CENTRE FOR QUALITY ASSESSMENT IN HIGHER EDUCATION

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EVALUATION REPORT

STUDY FIELD of JOURNALISM

at Vytautas Magnus University

Expert panel:

1. **Prof. dr. Jörg Matthes (panel chairperson),** academic*;*
2. **Dr. Penelope H. Sheets Thibaut,** *academic;*
3. **Prof. dr. Adrian Hadland,** *academic;*
4. **Ms Vaiva Žukienė,** *representative of social partners;*
5. **Mr Matthew Kitching,** *students' representative.*

Evaluation coordinator – *Ms Natalija Bogdanova*

Vilnius
2021

Study Field Data*

Title of the study programme	***FUTURE MEDIA AND JOURNALISM***
State code	6211JX064
Type of studies	University
Cycle of studies	Second
Mode of study and duration (in years)	Full time, 1,5 years
Credit volume	90 ECTS
Qualification degree and (or) professional qualification	Master of Social Sciences
Language of instruction	English
Minimum education required	Bachelor level
Registration date of the study programme	19 Feb. 2007

** if there are **joint / two-fields / interdisciplinary** study programs in the study field, please designate it in the foot-note*

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CONTENTS

I. INTRODUCTION

1.1. BACKGROUND OF THE EVALUATION PROCESS

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

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

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

On the basis of 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 was evaluated as satisfactory (2 points).

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

1.2. EXPERT PANEL

The expert panel was assigned according to the Experts Selection Procedure (hereinafter referred to as the Procedure) as approved by the Director of Centre for Quality Assessment in Higher Education on 31 December 2019 Order No. V-149. The site visit to the HEI was conducted by the panel on *28 April, 2021*.

> **Prof. dr. Jörg Matthes (panel chairperson)** *Head of Dep. Of Communication, University of Vienna, Austria;*
> **Dr. Penelope H. Sheets Thibaut,** *Senior lecturer at Dep. of Communication Sciences, University of Amsterdam, Netherlands;*
> **Prof. dr. Adrian Hadland,** *Deputy Dean of Faculty of Arts and Humanities, University of Stirling, U.K..*
> **Ms. Vaiva Žukienė,** *Chair of the Lithuanian Ethics Commission of Journalists and Publishers, Lithuania;*
> **Mr. Matthew Kitching,** *PhD student in Higher Education: Research, Evaluation and Enhancement at Lancaster University, U.K.*

1.3. GENERAL INFORMATION

The documentation submitted by the HEI follows the outline recommended by SKVC. No additional documents have been provided by the HEI before, during and/or after the site visit.

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

Journalism programs across the globe face the constant challenge of trying to balance the practical skills that will be needed in a rapidly changing, often digital workplace with the critical, reflexive and analytical skills that professional journalists need to give them the edge over amateur or untrained competitors. In addition, in the age of 'Fake News', misinformation and rising state power, there is an imperative to strengthen and consolidate the relationship between journalism and democratic values such as accountability, transparency and truth. Therefore, it is important that Lithuanian universities continue to nurture and support journalism departments which can produce graduates who have the skills and values needed to work in these demanding times.

It was clear to the review team assessing Vytautas Magnus University's 2nd cycle programme in Future Media and Journalism, that this represents a standout example of best practice in the study field. Graduates will make important contributions to the future of journalism and the future of democracy, not just in Lithuania but in the region and across the globe. The combination of praxis, theory, industry links, the highly-qualified and motivated staff and the obvious pride with which the journalism programme is regarded by the university itself, is an example to many Higher Education Institutions.

It is worth stating that the Covid19 pandemic has impacted the review panel's capacity to conduct a complete and comprehensive assessment. Without physically seeing media laboratories, studios, libraries, working spaces or people, it is hard to judge how they compare regionally or globally. On-line discussion can never quite match face-to-face conversation as it prevents, to some extent, the trust and human intuition that colours our usual physical interactions and judgments. However, the review team is grateful for the openness and candour of the participants from Vytautas Magnus University, whether student, teacher, alumnus, industry representative or university executive. We were also very happy with the technical support and with the excellent organisation and support that made this non-physical assessment so enjoyable.

II. GENERAL ASSESSMENT

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

Study field and cycle assessment in points by evaluation areas

No.	Evaluation Area	Evaluation of an Area in points*
1.	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	3
5.	Teaching staff	5
6.	Learning facilities and resources	5
7.	Study quality management and public information	4
	Total:	29

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

III. STUDY FIELD ANALYSIS

3.1. INTENDED AND ACHIEVED LEARNING OUTCOMES AND CURRICULUM

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

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

(1) Factual situation

The study program of Future Media and Journalism trains experienced analysts and communications experts. The aim of the program is strategically focussed to meet and professionally adhere to the changing market/social needs and also to technologically/digitally driven trends.

As mentioned in the SER, the field of journalism studies (in general) and the graduate program in Future Media and Journalism (in particular) address the above identified developments by ensuring that students receive a solid education in journalism, compliant with national and international requirements. This program trains the competent professionals required in today's rapidly changing and technologically enhanced mediated communications environment.

The Future Media and Journalism study program directly draws on the latest developments in the journalistic profession through the expertise of the faculty and cooperation with external partners/stakeholders. It aims at training engaged media professionals open to societal challenges, possessing journalistic knowledge and expertise to adequately respond to various societal needs, to critically analyze the impact of mediated communications in public life, and to initiate innovative news services and produce multimedia products.

Program graduates acquire the qualifications to work in diverse media groups: print, radio, television and online-only organizations which can be conventional news media or start-ups; furthermore, they can work in journalism and media research and training institutions (colleges and schools), as well as in media analysis and monitoring organizations, market research companies and in web design/production companies.

According to statistical data on occupation status provided by STRATA, 12 months after graduation, 70% of program graduates (on average) are working in the professional field.

(2) Expert judgement/indicator analysis

Strong emphasis is put on developing entrepreneurship, leadership and innovation-based thinking skills. Students acquire multiple competencies (professional, conceptual, analytical, social and personal skills) by participating in relevant subjects offered, and this ensures successful integration for the program graduates' into the job market.

Social partners and alumni evaluated this program very positively during the meeting at the site visit and appeared happy that students were being appropriately prepared for society and for the labour market. However, the panel notes a small but significant disconnect between learning and employability outcomes, illustrated by the EXIT data which indicates that only 55% of students in 2018 rated their study sessions (lectures, seminars, media labs,

etc) as good preparation for the labour market and 60% in 2019 thought their independent/self-study tasks had been helpful for the workplace. Clearly there is still work to be done to correlate the aims and learning outcomes of the program with the skills and real needs of the digital workplace.

