consciousness of the academic staff. The HEI shows strong awareness in linking the content of studies with the latest developments in the legal field. This shows an awareness of the VU in adopting a strategy that can bolster the quality of the content of studies and, in addition, gives a certain flexibility in its implementation by making the academic staff responsible for its development and the specific choices to be made as to the improvement of the content of studies.

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

Various academic activities for students are available ranging from presentation of research articles in a team at an annual conference, academic tutoring, publication of research results, academic debates in German or French during summer school and invitation to participate in scientific conferences. The HEI provides very good conditions for students to get involved in scientific activities. However, the engagement of students in research activities is not very high, with participation of around 4% of all students each year at the faculty of law which might be related to the case that most integrated cycle students start their work from the second year and almost all master students are employed before starting their master studies.

Overall, the science that is conducted in VU is very good, the only point would be for VU to find ways to include more students to get involved in research (one of the solutions might include bigger financial incentives for students).

Strengths and weaknesses of this evaluation area:

(1) Strengths:

1. Research is focused on current topics and is developing in terms of peer-reviewed publications.
2. Students have many opportunities to participate in research activities and various academic activities are available for the students.

(2) Weaknesses:

1. More students are needed to be involved in research at HEI.

3.3. STUDENT ADMISSION AND SUPPORT

Student admission and support are evaluated according to the following indicators:

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

Admission to Law studies at Vilnius University follows the guidelines outlined in the Admission Rules for Vilnius University Study Programs, as approved by the VU Senate. These regulations specify that individuals eligible for state-funded positions include citizens of the Republic of Lithuania, members of the Lithuanian diaspora, and citizens and stateless individuals with permanent residence permits in the Republic of Lithuania, granted by foreign states outside the European Union or the European Economic Area.

For international candidates who are citizens of other countries and have obtained their qualifications from foreign educational institutions, but are not eligible for state-funded positions in Lithuania, admission is governed by the Admission Procedure for Foreign Nationals in First Cycle, Second Cycle, and Integrated Study Programs at Vilnius University. This procedure governs the admission of foreign students to study positions that are not financially supported by the Lithuanian state.

Admission to the Integrated Law study program at FL (Faculty of Law), which predominantly attracts Lithuanians, follows a centralised admission process. This process is conducted in accordance with the procedures approved by both LAMA BPO (Association of Lithuanian Higher Institutions for Centralised Admission) and Vilnius University (VU). LAMA BPO is an authorised institution under the Ministry of Education, Science, and Sports of the Republic of Lithuania. Applicants are admitted by their admission score, which consists of their state examinations and achieved results of them. To guarantee that applicants are adequately prepared for University studies, they are required to have successfully completed a minimum of three state examinations, which include Lithuanian Language and Literature, Mathematics and a subject of their choosing (for Law studies History's exam is necessary too).

Admission to the MA study programs in Criminal Justice and International and European Law is available to individuals who have completed undergraduate university programs in the field

of law with success. The selection process is conducted independently through Vilnius University's general admission system. The evaluation criteria for gaining admission to state-funded study positions in Lithuania include: the grade, which is the average of the final thesis and/or final examination, or the average of the final examination grades and the overall weighted average of the grades from the diploma supplement (annex).

Admitted student number to Law (integrated studies): in 2019 - 274 students, in 2020 - 354 students, in 2021 students 304 students and in 2022 - 295 students. The admitted student numbers are stable.

Admitted student number to Criminal Justice (MA): in 2019 - 12 students, in 2020 - 13 students, in 2021 - 5 students, in 2022 - 6 students. In the last two years the number of admitted students was stable.

Admitted student number to International and European Law (MA): in 2019 - 16 students, in 2020 - 26 students, in 2021 - 20 students and in 2022 - 70 students. Comparing 2019 and 2020, the number of admitted students rose a lot, which is really commendable.

Admission criteria and procedures are available on Vilnius University's website, the information is easy to find, structured and easy to understand no matter whether a person wants to apply to an integrated or MA study programmes.

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

Vilnius University provides multiple avenues for accessing higher education and acknowledges the diverse qualifications and skills that students acquire. VU has received authorization from the Minister of Education, Science, and Sport of the Republic of Lithuania to conduct the academic recognition of education and qualifications obtained through higher education programs offered by foreign countries and international organisations. A foreign qualification is deemed equivalent to a secondary or corresponding-level higher education qualification obtained in the Republic of Lithuania when there are no significant disparities in the basic requirements between the two, as determined by the country's standards. The process is overseen by an expert from the Student Admission Division within the Department for the Quality and Development of Studies at Vilnius University, working in collaboration with specialists from the respective Faculty in which the candidate intends to pursue their studies.

