# SKVC

## CENTRE FOR QUALITY ASSESSMENT IN HIGHER EDUCATION

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## EVALUATION REPORT

## STUDY FIELD of PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION

### at Mykolas Romeris University

**Expert panel:**

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2. **Dr. Egert Juuse,** *academic;*

3. **Assoc. Prof. Dr. Daniel Klimovský,** *academic;*

4. **Prof. Dr. Benedikt Speer,** *academic;*

5. **Dr. Ieva Lazarevičiūtė,** *representative of social partners;*

6. **Mr. Rimvydas Burba,** *students' representative.*


**Evaluation coordinator –** *Dr. Domantas Markevičius*

Vilnius
2022

# Study Field Data

| Title of the study programme | *Public Governance and Leadership* | *Public Administration* |
|---|---|---|
| State code | 6121LX054 | 6211LX076 |
| Type of studies | University studies | University studies |
| Cycle of studies | First cycle | Second cycle |
| Mode of study and duration (in years) | Full-time (3 years), part-time (4.5 years) | Full-time (1.5 years), part-time (2 years) |
| Credit volume | 180 | 90 |
| Qualification degree and (or) professional qualification | Bachelor of Business and Public Administration | Master of Business and Public Administration |
| Language of instruction | Lithuanian | Lithuanian, English |
| Minimum education required | Secondary education | Bachelor's degree |
| Registration date of the study programme | 23/04/1999 | 23/04/1999 |

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# 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 (SER) prepared by Higher Education Institution ( 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 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 online on *27 May, 2022.*

***Dr. Christine Leitner (panel chairperson)****, Senior Advisor, Centre for Economics and Public Administration (London, UK), and Senior Policy Advisor, Federal Ministry for Digital and Economic Affairs, Austria;*
***Dr. Egert Juuse****, Research Fellow, Ragnar Nurkse Department of Innovation and Governance, School of Business and Governance, Tallinn University of Technology, Estonia;*
***Assoc. Prof. Dr. Daniel Klimovský****, Department of Political Science, Faculty of Philosophy, Comenius University in Bratislava, Slovakia;*
***Prof. Dr. Benedikt Speer****, Berlin School of Economics and Law, Germany;*
***Dr. Ieva Lazarevičiūtė (social partner)****, independent expert, Lithuania;*
***Mr. Rimvydas Burba (student representative)****, graduate of Master's programme "Diplomacy and International Relations" at Vytautas Magnus University, Lithuania.*

## 1.3. GENERAL INFORMATION

The documentation submitted by the HEI follows the outline recommended by SKVC. Along with the self-evaluation report 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. | Data on the applications, admissions (state-funded/state not funded), drop-out-rates and graduations for Public Administration study field programmes (in each study mode and specialisation) offered during the evaluation period |
| 2. | The list of thesis defence committee members for the last 3 years 2019-2021 |
| 3. | Data of social partner, alumni and student engagement in quality assurance (methods, frequency, response rates, results and improvement actions) |
| 4. | Data on the offered electives in comparison to the actually offered electives for each program / specialisation with the corresponding numbers of students |
| 5. | Public Administration field teachers all scientific publications 2020 |
| 6. | Examples of course syllabi where relevant EU competences and skills (relevant for practice) are integrated |
| 7. | Cooperation agreements with social partners |

## 1.4. BACKGROUND OF PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION FIELD STUDIES AT MYKOLAS ROMERIS UNIVERSITY

Mykolas Romeris University (hereafter – MRU, also – the University) is a public HEI established in 2004. It is the largest social science university in Lithuania. Its predecessors were the Lithuanian Police Academy (1990–1997); the Lithuanian Academy of Law (1997–2000); and the Lithuanian University of Law (2000–2004). There are four faculties: the Law School; the Public Security Academy (Kaunas); the Faculty of Human and Social Studies; and the Faculty of Public Governance and Business. MRU has 6,000 students, including 785 international degree and exchange students from over 40 countries (more than half in the first cycle, around 40% in second cycle studies and 180 doctoral students). MRU offers 85 study programmes in three cycles of higher education: 29 bachelor, 50 master and 6 doctoral programmes in the fields of accounting, communication, economics, educational sciences, finance, computing, law, management, human resource management, pedagogy, philology (English), psychology, political sciences, public security, social work, tourism and leisure, translation studies, public administration, and business studies. 25 programmes are offered in English (10 in the first cycle, 15 in the second cycle); seven are joint degree programmes or double diploma programmes. MRU co-operates widely with over 500 universities, public and business entities, secondary and vocational schools, and other education and training establishments, state and municipal institutions, associated structures, and non-governmental organisations.