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

The study programme's commitment to internationalisation and interdisciplinarity is recognised by university management as an important contribution to the institution's mission and objectives. There appears to be good synergy between the field, the study programme and the mission and strategy of VMU.

(2) Expert judgement/indicator analysis

This is an excellent programme for the HEI, which helps to raise its profile. A number of very accomplished and well known faculty members are involved in the programme, and that quality shows. At the same time, it's clear that these field leaders are struggling to find sufficient time to conduct and write up their research. This is limiting their capacity to contribute to the institution's emphasis on internationalisation.

3.1.3. Evaluation of the compliance of the field and cycle study programme with legal requirements
(1) Factual situation

The scope of the Future Media and Journalism programme is 90 ECTS (= 1.5 years). The MA Thesis (30 ECTS) comprises two elements, a research paper (6 ECTS) which is tested during students' internships, and the fully developed MA Thesis (24+6 ECTS = 30 ECTS). One ECTS corresponds to 26,67 hours of usual student work time.

(2) Expert judgement/indicator analysis

All legal requirements have been observed. In many respects, the programme offers far in excess of the minimum legal thresholds highlighting the inherent value of the programme.

3.1.4. Evaluation of compatibility of aims, learning outcomes, teaching/learning and assessment methods of the field and cycle study programs
(1) Factual situation

Learning outcomes of the programme are varied, relevant to the field, but clearly defined and care has been taken to map these onto teaching and learning activities. The learning outcomes of the program have been arranged into 5 broad clusters of competences (conceptual and theoretical knowledge and competences; analytical and research-based competences; professional competences and skills; social skills; personal skills).

(2) Expert judgement/indicator analysis

The program has succeeded in maintaining a balance between offering the critical, professional skills demanded by the field together with competencies in critical skills, in emerging technologies and in understanding modern media industry trends. It does seem,

8

from talking with students, that students may not recognize all the critical thinking and interdisciplinary skills they are gaining, and that they may not see how these are relevant to their career goals. Perhaps reconfiguring the learning outcomes to more explicitly include some of these broader theoretical and critical skills might help make that more transparent for students? Overall, however, there is certainly a coherence between the program's aims and its Learning Outcomes and the curriculum design, assessment methods and subjects (modules) all comply with the type and cycle of studies.

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

(1) Factual situation

The content of the program complies with second cycle requirements. All subjects correspond to the appropriate sequence in learning outcomes with students acquiring specific skills through the semesters, work experience and knowledge through the individually-chosen internships and self-reflective and analytical skills through the thesis.

(2) Expert judgement/indicator analysis

The program (including various stakeholders) has worked hard to ensure subjects and modules are up-to-date and reflect the challenges and demands of contemporary news environments. This includes areas such as the plaformization and algorithmization of professional journalistic production methods. In evaluating the totality of the field and cycle study programme subjects/modules, it is evident that there is consistent development of competences of students. The program is interdisciplinary and is arranged logically and sequentially, correlating with learning outcomes. The content of modules and final thesis topics align with both national and global trends and interests.

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

(1) Factual situation

Students have several opportunities to personalise the structure of their study program including meetings with students each semester to discuss their views and opinions about the programme which are then forwarded to the Study Program Committee. Students can also choose optional study subjects, individually propose and select topics for their assignments within different classes while internship placements are also chosen individually. The topic of the Final Thesis is adapted to the interests and expertise of the student. In addition, students are supported in modelling their career programs through VMU's Career Centre of Student Affairs.

(2) Expert judgement/indicator analysis

There does seem to be flexibility for personal student choice within the program's subjects and activities. Students, for instance may choose their internship and the subject of their Thesis and research project. However, there do not seem to be clearly defined pathways through the program that emphasise different skills and interests to allow distinct personal choices to be made in a more holistic manner, for example a preference for finance, visual or sport journalism.

3.1.7. Evaluation of compliance of final theses with the field and cycle requirements
(1) Factual situation
VMU staff strongly and quite persuasively defended the importance and value of the final thesis as a means of developing the analytical, evaluative and research skills of students.

(2) Expert judgement/indicator analysis
Consideration should be made to offering students an alternative to a Final Thesis, given the practice-oriented trajectory of the program. The program might consider a practical, multimedia project, or an investigative journalism project (also worth 30 ECTS) that will enhance students' portfolios – and therefore their employability – as an alternative to the traditional thesis. Not every student excels at academic theses, nor are these particularly valued by industry, and a wider spectrum of choices might be beneficial to the student experience. The panel does note that recent theses are impressively thorough and reflect extremely important contemporary media issues such as fake news, human rights and the significance of mobile phone usage. This does support the compliance of the theses with field and cycle requirements.

Strengths and weaknesses of this evaluation area:

(1) Strengths:
1. Updated, contemporary curriculum full of relevant skills and competencies.
2. Strong emphasis on internationalisation, including the language of instruction being English.

(2) Weaknesses:
1. The link between learning outcomes and employability.
2. The lack of students' understanding and appreciation of the relevance and importance of interdisciplinary and theoretical competencies, which are present in the curriculum but perhaps not emphasized as much as the newer practical skills.

3.2. LINKS BETWEEN SCIENCE (ART) AND STUDIES

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

3.2.1. Evaluation of the sufficiency of the science (applied science, art) activities implemented by the HEI for the field of research (art) related to the field of study
(1) Factual situation
The research profiles and efforts have taken a significant development since the last evaluation report. Overall, research is strongly connected to international scholarship and media production as well as creative industries. A large share of research activities is internationally competitive and relates to recent debates in the field. Furthermore, publication efforts have significantly increased, although the types of journals are not fully

visible. Yet there is a clear trend that the majority of publications are in English, there is a strong international profile, and tremendous international recognition of the research efforts. The motivational system in place works well.

Research activities in terms of grants are excellent, there are large scale as well as comparative projects, although there seems to be a slight focus on teaching oriented projects such as Erasmus Plus. Nevertheless, international visibility is very high, there is strong presence in editorial boards of international journals, with top journals among them, and faculty members have excellent contacts to research institutions in Europe and around the globe.

(2) Expert judgement/indicator analysis

Although the research output of this program is already excellent, the share of journal articles, especially those in top level outlets, could be further increased. The research activities are embedded in the general principles of Interdisciplinarity, Internationality, Impact. These three principles mark a great strength of this program and make it internationally competitive.