Talking in numbers, during the period spanning from 2019 to 2021, Vilnius University received a total of 118 requests for the evaluation and recognition of foreign qualifications from applicants to the Faculty of Law study programmes. Among these requests, 53, which accounts for 45%, were approved. An individual who has pursued education at another higher education institution in Lithuania or abroad and desires to further their studies at Vilnius University can be considered for admission into the Faculty of Law programs. In such instances, the recognition of their prior educational achievements is contingent upon evaluating the alignment of these achievements with the formal criteria, encompassing the study field, type of study program, study format, and more, as well as the subject-specific criteria, including the

goals, competencies, content, and extent of the study subjects. It is important to note that no more than 75% of the extent of the first-cycle, second-cycle, or integrated study programs can be acknowledged or recognized for prior educational achievements. In 2019-2021 there were 28 students, who had transitioned from other higher education institutions to continue their studies at Vilnius University had the option to transfer study credits from their prior educational experiences. Before submitting their applications, these students typically seek advice from specialists at the FL Division of Studies to determine which course units are most commonly eligible for credit transfer.

Students at the Faculty of Law also have the opportunity to submit applications for the recognition of their educational achievements obtained through non-formal education or self-education. This recognition is carried out in compliance with the guidelines established by the VU Senate and it allows for the acknowledgment and crediting of a student's skills acquired in various contexts, such as work, voluntary activities, internships, courses, seminars, projects, and independent learning. However, it's important to note that the credit transfer is subject to specific conditions like recognition and credit are limited to no more than 50 percent of the total scope of the study program, credits cannot be awarded for final exams, theses, or other written works that are already included in the study program as separate subjects. Important note is that the Department of Studies is responsible for organising the recognition process and the decision regarding the crediting of study outcomes is determined by the study program committee.

3.3.3. Evaluation of conditions for ensuring academic mobility of students

The Faculty of Law provides numerous mobility opportunities for students to study abroad in countries with which VU has established contractual agreements (Erasmus+). These opportunities include 27 European countries - many options and even more contracts.

Students are introduced to mobility opportunities as early as their first year, typically during the Integration Week. Pertinent information about mobility can be found on the Vilnius University and Faculty of Law websites, as well as their Facebook account. These resources offer valuable insights, including success stories of students who have undergone partial studies and guidance for students interested in exploring these opportunities.

Moreover, information is disseminated through newsletters sent to the university community and during organised information sessions with students. In these sessions, students are provided with details about the Regulations for Sending Vilnius University Students for a Partial Study Period at Foreign Education and Study Institutions, the Procedures for Organizing Erasmus Internships for Students and Graduates of Vilnius University, as well as information on how to earn credits for their study periods and the procedures for appealing if they are dissatisfied with the results of credit recognition.

The selection process for study exchanges occurs twice a year, typically on a per-semester basis. Students are chosen for overseas studies and internships following predefined criteria and requirements, with the organisation of this process overseen by the International Studies

Coordinator at the Faculty of Law (FL). Decisions regarding student selections are made by a committee established by order of the FL Dean.

Students in the integrated Law study program have the option to pursue partial studies during their third and fourth years, while MA students can do so in the second semester of their studies. However, there are certain objective limitations for MA students when it comes to their exchange opportunities. These constraints are primarily related to the duration of their studies. For instance, students are generally unable to participate in exchanges during the first semester due to restrictions imposed by the mobility procedure. Additionally, partial studies are less common during the final semester when students are focused on preparing their master's theses.

Number of students who left to study abroad with the mobility programme: integrated Law study programme - in 2019-2020 went 31 students, in 2020-2021 went 13 students and in 2021-2022 went 17 students to study abroad.

Situation changes while speaking about MA students, who went to study abroad. In 2019-2020 there were only 3 students, in 2020-2022 there were none students that went to study abroad.

There were only 1 student from integrated Law studies that had an internship abroad (in 2020-2021) and 8 students from MA, that had internships abroad (from 2019 to 2022).

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

Students have many ways to get academic support. The VU Student Services and Career Department offer support to students on various matters, including admissions, the study process, financial assistance, internships, and other related issues. This support is offered by academic consultants, who are available to assist all students, whether they are from Lithuania or foreign countries. Mentioned department also offers a range of free services to assist students in shaping their career path from the outset of their studies. These services include individual career counselling, self-assessment tests and questionnaires, review of resumes (CVs) and motivation letters, career development workshops, etc. Faculty also offers academic consultations to its students on various academic matters, including learning outcomes, course content and selection, individual study plans, and credit transfer. These consultations are available through the chairpersons of the study program committees, the Faculty of Law Vice-Dean for Studies, and the Academic Consultant.