Social science study programmes are predominant in MRU's programme portfolio (95%). The field of Public Administration (hereafter – PA) is one of the largest study fields at MRU by number of students. In the field of PA, the bachelor degree programme *Public Administration* launched in 1999 was changed two times: 1) from *Public Administration* to *Public Administration and Leadership*, approved by MRU Senate resolution No. 1SN-18 of 10 March 2021; and 2) from *Public Administration and Leadership* to *Public Governance and Leadership*, approved by MRU Senate resolution No. 1SN-83 of 17 December 2021 (from the 2022–2023 study year). The programme is offered full-time (3.5-year duration) and part-time (4.5-year duration).

The *Public Administration* master degree programme was registered by order No. 560 of 23 April 1999 and accredited by order No. ISAK-616 on 15 April 2005. The *Education and Science Policy and Management* specialisation of this programme was approved by the Senate of MRU resolution No. 1SN-38 on 28 May 2018. MRU Senate approved the *Public Administration* master degree programme in English by resolution No. 1SN-32 of 18 June 2019. In 2021, MRU applied for approval of the implementation of the programme in Utena district municipality. All master degrees in the field of PA – *Public Administration* programme, its *Education and Science Policy and Management* specialisation, and the double-diploma PA programmes in  English (under the contract with "National Academy of Public Administration under the President of Ukraine") – are 90 ECTS each. PA master studies have two forms, full-time (1.5 years) and part-time (2 years); the specialisation is only available part-time (2 years); and the double diploma studies are only available on a full-time basis (1.5 years).

MRU scientists and researchers carry out fundamental and applied research (including interdisciplinary research) in the social sciences and humanities. MRU annually publishes 600 research papers, implements 50 research projects, and provides 50 contract-based services. In 2015, MRU opened the Social Innovations Laboratory Network, the MRU LAB, with interdisciplinary laboratories.

An international external evaluation of the original bachelor programme *Public Administration and* master programme *Public Administration* was carried out by AHPGS in 2013 (with a recommended accreditation of six years for both programmes), and SKVC accredited these two programmes on 11 June 2013 for a maximum period of six  years.

The second cycle programme *Public Administration*, implemented in Utena district municipality, was evaluated positively by SKVC in 2021.

# II. GENERAL ASSESSMENT

*Public Administration* study field and *first cycle* at Mykolas Romeris 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 | 3 |
| 2. | Links between science (art) and studies | 3 |
| 3. | Student admission and support | 3 |
| 4. | Teaching and learning, student performance and graduate employment | 3 |
| 5. | Teaching staff | 4 |
| 6. | Learning facilities and resources | 4 |
| 7. | Study quality management and public information | 3 |
| | **Total:** | **23** |

*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.

*Public Administration* study field and *second cycle* at Mykolas Romeris 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 | 3 |
| 2. | Links between science (art) and studies | 4 |
| 3. | Student admission and support | 3 |
| 4. | Teaching and learning, student performance and graduate employment | 3 |
| 5. | Teaching staff | 4 |
| 6. | Learning facilities and resources | 4 |
| 7. | Study quality management and public information | 3 |
| | **Total:** | **24** |

*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. 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 programmes to the needs of the society and/or the labour market*

In the PA study field first-cycle studies, MRU offers "Public Administration and Leadership" study programme which, as of 2022/2023 academic year, is called "Public Governance and Leadership" (hereafter – PGL). In the second-cycle, MRU offers "Public Administration" programme (hereafter – PA) that also offers an "Education and Science Policy and Management" (ESPM) specialisation as well as the double-diploma PA programme in English. The double-diploma PA in English was offered under a contract with the "National Academy of Public Administration under the President of Ukraine", which was discontinued, therefore it is not evaluated here (MRU intends to sign an agreement with Taras Shevchenko National University of Kiev in order to continue the programme in the future).