The program has developed a clear vision and strategy, it is a national leader, and at the forefront of the scientific debate.

Large scale European grants such as ERC are still missing but appear within reach and should be pursued. More resources to enable such large scale grant applications are necessary.

The UNESCO Chair is another outstanding achievement and the launch of the PhD program can further increase research visibility and output.

An SAB has been established, however, with "some partners/institutions with whom the Department's staff has research projects". The SAB should be more independent.

There is a risk that the major share of research activities are done by a limited number of internationally highly visible scholars. Furthermore, faculty members reported that there is limited time for research, so the balance between teaching, administration, and research needs to be kept in mind.

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

(1) Factual situation

The program is well connected to recent developments in journalism, practically and theoretically, especially with respect to media transformation, technological developments and recent professional techniques in journalism. This is visible in the research activities of faculty members and the various cooperations with external partners and stakeholders.

(2) Expert judgement/indicator analysis

The program is closely following the state of the art in journalism, especially with respect to recent developments in practical journalism.

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

(1) Factual situation

Students are well integrated, as for instance, in ongoing research projects, mobility schemes, scientific events, public events, or internship possibilities facilitated through the program. It is noteworthy that approximately 50% of the students are involved in research related activities at the Department.

(2) Expert judgement/indicator analysis
Students report that the involvement in research is good and that the methodological skills required for research activities are sufficient. This enables students to acquire skills related to the profession, to research methods, but also networking.

Strengths and weaknesses of this evaluation area:

(1) Strengths:
1. There is a vibrant research atmosphere, and research is at the pulse of pressing issues in society.
2. There is a strong research profile which is internationally visible, with significant grants and publications. The overall trend is positive, the program has taken an excellent development.
3. The arrival of the PhD program will further increase the impact and importance of this programme.

(2) Weaknesses:
1. More attention needs to be paid to create time for research, systematic research support, and research spaces, particularly for those faculty members who are not research active.
2. Like with any journalism programme, the tension between practice and theory is always present; in this case, the teachers clearly understand the links between these elements in the programme, but students seem more aware of the practical strengths and may not appreciate the theoretical training and links to science as much as they could.

3.3. STUDENT ADMISSION AND SUPPORT

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

3.3.1. Evaluation of the suitability and publicity of student selection and admission criteria and process
(1) Factual situation
The Admission Commission in the Department of Public Communications is responsible for admissions to the graduate program in Future Media and Journalism. Admissions are processed in accordance with the University's statute, study regulations and Application and Admission Procedures, as well as relevant Lithuanian law. The Admissions Commission applies a formula in order to make admissions decisions which takes account of subject evaluations in the diploma supplement, evaluation for the Bachelor's thesis, motivation letter

and information concerning English language proficiency. Applicants are notified of the Admission Commission's decision within 10 working days.

Admissions requirements are approved by the University's Senate and published on webpages for both the University and Faculty. Requirements are also communicated through social media channels. Prospective students apply online and applicants must possess a Bachelor's degree, related knowledge comprising at least 30 ECTS credits and good command of the English language. Applicants without appropriate credits in social sciences or the humanities may be admitted to the program subject to completion of an individually tailored supplementary study program.

In addition to promotion through the institution's website and social media the program is publicised through Kaunas and Lithuanian study fairs, 'open door' events and annual meetings between the Program Study Committee and prospective students. Information is also available from the Admissions Office.

Between 2017 and 2021 the program received a total of 93 applications and admitted 50 students. Across the same period the number of state-funded study places fluctuated between 5 and 10 each academic year. In total, 17 students were admitted without state funding, paying for their own studies.

(2) Expert judgement/indicator analysis

The program has responded positively to a recommendation from its last external evaluation to monitor students coming from different academic backgrounds and where necessary require them to undertake bridging courses. Regulations now specify the instances where students must undertake such a course; namely, where they do not hold 30ECTS in the social sciences or humanities. Courses take account of applicants without a prior university degree and those who have graduated from other disciplines.

Students informed the panel that entry criteria were clear and that they understood the selection process, which they identified as being fair and transparent.

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

(1) Factual situation

Applications from international students are processed centrally by the University, using the DreamApply system. Recognition of foreign qualifications is carried out by the International Cooperation Department (ICD), using guidance provided by the Centre for Quality Assessment in Higher Education. The University also reports recognition decisions to the Centre.

The University operates a Procedure for Recognition of Learning outcomes, including partial learning outcomes. The process is decentralized and organised either by the relevant faculty or International Cooperation Department. ICD receives the documentation and makes an initial assessment about the level of the qualifications and whether they were undertaken at a suitable institution. The Faculty then assesses the suitability of course content and the volume of study undertaken. Scrutiny of documentation may also be supported by an online interview where this is deemed necessary.

Recognition of non-formal and informal learning is regulated by the VMU Study Regulations in the Procedure for Assessment and Recognition of Competences acquired through Non-Formal and Informal Education and the VMU Description of Organization of

Non-formal Adult Education. These regulations take account of learning acquired in work settings, including voluntary work, internships, courses, seminars and projects; as well as self-learning.

In total the University has received 25 applications for recognition of prior learning between 2017 and 2021, of which 14 cases were successfully accredited. In fact, none of the remaining 11 applications were refused, rather students withdrew their application before the end of the admissions process, due to the Covid-19 pandemic and other factors.

(2) Expert judgement/indicator analysis
The Panel found that the University has appropriate policies for the recognition of foreign qualifications and prior learning.

3.3.3. Evaluation of conditions for ensuring academic mobility of students
(1) Factual situation
Information about mobility opportunities is produced by the VMU International Cooperation Department and the Faculty International Coordinator. This information is cascaded through the University website, intranet and social media, together with emails and presentations, including at Erasmus days.

The University has 35 teacher/staff exchange agreements with universities in a wide range of countries and bilateral agreements with 200 higher education institutions in 42 countries. Although students are provided with language preparation courses and guidance on practical matters from the International Relations Office the University recognises that outbound mobility is a challenge on the program.

Students engaging in study exchange programs agree their study plan with the University before attending the partner University and learning outcomes acquired during the mobility period are recognised with an academic certificate from the partner. Where the mobility period extends for multiple semesters, certificates must be issued after each semester.

All VMU students are eligible to apply for Erasmus+ and bilateral mobility programs and 105 students and graduates benefit from this on average. In relation to the program, between 2017 and 2020 a total of 6 students engaged in outgoing mobility studies and a further 4 graduates of the program participated in internships based in the Czech Republic, Malta and Italy. Over the same period 56 students participated in in-coming mobility sessions on the program. Students confirmed that where they have difficulty finding an internship or mobility opportunity the University supports them to ensure that they find a suitable option, which ensures that they are able to meet the learning outcomes. Students also praised the flexibility of mobility arrangements and the willingness of Faculty to support student participation in opportunities that are related to communication more broadly, rather than pure journalism courses and internships.