Faculty of Law students have access to various forms of financial assistance. These include incentive scholarships, one-off social grants for specific situations, and one-off target scholarships for achievements in sports, culture, or academic/social activities. The procedures for awarding these scholarships and grants are outlined in the Scholarship Regulations of Vilnius University. Students can also apply for social scholarships provided by the State Studies Foundation, utilise state-supported loans to cover their study or living expenses, and receive financial benefits if they have disabilities through the Department for the Affairs of Disabled under the Ministry of Social Security and Labor. Additionally, the Education Exchanges Support

Foundation offers opportunities to reimburse study costs and scholarships to citizens of specific foreign countries studying in MA programs. Worth mentioning that students from Ukraine get free dormitories and scholarships.

The Counselling and Training Centre at the Faculty of Philosophy in Vilnius University offers professional psychological support provided by psychologists and psychotherapists to all VU students. Students can receive counselling individually, in groups, or even as couples or families. Vilnius University sponsors student counselling, which means there are special payment conditions in place. The first four individual counselling sessions are offered free of charge to students, while the first eight group counselling sessions are also free. Family counselling and subsequent individual or group counselling are available at reduced fees, which are reviewed annually and approved by the Rector's Order. Furthermore, the Centre's community psychologists offer free emergency counselling (up to three sessions) to members of the VU community in cases of suicide risk. They also conduct educational and preventive activities in the field of mental health. It's worth noting that foreign students can receive consultations in English or Russian languages. Additionally, the Centre organises seminars and workshops on various topics related to mental health for the benefit of the university community, such as stress management, overcoming procrastination, self-awareness, and creativity. So, only the first few sessions with psychologists or psychotherapists are free, then students have to pay to get psychological help.

3.3.5 Evaluation of the sufficiency of study information and student counselling

At the start of their studies, the primary goal is to ensure the smooth integration of new community members. Worth mentioning, that the integration process to VU's community and studies itself is highly developed. Students have a freshman camp, they are separated into groups, each of them gets a representative, which helps with any upcoming questions or problems. They also get an opportunity to talk to faculties administration and give feedback about studies. According to students, Vilnius university is a unique place for integrating students. Students get an invitation to attend teaching classes, which are organised every month. In these classes students are taught how to get a book from the bible, where to seek for academic/financial support, etc. Vilnius University Student Union (VUSA) prepares a Student Life Guide in both Lithuanian and English to assist students. Additionally, students have access to a VU video guide consisting of short videos covering various topics relevant to newcomers. To facilitate integration, an Integration Week is organised for students, featuring a wide range of lectures and discussions on academic matters and their chosen professions. During this week, students interact with faculty representatives, receive presentations on their specific study programs, learn about academic ethics, and receive crucial information about the study process, available counselling and support services, students' rights and responsibilities, and leisure activities. Furthermore, a short introductory course on the basics of the Lithuanian language is provided, and foreign students are introduced to the city of Vilnius. These events not only serve to offer essential information for academic success and acquaint students with the university's units, services, and support systems, but they also create opportunities for students to connect with one another, fostering a smoother integration process. Vilnius University Student Information System offers personalised information to each student in both

Lithuanian and English. Students can access and view their study plan (curriculum), course unit descriptions, examination schedules, grades, study fees, choose elective courses, access information related to their final master's thesis topics, submit applications, and view extracts from orders, among other functions.

Strengths and weaknesses of this evaluation area:

(1) Strengths:

1. Well-developed communication through social media (VU website, Facebook, etc.). Information about admission, academic, financial, social help, mobility opportunities is easy to find and understandable to students (and all of that is adapted to foreign students, who do not speak Lithuanian - information is available in English too).
2. Law integrated study programme has consistently ranked among the most sought-after study programs in Lithuania each year, consistently placing within the top three programs across all funding categories, drawing the highest number of students (there were 1175 applicants and almost 300 students that were admitted to this study programme in 2022).
3. Study programme International and European Law admits about 20 students each year (in 2019-2021) and the number of students may be little, but working in small groups and personalised attention to students is a strength of this study programme, which is important for students coming from other countries.
4. Very wide mobility opportunities - Faculty of Law has made 95 Erasmus agreements and other agreements with higher education institutions located in 27 countries.

(2) Weaknesses:

1. Only the first few sessions with psychologists or psychotherapists are free, then students have to pay to get psychological help, which is not financially available to everyone.
2. Mobility opportunities are not adapted to master students because of their course and study programme length. In 2019-2020 there were only 3 students, in 2020-2022 there were zero students that went to study abroad.

3.4. TEACHING AND LEARNING, STUDENT PERFORMANCE AND GRADUATE EMPLOYMENT

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

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

The teaching and learning process is planned and implemented according to legislation requirements and internal procedures.

Studies at the FL are carried out in the full-time form in semesters. The studies of each course unit begin with an introduction of the course unit aim, learning outcomes, study procedure, teaching-learning methods, organisation of independent work, and assessment of students' achievements to students.