The SER (p. 5) indicates that the aim of the first cycle PGL programme is to prepare specialists to work in the public sector and be capable of analysis, adaptation to changes, undertake sectoral problem solving as well as have an understanding and abilities in human resources, procurement, and financial administration. The report also indicates the inclusion of knowledge on public law, strategic management, and the digitisation of government and services as well as skills necessary for research-based and open-data based decisions.

The aim of the second-cycle PA programme is to train highly skilled public governance (public administration and policy) specialists who have skills in developing and applying various instruments of public administration, can engage and empower citizens, and have expert knowledge in public policy formulation and implementation. SER (p. 5) states that MRU second-cycle PA studies aim to "empower public sector employees with the capability to spread the ideas of modern public administration and practically apply the competencies gained at the university in central and municipal government and in other public and non-profit organisations and, thus, contribute to the development of a modern Lithuanian state based on the principles of democracy and civil society".

The stated aim of the ESPM specialisation in the second-cycle PA programme is to prepare specialists in all levels of education policy and management, education policy analysts, heads, and administrators of educational institutions.

Considering current labour market conditions, reflections shared by the social partners during the site-visit as well as existing national development priorities and strategies, the stated aims of both first- and second-cycle programmes are adequate and in line with the needs of the society. In this sense ESPM stands out as a positive characteristic that sets MRU apart from the remaining PA programmes. The cooperation with Ukrainian PA training institutions/universities is noteworthy in this context, even though the future is uncertain due to the current situation.

### 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

As outlined in the SER, the first- and second-cycle study programmes' aims and outcomes are aligned with the University's mission, objectives and strategy. MRU mission is "to create a culture and a state of the society in accordance with the principles of democracy, to educate an academic society, to promote sustainable progress of organisations and communities and to lead each member of our community to their individual and professional success" (SER, p.7). The main goals of the University's Strategic Plan 2021–2023 are as follows: to provide "global market driven studies, advanced science creating social innovation, sustainable internationalisation development, and [to promote] lifelong learning". In the same vein, at the PA study level, the overall aim is "to empower public sector employees with the capability to spread the ideas of modern public administration and practically apply the competencies gained at the university in central and municipal government and in other public and non-profit organisations and, thus, contribute to the development of a modern Lithuanian state based on the principles of democracy and civil society" (cf. SER, p. 7). The subjects of the PA studies are based on research aiming to transfer the latest knowledge in the field of PA to students. The part-time and distance studies ensure life-long learning opportunities for those who work, have children, or engage in other activities. MRU also recognises that the competencies of PA are important for all modern states, and provided evidence that a number of PA graduates are working abroad, e.g. in European administrations or other. In the SER, MRU also emphasised that "international mobility programmes for students and teachers [...] enable sustainable internationalisation" and "strengthen preparation for the global market".

Taking the above into account, and having reviewed the content of the study programmes (including the competences and skills they aim to develop) and related research activities in the PA field, the expert panel concludes that the study field and the aims and outcomes of both first- and second-cycle study programmes are aligned with the mission, strategic objectives and activities of the University.

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

**Table No. 1**. Study Programme's ***Public Governance and Leadership*** compliance to general requirements for *first cycle study programmes*

| Criteria | Legal requirements | In the Programme |
|---|---|---|
| Scope of the programme in ECTS | 180, 210 or 240 ECTS | 180 |
| ECTS for the study field | No less than 120 ECTS | 150 |
| ECTS for studies specified by University or optional studies | No more than 120 ECTS | 30 (General University Studies) and 18 (elective courses) |
| ECTS for internship | No less than 15 ECTS | 15 |

| ECTS for final thesis (project) | No less than 15 ECTS | 15 |
|---|---|---|
| Contact hours | No less than 20 % of learning | 29.1% |
| Individual learning | No less than 30 % of learning | 70.9% |

**Table No. 2**. Study Programmes' ***Public Administration (Education and Science Policy and Management)*** compliance to general requirements for *second cycle study programmes*

| Criteria | Legal requirements | In the Programme |
|---|---|---|
| Scope of the programme in ECTS | 90 or 120 ECTS | 90 |
| ECTS for the study field Information Services | No less than 60 ECTS | 90 (including thesis) |
| ECTS for studies specified by University or optional studies | No more than 30 ECTS | 6 (elective courses) |
| ECTS for final thesis (project) | No less than 30 ECTS | 30 |
| Contact hours | No less than 10 % of learning | 17.3% |
| Individual learning | No less than 50 % of learning | 82.7% |