The Department of Public Communications helps to facilitate a range of development and training opportunities for journalism students. These include:
- 3 students attending a two-day training session on film and media literacy organised by the Latvian Academy of Culture.
- 2 students participated in online training provided by an Erasmus+ project on entrepreneurship, leadership, digital communication and marketing.

- 3 students are scheduled to participate in another Erasmus+ funded project, in the form of a Winter School held in France, designed to improve students' media literacy, evidence-based communication skills and their resilience towards disinformation.

(2)   Expert judgement/indicator analysis

There is a clear imbalance between incoming and outgoing mobility. VMU suffers from a number of challenges with respect to outbound student mobility. Some of these are problems nationally but include finance and the fact students often have to work to support their studies. Nevertheless, students recognise the value of participating in such opportunities and reported to the expert panel that they considered the University could do more to encourage students to take up international study and internship opportunities.

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

(1)   Factual situation

The SER states that academic support covers several key aspects, namely:

1. accessible and timely information on students' studies which allows them to choose their study courses according to their individual study needs and preference.
2. accessible and timely information which allows students to keep in line with key institutional issues concerning University regulations and activities such as Rector's orders, rules, mobility opportunities, student support information and career possibilities.
3. Information on the University's activities in respect of events, meetings, seminars, leisure and entertainment which support students' personal development.

Support is also provided in the form of regular consultations with teachers to clarify topics of study courses or assignments, evaluate students' learning progress and provide and gather feedback both for students and teachers.

In addition, support is provided by the Dean, Head of Public Communications Department and members of the Study Program Committee who periodically meet with the students and discuss issues pertaining to student experience and career opportunities. The Faculty Administration Office is also available to support students.

VMU Study Regulations require every member of academic staff to spend a specified number of hours per semester supporting students with homework, assignments and other course-related issues. These consultations are performed face-to-face during office hours and using online platforms.

Students are provided with an allotted time to discuss examination results.

The University's financial regulations relating to tuition are set out in the Description of Procedure for Compensation for Tuition Fees. Financial support is available, in the form of more lenient repayment schedules, for students who encounter difficulties paying their tuition fees. Students attending conferences and seminars or representing the University at external events may also seek reimbursement for some or all of the costs associated with the activity.

A range of other support services are in place at VMU. The University's Student Affairs Department is responsible for coordinating social support, including accommodation and social scholarships. The University's Student Affairs Department also contains a Career Centre

which regularly organizes seminars and provides consultation sessions for students designed to support students' career planning. Free counselling provision is in place for students from University Psychology clinics. This includes rehabilitation services for disabled students.

The University looks to engage alumni, including through the Academy and opportunities for annual face-to-face meetings whereby graduates are invited to discuss their work experience and skills. The Faculty also shares relevant job vacancies and opportunities on Faculty and Career Centre websites. Program alumni also have the opportunity to take part in University research projects, professional training seminars, conferences and public lectures.

The Student Council also plays an active role in student social support, representing the interests of students and organising sessions designed to support cultural and extra-curricular activity.

(2) Expert judgement/indicator analysis

The University's support arrangements are comprehensive and recognised by students as being high-quality and accessible. This was also reported to be the case throughout the Covid-19 pandemic. In addition to formal mechanisms, students praised their informal interactions with academic and support staff and the overall responsiveness of the institution. Students receive regular communication about the availability of psychological and spiritual support.

3.3.5 Evaluation of the sufficiency of study information and student counselling

(1) Factual situation

Study information is made available to students by the Department and Study Programme Committee through formal meetings and the Virtual Learning Environment (VLE). In addition to hosting course syllabi, the VLE also contains lecture materials, readings and assignments, as well as acting as a communication tool. The VLE also contains a video lecture room.

As mentioned under 3.4, teaching staff are required to maintain fixed office hours, amounting to 20 contact hours, for advising students and providing consultations. These hours are communicated to students at the beginning of each semester. This support is supplemented by emails, telephone, virtual university facilities and virtual meetings rooms.

The Study Program Committee is responsible for providing sufficient study information and the Chair meets new students as part of their induction to talk about expectations and answer questions. A similar meeting is held with second year students during the third semester. The student representative on the Program Committee also acts as a conduit for key information as well as student opinion. These consultations were carried out through a variety of online platforms following the onset of the Covid-19 pandemic.

(2) Expert judgement/indicator analysis

Students receive detailed study information at unit level and confirmed to the panel that they understand what they need to do in order to succeed. Students also informed the panel that the University's system of academic consultations is working effectively, and staff are always willing to provide additional support to any students who require it.

Strengths and weaknesses of this evaluation area:

(1) Strengths:
1. Progress in monitoring the background of applicants.
2. Breadth of mobility opportunities available to students and their alignment with students' broad career aspirations.
3. The comprehensive range of support services provided for students.

(2) Weaknesses:
1. The University would benefit from finding additional mechanisms to encourage and support students to take-up mobility opportunities.

3.4. TEACHING AND LEARNING, STUDENT PERFORMANCE AND GRADUATE EMPLOYMENT

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

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

(1) Factual situation

The study process is regulated by the VMU Study Regulations. The SER states that timetables are developed in a considered manner, to enable students in employment to be able to participate in the program. Learning needs are also taken into account through the variety of teaching methods employed, which includes lectures, practical workshops and independent study. Within this, academic staff make use of case analysis, theoretical and conceptual reasoning, small scale projects and presentations among others. The Master's Thesis is viewed by VMU as the most important factor in determining whether a student has met the program learning outcomes. Requirements for these are set out by the Program Committee with the final mark awarded by the Defence Committee. Students are provided with detailed information about this and assessment methods through course outlines.

The program also incorporates a Summer Internship, lasting a minimum of 6 weeks, which is designed to help students secure and demonstrate professional skills and apply theoretical knowledge.

Students also benefit from the VMU Media Lab, an improvised newsroom, where they can engage in audio-visual and online media production, as well as other news and information management activities.

Assessment typically follows a similar pattern with 20-30 percent determined by a midterm exam, 50 percent by the final exam and the remaining proportion by individual assessments. Academic staff are responsible for determining assessment questions on their respective courses. Grades are maintained on the institution's grade information system, which also acts as the communication mechanism to students. Exams are assessed using a 11-point scale, where 10 is Excellent and 0 constitutes an absence or dishonest behaviour.