The main types of studying are contact classes (lectures, seminars, practical sessions, consultations) in auditoriums and independent work by students (self-study of literature, work on written papers, specific tasks, etc.). Contact classes are also conducted online in individual cases.

The entire study process is organised with an emphasis on the student-centred nature of studies and on the importance of independent work by students. The teaching-learning methods in combination with a large amount of supplementary study material of each course unit available on the VU Virtual Learning Environment provides flexibility to students and encourages the development of practical skills.

For example, in semesters 1-6 of the integrated study programme *Law*, the share of contact hours is 38-46%, while the share of contact hours decreases to 4% in semester 10. It means that 67% of the total student workload is devoted to independent work in this study programme in total. Such distribution of contact and self-study hours reflects the concept of the study programme design where the beginning of studies focuses on the acquisition of the essential legal knowledge and on the development of the ability to study independently and later, the study time is devoted to research, studies of sources, internship, and the preparation of the final master's thesis.

Internships are usually carried out in the area of chosen study specialisation. During internship a student is supervised by a person who has at least Master's degree in law or equivalent higher education qualification and who has at least five years' experience in law practice.

Virtual teaching-learning methods, which are an effective complement to contact classes and independent work, will continue to be widely used in the university.

Not all semester course units start at the same time implementing the MA study programme International and European Law – only one or two course units are studied intensively. Such organisation of studies makes it possible to invite specialists from foreign higher education institutions who are unable to come for the whole semester; in addition, students often note that it is easier for them to plan their study load, focus on a specific topic, and feel less stressed about assessment.

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

VU ensures conditions to study for socially vulnerable groups and students with special needs.

VU approved a five-year Vilnius University Diversity and Equal Opportunities Strategy 2020-2025. According to the Strategy, the VU invests in the adaptation of the University environment and studying process to socially vulnerable groups by providing access to compensatory equipment, consulting students and teaching staff on issues of the accessibility of studies and allowing students to study according to individual study plans.

VU Community Development Department has a Disability Affairs Coordinator responsible for analysis and monitoring the needs of members of the University community with disabilities, as well as for organisation and coordination the provision of appropriate conditions for study and work, and for ensuring inclusion. Each VU faculty has appointed a special contact person who provides full information on financial support, the study process adaptation to individual needs and available compensatory equipment.

The most important information for students with disabilities is available on the VU website.

Other socially vulnerable groups are provided with appropriate financial support (one-off social grants in case of death of relatives, natural disaster, illness, etc.; VU nominal scholarship for students from low-income families, etc.) and all the required services (psychological counselling, spiritual support, etc.).

The expert team did not find any evidence that VU has challenging issues in the area.

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

VU has developed and applied a systematic approach of the monitoring of the student study process.

The assessment of achieved learning outcomes is planned and organised by the teaching staff according to the course unit description approved at the meeting of the Study Programme Committee.

Students are familiarised with the assessment methods, their application and time limits for interim and final assessment during the first lecture, all of which are detailed in the descriptions of course units. The assessment strategy and assessment methods to be applied in the course units of the FL study programmes correlate with the teaching-learning methods, which enable to achieve the intended learning outcomes, motivate students for continuous independent learning, and critical (self)assessment of their knowledge and abilities.

A final assessment of students' achievements is obligatory. Almost all course units are completed by one of the different forms of written examination or a written and oral examination, or the preparation of a written project/paper. All the competencies developed during all study programmes are assessed through the final master's thesis also through the final examination for integrated cycle students and for the master study programme Criminal Justice.

Feedback to students mostly is provided during contact classes (in the classroom or online) and individually, as well as for the entire group or in writing through e-tools.

The FL monitors the study progress of students on several levels: the course unit, all students of a given year, and the study programme that the students study in.

Progress on the level of all students of a specific year is monitored by the VU Study Administration Department. If there are repeating trends in the assessment of students, the grades are discussed with the administrative staff of faculties operating such studies and with the Study Programme Committee.

On the level of a particular year of the study programme, student drop-out levels are monitored and an action plan for drop-out prevention is implemented by the VU Student Services and Career Department.

The expert did not find any shortcomings or areas to improve regarding the study process and evaluations. One thing is for VU FL to ensure that all students get feedback systematically as some students mentioned that the guest lecturers or lecturers that are not full academics might be hesitant to provide full feedback.

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

Employability of graduates are analysed by data provided by Lithuanian State institutions, such as Employment Service under the Ministry of Social Security and Labour of the Republic of Lithuania and Government Strategic Analysis Centre STRATA.

Additionally, the monitoring of further studies and careers of VU graduates is implemented through the Career Management Information System karjera.lt tools.