In most part, study programmes on both study cycles meet the legal requirements and provisions stipulated in various legal acts of Lithuania. The volume of both study programmes is sufficient to achieve the expected learning outcomes in both study cycles. The usual volume of each study subject is 6 ECTS credits and as students are expected to take a maximum number of 5 study subjects per 1 semester, a student's workload is evenly distributed throughout the programme between single courses (1 ECTS equals to ca. 27 hours of work) and between semesters. Learning outcomes meet the requirements set out in the Descriptor of the Study Field of Public Administration for second-cycle study programme, but on the first-cycle level, the competences and abilities in relation to knowledge and understanding of the public governance system, methods, instruments, and principles should be more clearly and explicitly stated. There are separate modules / courses dedicated to governance topics, but on the programme level, governance as such is not mentioned at all (even though some of its aspects have been addressed such as management of public sector resources and the resources of public governance organisations (human and financial)). Another shortcoming is an inconsistent use of social partners in thesis defence committees. Therefore, some shortcomings exist in both cycles of studies in meeting legal requirements, in particular, the Descriptor of the Study Field of Public Administration.

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

For the first-cycle study programme *Public Governance and Leadership,* the aims and learning outcomes, divided into "purposes", "competencies" (general and subject specific) and "results of the study programme", are specified in Annex 1.1 of the respective SER. From the material provided before and after the online-site visit it can be deduced that the basic mechanisms for the implementation and adaptation of aims/learning outcomes and their connection with teaching, learning and assessment methods are in place. However, instead of a more or less repetitive enumeration of the same variety of study methods in Annex 1.1, a more precise linkage between individual study subjects and concrete study methods would be desirable not only in the individual course descriptions, but also in the overall planning documents. As the orientation and content of the study programme is constantly revised/ improved and the corresponding responsibilities are defined, this might possibly be more a problem of presentation than of application in practice.

The same observations basically also apply to the second-cycle study programme *Public Administration*, for which the corresponding overview is given in Annex 1.1 of the respective SER. Apart from that, the linkage between study subjects and study methods is better defined here than in the first-cycle study programme. For the specialisation ESPM, an own overview of aims, learning outcomes and study methods is presented in Annex 1.2 of the SER for the second-cycle study programme *Public Administration*. As it follows the same methodology as the previous examples, the aforementioned observations can also be applied to this case. The expert panel concludes therefore that the compatibility of aims, learning outcomes and corresponding methods is ensured by the existing mechanisms, but that a more systematic presentation of the relevant information – e.g. in form of encompassing and integrated planning documents for each course of the study programmes – might be useful for further planning and adaptation.

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

The structure of the first-cycle study programme *Public Governance and Leadership* strives to convey generic as well as subject specific competencies to the students. While the sequence and orientation of the subjects is all in all comprehensible, the need for an isolated philosophy course in the first semester – even if approved as a mandatory subject by the Senate of MRU – should be discussed. Also, the identical denomination of the two modules "Introduction to Studies" is not sufficiently clear (at least renaming as Introduction to Studies I and II is suggested). Apart from this, MRU claims that its "added value" for this programme is the MRU Law School, but the only specific law module seems to be "Fundamentals of Public Law" in the first semester which is hardly enough for the "development of graduates' knowledge and skills in public (administrative) law" (respective SER, p. 5). Even if MRU Law School representatives are integrated in other activities of the programme, at the subject level a broader and more systematic integration of law subjects into the programme could be a matter for further discussion. Also, the concrete positioning of some subjects could be up for discussion: e.g. given the sequence of the other subjects, "Public Relation and Marketing in the Public Sector" in the second semester seems to be rather early, while "Political System of Lithuania" in the fourth semester is very late for a programme oriented towards "leadership".

Given the importance of the EU system and law for all Member States and their administrations, it is also not very comprehensible that "European Union Institutions and Administration (English)" is only a freely-selected alternative in the fifth semester, while the more specialised module "Civil Service in the Countries of the European Union" is mandatory and positioned in the third semester.