Students can register for subjects and assessment and access their grades through the University register available at www.studentas.vdu.lt. Timetables and course requirements are accessible on Moodle and students have access to Eduroam and Wi-Fi across campus in

order to ensure that they are able to access the information they need in order to successfully complete their studies and undertake assessment in order to meet their learning outcomes.

The VMU Innovative Studies Institute provides support for lecturers to develop online materials. During the Covid-19 pandemic all courses have been moved online.

Students with disabilities and/or those studying abroad are able to undertake their studies according to an individualised program, though this has to be approved by the Rector.

The SER sets out the importance that VMU places on master's programs paying particular attention to students' development of research and analytical skills, as well as ensuring that the balance between compulsory and elective subjects creates the theoretical and methodological foundation required for students to succeed in future academic and professional careers.

(2)   Expert judgement/indicator analysis
The University has extensive arrangements in place to support student needs and help them to achieve learning outcomes. Students are aware of these arrangements which cover induction, approaches to teaching, assessment and support and they provided positive feedback to the team about their implementation. In particular, the transition of learning to online delivery during the Covid-19 pandemic was viewed to have been handled effectively.

3.4.2. Evaluation of conditions ensuring access to study for socially vulnerable groups and students with special needs
(1)   Factual situation
As noted under criteria 3.4.1, students with disabilities are able to undertake their studies according to an individualised program, though this has to be approved by the Rector. This process is governed by the VMU Description of the Procedure for Providing the Individual Study Schedule. The same opportunity is available to other students from socially vulnerable groups such as orphans, students from large families and students from low income families. Students from these demographic groups are given the opportunity to apply for tuition and accommodation discounts as well as to receive scholarships.

The University estate is designed and maintained in order to facilitate appropriate disability access, including in relation to parking, classrooms, libraries and student accommodation. The University informed the team that no students with disabilities had been recruited to the programme during the period being evaluated as part of the accreditation.

(2)   Expert judgement/indicator analysis
Although the SER stated that no students with disabilities have been recruited to the programme during the period being evaluated, the experts met with a student who reported having a visual impairment. The student stated that they opted not to request an individualised study plan and preferred to deal with the issue informally. They also praised the level of advice and support for students with disabilities. Nevertheless, the program should strengthen its oversight of students with disabilities by removing the artificial distinction between those students with disabilities on an individualised plan and those who still possess a disability but deal with it more informally.

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

(1) Factual situation

The University's approach to monitoring student learning progress is set out in the VMU Study Regulations and, more specifically, the Description of Procedure for Student Learning Achievement and Monitoring Assistance.

VMU considers that students are themselves actively monitoring their own study progress. They contribute to this by registering for their studies, selecting elective courses, amending their study plans and by participating in evaluations of their learning carried out by academic staff. They also provide feedback to the University about areas for quality improvement that would further support their progress.

Beyond this, a range of University departments contribute to monitoring student study progress. These include Program Committee members who oversee assessment processes and discuss student progression. The Program Committee also considers and acts on student feedback, including any comments relating to partner organisations and student placements. Internal quality assurance is conducted in-line with the VMU Study Regulations. This includes internal program assessment which is carried out annually. The process involves production of a self-assessment by the Program Committee which involves participation from social partners, students and alumni. In addition to this the University operates a Teaching and Learning Quality Assessment (TLQA) process. This entails staff and student surveys, which are completed anonymously and monitored by the VMU Study Department. Results from the survey are also considered at the Program Committee level and inform proposals for improving teaching quality which are ultimately approved by the Department of Public Communications and Council of the Faculty of Political Science and Diplomacy.

(2) Expert judgement/indicator analysis

Effective processes are in place to ensure the systematic monitoring of students' progress. The Program Committee is central to overseeing this but the fact students themselves play an active role in managing their own progress is a positive feature of the program.

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

(1) Factual situation

A multi-layered approach is in place with respect to supporting and evaluating the employability of graduates and their career progress. The VMU Alumni club provides a wide range of opportunities that alumni can participate in, including graduates from the Masters program. Individual departments also provide graduates with periodic information and notification of various opportunities.

Data on graduates is provided by the VMU alumni survey, statistics provided by the Employment Service and further statistics provided by the Government Strategic Analysis Centre. Graduates are surveyed about their job status and VMU's contribution to their preparation for the labor market. The University receives information about VMU graduates twice per year.

(2) Expert judgement/indicator analysis

Recent data demonstrates that 70% of program graduates are working in a related, professional field and 90% consider the University's contribution to their preparation for the labour market was either 'Good' or 'More Good' than bad. Data also demonstrates that students were most satisfied with knowledge and skills acquired during study sessions (70%) and study practice (70%), followed by knowledge acquired through independent self-study (60%). It should be noted that this data is drawn from a small overall population. In addition, the data provided in the SER suggests a small disconnect between learning and employability outcomes (the EXIT data indicates only 55% of students in 2018 rated their study sessions good preparation for the labour market). While the program has been significantly revised since 2018, including a new name and fresh content, and relations appear close with both alumni and the industry, continuing attention needs to be paid to ensuring learning and employability outcomes are matched and enhanced (see also 3.1.1.).

While students considered that the volume of practical skills on the program could be enhanced, a wide range of students and alumni recognise the role of the program in providing them with academic knowledge and transferable skills. Students and alumni praised the broad focus of the program and the fact that it trains graduates for a variety of careers allied to communication and not just journalism.

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

(1) Factual situation

VMU operates a Code of Ethics, defined in the Statute, which governs academic integrity. The University also has Plagiarism Prevention Procedures in place. Where a member of staff deems a student to have committed an offence, they suspend the student, write to the Dean to notify them and award the student a zero mark. Any breaches of academic ethics are discussed in Program Committees. Students have the right to appeal to the Academic Ethics Commission.

Changes were made in 2015 to the appeals framework, which informed the provision of information to students about academic misconduct, including description of potential reprimands and guidance on how to act correctly in classes and in the preparation of assessment. At a program level bachelors and master's theses are checked with authenticate to ensure that there are no breaches. The University informed the panel that arrangements for addressing academic misconduct are designed to be developmental and not simply punitive.