The highest number of 2018-2020 graduates employed under employment contracts was among the graduates of the MA study programme *Criminal Justice*. Every year, more than 80% of the graduates of this study programme get employed in Lithuania 12 months after graduation (as lawyers, junior legal and allied professionals, and policy and administration specialists).

The employment rate of the graduates of the integrated study programme *Law* of the years 2018-2020 under employment contracts 12 months after graduation varies annually at around 60% (as lawyers, junior legal and allied professionals, legal professionals, policy and administration professionals). The majority work in private limited liability companies and budgetary institutions.

According to the Government Strategic Analysis Centre *STRATA*, a significant proportion of VU FL graduates are not in hired employment: 34% of 2018 graduates and 38% of 2019 graduates. The main reason is that some of them are self-employed, which is not reflected in the data of the STRATA tool.

The expert panel concludes that even if the data seems to show not very high rates of employment, the expert panel saw that almost all students are employed even during their

studies which already shows that the graduates will be able to find job opportunities after graduation. To be frank most of the students from the integrated cycle already worked in positions that are related to the legal/law field. The expert panel had extensive discussions about student employment. In most western countries employment during the “first” cycle (or integrated) studies is very rare. The experts appreciate the fact that the students work and can catch the link between what they learn and what they see in the “real” law world. However, VU cannot turn a blind eye to the fact that this disrupts the study process and students have less time to concentrate on their studies/ research/ mobility/ extracurricular activities/ etc. The experts also saw that some social partners are more eager to compete for the students with other social partners for employment rather than involve themselves to genuinely improve the quality of study programmes. In the end, we decided that even though this is quite a usual matter for students in Lithuania to start work from an early age, VU could become a leader and try to break this cycle. Firstly, this should start from increasing the scope and amount of scholarships or to find other ways to delay the start of student employment, so students would have more time that could be dedicated to try other activities which the University offers (research, academic organisations, enjoy the student life years in general, etc.) and not work. Also, it might be useful for VU to have more data and broader data themselves which would be related to employment if the official data cannot show true employment of graduates.

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

VU implemented policies to ensure academic integrity, tolerance, and non-discrimination.

VU has approved a five-year Vilnius University Diversity and Equal Opportunities Strategy 2020-2025. The Strategy contains the objectives related to gender equality, cultural diversity and social exclusion, and anti-discrimination.

Additionally, in line with the Vilnius University Gender Equality Plan 2021-2025 (which aims to ensure the effective and continuous implementation of gender equality), as of October 2022, a Gender Equality Coordinator has been appointed in the FL. The Gender Equality Coordinator is responsible for the development of anti-discrimination policies and practices at the University, for monitoring the equality of the study process and working conditions, and for consultations to staff and students on the issues of equality and diversity.

No cases of breaching academic integrity, non-tolerant behaviour or cases of discrimination have been identified in SER or during site visits to VU in the last few years. During the period under analysis, the Faculty Academic Ethics Commission received two applications concerning unethical behaviour – a complaint made by a student was not investigated according within the competence of the Commission and a complaint made by a member of the teaching staff concerning unethical behaviour of a student was granted (the student was reprimanded). As well 3 students were expelled from VU for dishonesty during the assessment of students’ achievements or for plagiarism in the preparation of written papers, and 3 students were reprimanded for similar reasons (with reference to SER, p. 57, p. 58).

The expert panel concludes that the system in place works with examples provided above.

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

VU has clearly described the procedure for assessing learning achievements.

A student who disagrees with the final assessment (grade) for a course unit may submit a reasoned written appeal to the Dispute Resolution Commission of the faculty. Appeals against the final assessment of the final master's thesis and final examination are not allowed. Appeals regarding violations of the interim assessment, final assessment of students' achievements, final examination, or the final master's thesis defence procedure may be lodged by students.

A decision of the Dispute Resolution Commission of the faculty concerning the final assessment is final. Other decisions of the Commission may be appealed to the VU Central Dispute Resolution Commission.

According to the SER, between 2019 and 2021, the FL Dispute Resolution Commission received 91 applications, all of them from students concerning the final assessment of students' achievements in course units. Such an increase in the number of appeals in 2019 is related to the assessment of one lecturer's course unit (more than 40 appeals). It should be noted that this lecturer no longer works at the FL which is regarded as a positive that FL responded quickly to the students' wishes.

During the period under analysis, the Commission did not receive any complaints regarding procedural irregularities in the assessment of students' achievements or regarding other disputes between members of the academic community.

Strengths and weaknesses of this evaluation area:

(1) Strengths:

1. Strong academic community.
2. Long-lasting value-based relations, cooperation and partnership with all stakeholders, social partners and employers.
3. High level of employability of students, especially in private practice.

(2) Weaknesses:

1. Early employability of students.

3.5. TEACHING STAFF

Study field teaching staff are evaluated according to the following indicators:

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

The study programs under evaluation are delivered by 135 teaching staff at the faculty of law, of whom 76 are men and 59 are women, the expert panel praises the almost gender balanced faculty. 74.8% of the teaching staff working have the doctor's degree in law, their research interests and activities are relevant for the topics of course units they teach and the integration of the subject content into the field of legal research. 25.2% of the teaching staff have a master's degree in law and are active legal practitioners and/or young researchers in specific areas of law. 11 of the teaching staff have defended their doctoral dissertations or undergone the habilitation procedure in foreign higher education institutions. There is a high level of language proficiency (English, Russian and German). The majority of the teaching staff (74.1%) are highly qualified lawyers who are engaged in professional practice. The term of office for a teaching staff member is five years. An open-ended employment contract is concluded with the teaching or research staff recruited for the main position after they win the competition for the same position at the HEI for the second time in a row. The teaching staff is of very high quality and with many high-level practitioners involved in the teaching. The use of high-level practitioners together with a strong academic teaching staff improves the quality of the education provided by the HEI.

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

Academic exchange through the Erasmus+, NordPlus, ISEP programs and under bilateral agreements are among the most popular ways of qualification development among the teaching staff. The division of studies keeps the teaching staff informed about academic mobility opportunities, consults and provides organisational support. The mobility of lecturers through exchange programs and projects depends on their personal initiative. The administration of the faculty of law encourages such initiative, provides organisational assistance and creates conditions for adjusting the timetable of studies. In 2021: 7 staff members made use of the mobility programs and in 2022: 12 staff members made use of the mobility program.

The HEI provides very good conditions for ensuring teaching staff's academic mobility and an incentive program is established to stimulate such a mobility. It is hoped that the situation post-Covid19 will boost the use of the various mobility programs even more.

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

The teaching staff improves their competences through a wide range of conferences, seminars or trainings, through membership in national and international networks, organisations and associations, as well as participation in different projects. Beginning from the year 2022, the faculty of law holds annual individual interviews of the teaching staff with the Dean on the performance of the teaching staff. The teaching staff do not systematically record their participation in professional development events and training. The participation of the teaching staff in the events and trainings to improve pedagogical qualification is not sufficient. An incentive program was created in 2022. This program provides financial incentives for participation in lectures, courses, or training of at least 4 hours, for the sharing of good teaching-learning practice with academic colleagues at the international and national level, for research

on teaching-learning issues and its presentation. The HEI provides very good conditions to improve the competences of the teaching staff. Yet the participation of the teaching staff at the HEI is insufficient. The incentive program created in 2022 may help to increase the participation of the teaching staff. It is too early to evaluate the impact of this incentive program at the HEI and particularly whether it will increase the participation of the teaching staff.

The expert review committee would also like to suggest giving bigger incentives to young researchers as the private labour market in law creates a challenge for young researchers and innovators to choose fully academic careers. Some kind of cooperation with social partners might result in a more flexible work-academia balance which would resolve this issue.

Strengths and weaknesses of this evaluation area:

(1) Strengths:

1. Enthusiastic and highly qualified teachers adapting their teaching to the needs of the Lithuanian society and the professional practice.
2. Teachers are very close to practice, and many are highly qualified lawyers, allowing an applied teaching approach.

(2) Weaknesses:

1. Low staff academic participation in the activities proposed to improve the competence of the teaching staff.
2. The private labour market in law creates a challenge to offer incentives for young researchers and innovators to choose fully academic careers.

3.6. LEARNING FACILITIES AND RESOURCES

Study field learning facilities and resources are evaluated according to the following indicators:

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

The University has 25 auditoriums which can accommodate more than 2000 students. All auditoriums are equipped with necessary multimedia equipment. It is noteworthy that some auditoriums have been fitted out and opened through the donations of social partners, primarily law firms operating in Lithuania. All premises meet legal requirements of occupational safety. The facilities have been adjusted to allow movement of persons with reduced mobility. There are several social places, including cafeterias, which enable studying and informal interaction among members of the academic community.

The scholarly community has access to main relevant databases usually utilised in academic research. The law faculty since 2019 is developing a series of up to 25 textbooks in fields which are relevant to the students.

The University's IT centre provides a wide range of services related to having access to various academic sources.

During the visit the expert committee saw a vibrant classical law school in operation. No concerns were raised during the interviews about the adequacy of physical and informational resources. The committee also has the impression that financial sources are optimally used for the purposes of high academic quality, at the same time the faculty has little if any influence upon the financial income.

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

The self-evaluation report says that the renovation of the largest auditoriums is planned for the near future, where the heating and air-conditioning system will be replaced. At the moment already the renovation of the heating and air-conditioning system of one auditorium is finished.