(2) Expert judgement/indicator analysis

The University reports that during the period being evaluated, as part of the accreditation, no instances of academic dishonesty were identified in the Department of Public Communications. This means the panel were unable to sample instances where misconduct has been identified and addressed. Where no instances of misconduct are identified over a given period; two possibilities exist. First, that the information provided to staff and students is working and that there have been no offences committed. Second, that offences have been committed but that they have not been identified. The panel stresses that they have found no evidence to suggest the latter; however, the University might benefit from considering ways to provide assurance that its processes for ensuring academic integrity are working effectively.

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

(1)   Factual situation

Complaints and appeals are governed by the VMU Description of Procedure for Appeal Investigation, Plagiarism Prevention Procedures and Study Regulations. Students are entitled to appeal assessment grades by detailing valid grounds in writing, which are subsequently considered by an Appeal Commission. The Commission's decision is communicated to the appellant within 5 days of the appeals receipt.

Students are also permitted to complain about an aspect of their experience of a procedure. This is carried out through the appeals procedure. The University informed the Panel that there were no complaints or appeals submitted during the period under consideration as part of the accreditation.

(2)   Expert judgement/indicator analysis

As with arrangements for academic integrity and processes for appealing academic grades, the panel found that the program would benefit from strengthened IQA in order to ensure the effectiveness of its arrangements for complaints and appeals. At present, it is not possible to discern whether the no complaints have been received because the standard of the student experience is high and informal resolution is effective or because complaints processes are not clear to students or they have limited confidence in them. Robust IQA systems and reporting would help provide this assurance.

Strengths and weaknesses of this evaluation area:

(1) Strengths:

1. The comprehensive arrangements to support students study process.

(2) Weaknesses:

1. Current systems do not appear to accurately identify all students admitted to the program with a disability.

3.5. TEACHING STAFF

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

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

(1) Factual situation

There is an excellent team of dedicated teachers with a strong research and practical orientation. Only 20% are professionals, underlying the unique research orientation of this program. Two full professors are native speakers of English. Teaching staff is well-experienced and competence is strong overall. For instance, according to the SER, no teachers

have a teaching experience of less than 10 years, and the average teaching experience is over 20 years. There are also rich experiences of teachers teaching at other institutions. The number of teaching staff, 12 professors, five associate professors, three lecturers/assistant professors without PhD, seems adequate. The qualifications are meeting legal requirements.

(2) Expert judgement/indicator analysis

Teachers are internationally visible, active researchers and there is a good share of practical classes too. For instance, they serve as experts for national and international committees and research agencies, they are well cited, they publish in visible research outlets, are active at international conferences, participate in large scale research projects, and share an international research orientation. Qualifications are broad and adequate, and the legal requirements are met. Virtual collaborations with partner institutions have been built, which is another   strength. Overall, the research-led teaching is impressive and teachers share a strong commitment to journalism as a key democratic institution. There are collaborative teaching initiatives. That is, many courses are done in teacher teams, which is a great strength as teachers can learn from each other.

Yet there appears to be a high teaching load, which can stand in conflict with the excellent research activities of faculty members.

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

Teachers are actively engaged in Erasmus+ and similar exchange programs and there is significant international cooperation with journalism researchers and professionals. Every year, there are 5-7 teaching visits, as for instance to Austria, Cyprus, Croatia, Italy, Spain, Sweden, or the UK. Faculty members have also served as international visiting professors. As for the conditions to ensure teaching mobility, VMU has a teacher professional development in place, teaching staff is regularly informed about mobility options, and there are relevant and frequent training courses.

(2) Expert judgement/indicator analysis

Mobility is very good, no major issues can be identified. Perhaps visits to leading academic research institutions should be preferred over visits to smaller teaching-oriented universities.

3.5.3. Evaluation of the conditions to improve the competences of the teaching staff
(1) Factual situation

Teachers have been involved in international scientific and practical conferences, besides teaching visits. Teaching skills have been renewed by participating in professional development activities, such as training or workshops. The number and scope of these training possibilities are remarkable. Teachers are provided with the possibility to acquire state of the art teaching skills, relevant knowledge necessary for international mobility, and overall, the institution seems to take good care that competencies of teaching staff are up-to-date. The training courses in didactics are remarkable. The scientific activity observation and promotion works very well.

(2) Expert judgement/indicator analysis

Measures to improve competencies are very good; no major or minor issues can be identified.

Strengths and weaknesses of this evaluation area:

(1) Strengths:

1. There are excellent collaborative teaching initiatives.
2. Teaching staff is research active as well as internationally visible, especially with respeact to international publications and conferences, but also grants, workshops, and teaching exchanges.
3. There is strong teacher mobility, and the university supports teaching staff very well in terms of courses, information, and mobility.

(2) Weaknesses: none found

3.6. LEARNING FACILITIES AND RESOURCES

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

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

(1) Factual situation

As the department is located at the newest, most modern of university buildings, journalism students can enjoy state of the art facilities that enhance their learning experience.

Classrooms are modern and well-equipped. The library has a large catalogue of print books, the vast majority of which are relatively or very recent, with new titles being added annually. The newest and most relevant information required for studies and research is available to members of VMU in subscribed databases.

The University has access to almost 624 thousand electronic resources (257 e-books, 31 thousand e-journals, 236 thousand conference presentations, audio recordings, study theses, and other documents).

The community also uses 58 databases that can be accessed on the University premises and from remote computers (via EZproxy). All materials including electronic texts or links to such texts are available for faculty students on the internet for free.

The University possesses sufficient library resources for an effective teaching process. The library has a large catalogue of print books, the vast majority of which are relatively or very recent, with new titles being added annually. The unique collections of professional literature were donated by the families of late prominent teachers of VMU. These collections contain valuable books and publications about East Europe policies, Lithuanian journalism in exile and so on.

The graduate program in Future Media and Journalism is well equipped with practical facilities (labs, computers, TV cameras) to ensure quality practical training. The extensive access to digital resources also makes it possible to combine face-to-face and online learning in order to maximise the efficiency of teaching delivery and enable students to

combine academic and professional commitments. Students can also make use of a sound studio and visual media lab, both located in the same building. The sound studio is among the most modern and technically advanced in the Baltic States.

Students can also develop their practical skills at VMU Newsroom, where they are able to engage into radio, television, online media, and print projects production, as well as develop skills of layout, photo processing, video editing, etc. The Newsroom is equipped with modern, contemporary technology: computer-generated workstations, recorders, video cameras, scanners, etc. Students are able to access the latest technologies in applied journalistic work processes (data analysis, information selection, agenda-setting, media production, fact-checking, among others) in real-life situations during their internship as well as when conducting research commissioned by media organisations.

Consultations on issues related to distance learning and technical assistance to teachers and students are regularly provided by the VMU Institute of Innovative Studies.