The recommendation of the previous evaluation was to revise the book purchasing policy, as the impression to the visitor was that the range of books was quite limited. The report says that a commission has been formed to deal with the acquisition of the most recent literature. Yet the budget figures for this remain uneven over the three years, for instance 29 700 euro in 2020 and 2 600 euro in 2021. The fluctuation of these figures is because the teaching staff published in 2020 several textbooks, which were purchased by the library and made available to the students. Without this aspect, the library budget is low and needs to be increased.

The committee visited the facilities and was satisfied with their status and equipment. The committee had a tour of the library and developed an understanding that students have access to relevant academic sources. There are support services available.

Strengths and weaknesses of this evaluation area:

(1) Strengths:

1. In general, the university has good facilities and resources for the implementation of studies.
2. Preparation of a series of textbooks in relevant fields of law.
3. Access to main academic databases.
4. Open spaces for socialising.
5. Members with physical disabilities have access to the facilities.

(2) Weaknesses:

1. None.

3.7. STUDY QUALITY MANAGEMENT AND PUBLIC INFORMATION

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

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

The system is based on a clear and appropriate normative basis. There are concrete responsibilities within the University and the faculty for quality assurance implementation. The emphasis is on collective approach, such as the Study Programme Committee. There are clear democratic procedures on the appointment of the Committee members. The Committee has a clear mandate and crucial role in ensuring the academic quality. There is a hands-on approach. Student representatives are included with equal voice in the Committee.

The committee had a lengthy discussion with the academic community on how the study quality management system operates in practice. The committee is confident that the system also works effectively in practice. For instance, several faculty members gave examples of detailed discussions related to the choices between various courses in the study programmes.

Yet it was not fully clear to the expert committee, by following the internal discussions among the faculty members which developed in connection with this topic, what are the principles used for resolving dilemmas between courses to be taught. Is it the seniority of the faculty members concerned, the matter that a course “has always been” in the curriculum, the pressure from external stakeholders? Higher transparency internally and externally is required here.

Overall, the criteria do not have any shortcomings and VU has an effective internal quality assurance system.

3.7.2. Evaluation of the effectiveness of the involvement of stakeholders (students and other stakeholders) in internal quality assurance

Various social partners are involved in the Study Program Committee, law faculty council, defence commissions and student’s internship supervision, delivering lectures, tutoring, scientific society, and by giving financial support. There is also the Strategic Planning Committee, which meets twice a year and assists in formulating and implementing the law faculty mission and strategic priorities. The demands of the labour market are an important factor taken into account in collective discussions.

Based on the written report (SER), it was not exactly clear how and to what extent the views from the stakeholders are taken into account in reality. The committee had the possibility to inquire into the mechanism of study quality management directly from representatives of stakeholders and students. It transpired that the stakeholders were actually quite well aware of each study programme content and many examples were given to the committee on how suggestions for opening some courses were approved. The committee is therefore satisfied that there exists an effective internal quality assurance mechanism taking into account the views of stakeholders.

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

There is a clear and consistent system of collecting feedback from the students in relation to their studies. The questionnaires are detailed and enable to identify areas of concern, as well as areas which are to be considered exemplary. It is important to emphasise that the surveys are

available to all faculty staff. The results of the surveys are monitored and action is taken if needed. For instance, it is reported that in the autumn semester 2021 – 2022 the overall satisfaction of the integrated study law programme students decreased to 3.77, which the report explains as the consequence of changing final assessment into auditoriums rather than online as before. A number of meetings were held with students in the attempt to explain the reasons for this decision and the envisaged security measures regarding Covid-19 were presented. The overall satisfaction of the master study programme in international and European Law students dropped to 3.92 in the spine semester 2021-2022. There were discussions with the students, where criticism towards bad administration and lack of timely information was voiced. As a result, a new coordinator of international studies was appointed.

The committee was not alerted to any challenges in this area during the meetings.

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

The overall student satisfaction with the studies remains consistently high. The average score of the students of the integrated study law programme varies between 4.03 and 4.19. The average score of Master students is higher: in the Criminal Justice programme it is between 4.36 and 5, and in the International and European Law programme between 4.22 and 4.70. The formal surveys are complemented with traditional meetings between administration members and the students. The system employed allows the institution to take immediate action if necessary for securing high-quality academic studies.

During the meetings, the faculty members confirmed that the satisfaction results are discussed between individual lecturers and the administration. This shows that all sides take the opinion of the students seriously.

Strengths and weaknesses of this evaluation area:

(1) Strengths:

1. There is a clear and transparent division of responsibilities for study quality assurance, strategic and daily planning, implementation and monitoring.
2. Academic quality assurance mechanisms are based on the involvement of stakeholders and students.