The Department is also actively involved in various practical journalism training projects and workshops developed in cooperation with national and international media organizations and media research groups.

To address the needs of students with disabilities, the University's buildings are maintained and prepared to meet the requirements of people with special needs: parking places are reserved near the university buildings; access to all buildings is provided. The necessary equipment is made available in libraries, and classrooms are equipped with suitable furniture.

(2) Expert judgement/indicator analysis

A new building was opened in 2016. It is a construction of contemporary architecture, comfortable for work, studies and leisure, as detailed in the video. There is lots of light and space. All the premises have been designed to ensure they are as comfortable as possible, including for all visitors. VMU has responded efficiently to recent challenges, reorganizing several classrooms to adjust them to distance learning, changed media production requirements, and evolving staff/students needs. The physical and digital infrastructure is friendly to people with disabilities.

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

(1) Factual situation

The University is constantly investing in increasing access to both digital and print resources. When planning the renewal of information resources relevant to studies, the necessary documents for study programs are coordinated with the Library by the teachers responsible for study programs and courses.

It is stated in SER that VMU upgrades computers and purchases multimedia equipment according to the resource development plans submitted by the faculties and academies, which they prepare according to the study needs every year. About 20% of computers are renewed annually. Almost all computers are connected to a common network and have an Internet connection. VMU computer network security systems are constantly updated.

VMU uses a centralized system for monitoring and updating hardware and software. Every six months, the software is audited and updated or supplemented.

In 2021, the reorganization of several classrooms has been planned to adjust these for distance learning and media production requirements and staff/students needs.

The University possesses comprehensive library resources for an effective teaching process. That is particularly the case in regard to digital resources (e-books, journal subscriptions).

(2) Expert judgement/indicator analysis

The University pays great attention to studying facilities to ensure they are effective, contemporary and regularly renewed. It is important to mention that no recommendations were provided in the External Evaluation Report (2013). It shows that VMU cares about the quality of learning resources and facilities constantly and makes efforts to maintain top position among national HEI in this field.

Strengths and weaknesses of this evaluation area:

(1) Strengths:
1. The University pays great attention to the studying facilities so that they are effective, contemporary and regularly renewed.
2. The University has got all means that are necessary for high quality studies, and takes the best advantage of disposable resources.

(2) Weaknesses: none found

3.7. STUDY QUALITY MANAGEMENT AND PUBLIC INFORMATION

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

3.7.1. Evaluation of the effectiveness of the internal quality assurance system of the studies
(1) Factual situation

At VMU, there is a three-fold structure to ensure and monitor the quality of study-related processes. The Faculty Administration (comprising the Faculty Council and Dean of the Faculty), the Head of the Department, and the study Programme Committee work together in this function. The core of quality assurance happens at the Programme Committee level, which comprises faculty, media partners and a student representative. At the end of each year, the PC reviews all courses, using student evaluations as well as input from teachers and social partners, and develops plans to keep the curriculum up-to-date with changes in the field and labour market. Program improvement plans are submitted to and approved by the Faculty Council.

Furthermore, there are centralized processes for ensuring teacher competencies; teachers are provided with training materials and handbooks and with resources to support study design. Another interesting aspect of the programme is its interdisciplinarity: many

courses are offered across/taught by teachers from multiple departments (as well as external experts if needed), and this ensures quality standards are compared and maintained across the faculty.

(2) Expert judgement/indicator analysis
These structures – both in how they are described in the SER and were discussed in meetings during the site visit – provide for a well-managed, well-organized program with careful procedures in place to systematically evaluate and improve courses. The relatively small size of the department helps ensure that teachers from multiple faculties are closely involved in creating and monitoring the relevance and quality of the program. The site visit discussions were convincing and the review panel were persuaded that the resources devoted to quality assurance are well thought-out. Furthermore, the SER clearly states that the results of this annual review process, including student evaluations, exit surveys, alumni surveys, and employer surveys, are shared not only with the Dean of the Faculty and Head of Department, but also with students. This suggests an adaptive, transparent, and flexible system designed to maximize responsiveness and quality assurance.

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

(1) Factual situation
The Program Committee involves faculty and teachers, students, alumni, and social partners. Its current composition includes only one social partner, as well as 4 academic faculty and 1 student. Students rotate every 2 years. And though other partners may rotate, the relatively small size of the department means a few core faculty members remain over time in this structure. Despite only having 1 social partner formally on the committee, the annual program evaluation (described in the previous section) includes a survey of graduates, a survey of alumni 12 months after graduation, and a survey of employers to evaluate how well programme alumni are prepared for the labour market, as well as to evaluate the student internships. The site visit revealed that – partly due to the alumni network, and partly due to the internship structure – the program has a close network of regional and local stakeholders in the media industry, who make recommendations about the curriculum based on the needs of the job market. Furthermore, social partners including alumni serve as mentors for students during their internships, often meet with students and teachers to share their professional experiences, and are invited to participate in evaluating Master's thesis quality.

(2) Expert judgement/indicator analysis
Given the annual engagement of "employers" as (informal) social partners, the regular contact with internship supervisors and alumni, and the formal incorporation of a social partner and student member in the PC, the structures are in place to maintain close contact with stakeholders. It might strengthen the PC to include more than one social partner, however, especially from different sorts of media institutions. Alumni and students during the site visit certainly gave the impression that their input is actively sought and incorporated in the programme.

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

(1)   Factual situation

Information about the internal reviews seems to be publicized clearly by the Program Committee for relevant partners and stakeholders. The process appears transparent. Information about learning outcomes is readily available on the departmental website (about intended learning outcomes, admission requirements, e.g.), and students during the site visit said they had sufficient access to relevant information, and further felt if they had questions, these would be answered promptly and fully.

(2)   Expert judgement/indicator analysis

Again, generally this seems to be well done. However, one area that emerged was that the students did not always seem to acknowledge the high quality of their studies or the department. That is, they still expressed some sense that this was not the top journalism programme in Lithuania, and they seemed to under-appreciate the unique opportunity to learn a range of cutting-edge journalistic skills from distinguished faculty and professionals. Consistent with the goal of training critically-minded, reflective journalists who can adapt to the changing media market, it may be useful to explain more clearly to students how their learning will serve them in a variety of journalism careers, particularly how the theoretically-oriented and foundational courses will help them develop critical thinking and reflexivity skills which are valued in the workplace.

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

(1) Factual situation

The study program has a rigorous system of surveying students alongside course evaluations, as well as a robust tradition of informal feedback in discussions between teachers and students. The results of the internal, departmental reviews — incorporating student feedback — are also documented and reported regularly to the Dean of the Faculty.