(2) Weaknesses:

1. It is not transparent by whom and under which principles conflicts concerning the choice of courses in the study programme are resolved.

IV. RECOMMENDATIONS

Evaluation Area	Recommendations for the Evaluation Area (study cycle)
Intended and achieved learning outcomes and curriculum	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. In the study programme in International and European Law the expert team recommends thoroughly advantages/challenges of an approach that maximises possibilities for students to individualise their study programme. 2. The expert team recommends the HEI to assess the role of 'internationalisation' in its study programmes, thereby addressing all relevant measures to allow and stimulate students to broaden their perspective. A clear policy in this regard can at best be established, embedded and monitored. For the expert team it is considered being a key yard. In this regard, the expert team recommends to consider whether certain obligatory subject fields could be usefully taught in a foreign language as part of a global/international strategy. Regarding internationalisation, the expert team advises the programme to also take 'internships' into full consideration. 3. Regarding the input from various perspectives and stakeholders and its integration in the process of decision making on design of the programmes and learning outcomes, a structural, systematic and well documented approach is recommended by the expert team. It can at best lead to an assessment of the study programmes on a systematic basis. 4. In view of the list of specialisations, the expert team wonders whether the broad field of Business Law and Civil Law can be captured in one specialisation and recommends the programme committee to reflect on this. Moreover, the expert team recommends the programme management to reflect on the balance between compulsory and elective law courses and consider in this regard what, taking into account nowadays' society and the need for future proof curricula, the status of courses (elective/compulsory) ought to be. The expert team refers in this regard to courses concerning private international law/Arbitration, insolvency, consumer protection, data protection, insurance etc. 5. Regarding the MA in International and European Law, taking into account the choice of the compulsory courses - common to all specialisations - and the corresponding credits, as well as the name and content of the 'specialisations', the expert team

	shares the opinion that a thorough assessment of the study programme and its name is recommended.
Links between science (art) and studies	1. Involve more students in joint research with teaching staff or social partners.
Student admission and support	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Student psychological help should be free and not limited to a few sessions. 2. Master programs study plans should include mobility windows or some other solutions, so there would be possibilities for master students to use mobility.
Teaching and learning, student performance and graduate employment	1. The expert team, aware of the early integration of students in the labour market, recommends to closely monitor advantages and disadvantages (eg. regarding involvement in academic life or in taking opportunities in internationalisation), as well as carefully address the issue if required.
Teaching staff	1. Find ways to motivate/ or make it mandatory if needed for the teaching staff to participate in programs, courses where they improve their competencies.
Learning facilities and resources	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Take seriously the weakness identified in the previous report and renovate the large auditoriums, in particular heating and air-conditioning systems. 2. Secure effective and co-operative implementation of academic sources purchasing arrangements.
Study quality management and public information	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Students' involvement in quality control mechanisms needs to become transparent and consistent. 2. Articulate transparent procedures on how possible conflicts concerning study program development are resolved.

V. SUMMARY

The expert team got a positive impression of the analysis of the curriculum, in extension the intended and achieved outcomes that are realised. VU's FL makes clear choices in designing its study programmes, with a relatively limited programme offering opting for academic quality that is recognised by society. The programmes focus on fundamental legal knowledge that have to allow students to answer to ever changing needs of society. Moreover, the programme is embedded in an academic, research-oriented, tradition.

The programme management seems aware of the importance of individualisation of the study programme by the students. Nevertheless, according to the expert team, it brings a fragile balance with the need for a 'core' in the study programme and the importance of crucial study fields that the degree in law has to cover.

The fact that, though the programme is aware of the importance of 'internationalisation' for the quality of education, students integrate only limited 'international' experiences in their study programme, is a point in need of improvement. It is the main concern of the expert team in relation to the programme outcomes.

It is unclear to the expert team whether all the valuable input the FL disposes of (internal and external stakeholders, academic network) are structurally gathered and used for systematic assessment of the study programmes.

It would be worthwhile to discuss with the FL and the central VU administration on the possibilities to provide bigger, broader student support, especially the financial aspect, so the students would be able to further the start of joining the labour market. The expert panel sees the positive side of joining the labour market, especially when VU students without the diploma can already find "small" positions in legal or other law institutions but there is still the question about the student life. If a student would start working for example from the 4th year, they could use mobility, do research, join academic or other student organisations, etc. Also, free time for students is needed to socialise with groupmates, try out extracurricular activities etc, enjoy youth life and to ensure a healthy life-studies-work balance is hard.

The expert team acknowledges that the VU established a strong partnership with the social partners and employers. Students graduated from the programme seem to be well prepared for qualified jobs in the public and private sectors. Graduates from VU are valued in the labour market by various employers, having good fundamental law knowledge.

Expert panel chairperson signature:

Prof. dr. Bertel De Groote

(signature)