(2) Expert judgement/indicator analysis

The procedures are in place to clearly track student feedback. One area that the SER notes as worthy of improvement, however, is to "better integrate into the management processes" the feedback gathered from students, alumni, and media industry partners through online questionnaire, face-to-face discussions, and industry analyses. It's positive that the institution is aware of the need to systematically track and incorporate these important sources of feedback; the structure is in place to do so, so perhaps ensuring a section of each annual programme review report includes a summary of such data would be a simple solution.

Strengths and weaknesses of this evaluation area:

(1) Strengths:

1. This is a close-knit department of dedicated, interdisciplinary stakeholders (teachers, partners). The small size has led to a lot of trust, commitment and open-ness to

improve and revise the programme. This certainly leads to higher study quality overall, as well as a willingness to monitor and improve.
2. The procedures for quality assurance seem to have been formalized since the last accreditation, and they certainly seem robust at this point.
3. The involvement of students, alumni, stakeholders and faculty from multiple disciplines on the Study Programme Committee helps ensure a high quality, responsive programme.

(2) Weaknesses:
1. The primary weakness here seems to be in the communication to students of how strong, unique and valuable this program is. While they appreciate the program generally, and particularly enjoy the internship, there should be more done to explain to them the value of the other coursework – both theoretical and competency-based – to their future careers in a changing world. Students need to perhaps better recognize the high study quality here, including the diverse and accomplished faculty, the high intra-departmental trust, and the cutting-edge curriculum.

IV. EXAMPLES OF EXCELLENCE

The profile of the faculty and their central involvement in prominent research activities, curriculum development, teaching, and programme quality assurance are impressive here. These strong ties with top-notch faculty really make this programme stand out from its competitors.

The cutting-edge nature of the practical skills training here is also excellent, and unique among journalism programs in Lithuania. It seems clear from our evaluations that graduates of this programme would be among the best equipped to deal with continual changes in the digital media landscape.

V. RECOMMENDATIONS

Evaluation Area	Recommendations for the Evaluation Area (study cycle)
Intended and achieved learning outcomes and curriculum	Investigate the creation of defined pathways through the program, such as in sports, financial journalism or visual journalism giving students greater personal choice along with appropriate skills. Investigate a practical, journalistic alternative to the Final Thesis by consulting with alumni, students, industry and staff. Ensure the learning outcomes make theory/the normative imperative of journalism as centrally valuable to students as the practical skills training they receive. Ensure students feel equipped to enter the digital newsroom/workplace by matching current practices with the syllabus, thereby enhancing sustainable employability.
Links between science (art) and studies	Additional efforts should be considered to create sufficient time for research activities by faculty members. Also, additional actions can be taken to create systematic research support and adequate space for research, particularly to maintain and further increase internationally visible research activities. Additional support systems for applying for large scale grants such as Horizon Europe and ERC should be developed.
Student admission and support	The University should develop additional mechanisms to encourage and support students to take-up mobility opportunities.
Teaching and learning, student performance and graduate employment	Ensure systems accurately identify all students admitted to the program with a disability, irrespective of whether individual support plans are required. Ensure comprehensive monitoring arrangements are in place which enable the institution to assure itself that complaints and appeals processes are understood by students and operating effectively.

Teaching staff	There are no significant points to improve. Yet more attention could be paid to balance teaching time with research time, perhaps providing more space to research and publish, including the possibility of sabbaticals.
Learning facilities and resources	There are no significant points to improve, only not to lose focus on measures that ensure quality of studies, to have up-to-date scientific literature and modern equipment; to continuously ensure that students have the possibility to access the main online resources also in the future.
Study quality management and public information	Think about ways to better communicate to students the strengths of the programme, and in particular the relevance of what they are learning (in particular the normative lens on journalism, the critical thinking abilities) so they more actively recognize the quality of the programme.

VI. SUMMARY

Main positive and negative quality aspects of each evaluation area of the study field *Journalism* at Vytautas Magnus University:

The review panel are overwhelmingly positive about the Future Media and Journalism programme at Vytautas Magnus University. Areas of strength that are evident include the contemporary curriculum, the strong emphasis on internationalisation and the vibrant research atmosphere. Further, we are impressed by this close-knit department of dedicated, interdisciplinary stakeholders all of whom seem committed to building trust, open-ness and responsiveness to industry demands. The panel notes the efficiency and speed with which the program adapted to Covid-19, in particular the smooth transition to online teaching and the additional support offered to students during the pandemic.

During the inspection, it was evident the procedures for quality assurance have been formalized and appear robust while students, alumni, stakeholders and faculty from multiple disciplines contribute collectively to ensure the Study Programme Committee maintains oversight of a high quality, responsive programme. This is enhanced by the regularly updated, modern facilities that are available to students on this program.

The panel acknowledge there has been progress in monitoring the background of applicants while a range of mobility opportunities are now routinely available to students. The teaching staff, many of whom are research active, are engaging in excellent collaborative teaching initiatives and have found a good balance between practice and research. In addition, there is strong teacher mobility.

The expert panel believe the new PhD program will significantly enhance the impact and importance of the Future Media and Journalism offering at VMU by providing an additional cohort of skilled, research-active students.

There are a number of areas that require attention to further develop and strengthen this impressive program. These include finding ways to ease the teaching load of faculty members through innovative practices such as sabbaticals or flexible working patterns, to enable a greater focus on research production. More attention needs to be paid to create time for research, to provide systematic research support, and to establish space and spaces for research, including for currently non-research active staff.

Systems in the department at present do not appear to accurately identify all students admitted to the program with a disability. It is evident that a more comprehensive IQA needs to be established to ensure academic integrity and enable effective complaints and appeals processes. In addition, the University would benefit from finding additional mechanisms to encourage and support students to take-up mobility opportunities.

Finally, there are some areas of communication that might be improved. Students are not always aware of the importance of theoretical and critical skills as compared to practical skills on the program. Nor do students seem to grasp how fortunate they are to be nurtured by such a talented and committed team or in what high regard the program is held locally and internationally. The Review Panel feels both of these are really just communication obstacles that can be corrected by some evidence-based self-marketing and better engagement with students.

Overall, however, the panel were delighted to have spent time observing the workings of this program and talking to students, teachers and stakeholders. The experts are in no doubt that this is a strong and relevant offering that will continue to serve the Lithuanian, European and Global journalism market well.

Expert panel chairperson signature:

Prof. dr. Jörg Matthes