The subjects/ modules of the second-cycle study programme *Public Administration* are more oriented towards managerial aspects for public administration. While this per se is not a problem, it is not clear if and how legal, financial and digital aspects are integrated into the content of the modules. Furthermore, given the specialised but limited scope of the programme, the replacement of the more generally oriented freely-selected alternatives "Rhetoric and Image Management" and "Coaching Practice and Theory" should be contemplated. By contrast, the subjects/ modules of the specialisation ESPM seem to be well balanced; the focus on education management is clear and systematic, legal and financial aspects are covered by mandatory courses ("Legal regulation of education" in the second semester, "Financial Management of Education and Science" in the third semester) and digitalisation seems to be included at least in the freely-selected alternatives (e.g. "Management of the Modern Education Technologies").

Given the general need of every study programme to constantly revise and adapt its subjects/ modules and the corresponding contents, the expert panel has identified some points for further discussion as mentioned above. The need to revise and complement the existing subjects and their sequences has also been explicitly confirmed by members of the teaching staff during the online site-visit. Apart from that, it is concluded that the existing structures and mechanisms provide the necessary basis for this process and the further consistent development of competences of students.

### *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*

There are various avenues for the personalization of studies (e.g. possibility to study according to individual study schedule, to take foreign languages, to participate in academic mobility, to choose electives (including courses from other programmes), undertake voluntary internship on a master level, to use non-formal and informal education in crediting of study subjects etc.). In addition, there are possibilities for students to select topics and adjust them for assignments in various modules and for the final thesis. Likewise, tasks in modules have been adapted, depending on students' working background or professional experience. That said, the problem is that not all optional courses can be selected by students, as a selection of optional courses is group-determined and hence, only some of them are actually offered. A particular issue on the second-cycle level is related to a low volume of electives in the programme – one course / module for the entire programme. Hence, 7% of the electives' share in the programme is too low. As a lack of specific skills has been highlighted by alumni and social partners such as various law topics, leadership skills, or data analysis competencies, these could be integrated into a basket of elective courses. In principle, MRU offers opportunities for students to personalise the structure of PA study field programmes

according to their personal learning objectives and intended learning outcomes, but in reality students face several constraints, in particular, in the second-cycle studies.

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

The principles of preparation, evaluation and defence of final theses are clearly determined by the "Procedure for the Assessment of Learning Outcomes at MRU (from 01.02.2021)" for the evaluated study programmes. A list of themes, supervisors and consultants is published for the first-cycle students in their third and for the second-cycle students in their first semester. However, students are also able to propose their own subjects. Approved themes for final theses are uploaded in the "IS Studijos" system and all pertinent information is available at the website of the MRU Institute of Public Administration (IPA). The subjects of the bachelor theses (Annex 1.4 to the respective SER) show a wide range of topics relevant for the study of public administration with a strong but not exclusive focus on Lithuania. The same applies to the second-cycle study programme *Public Administration*, while for the specialisation ESPM the distinct thematic orientation is also reflected in the titles and topics of the master theses (Annex 1.5 to the respective SER). The expert panel concludes on this basis that the necessary regulations and mechanisms are in place to ensure the compliance of final theses with the field and cycle requirements.

### *Strengths and weaknesses of this evaluation area:*

#### *(1) Strengths:*
1. Structures/mechanisms to revise and adapt the study programmes and their content are in place and can be used for upcoming revisions.
2. Various ways and possibilities to personalise studies with a flexibility provided to students, except for choosing elective courses (see Weaknesses below).

#### *(2) Weaknesses:*
1. Too low volume and share of elective courses in the second-cycle studies and group-level selection of electives, which reduces the possibilities for students to select courses according to personal preferences.
2. Insufficient coverage and provision of specific skills such as law topics, leadership skills, or data analysis competencies in both levels of study cycles.
3. Need to review and complement some of the existing subjects and their sequences especially for the first-cycle study programme Public Governance and Leadership and for the second-cycle study programme Public Administration.

## 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*

Results of research performance significantly followed recommendations proposed by experts during the previous external evaluation. More precisely, the University focused on internationalisation of its research and has achieved continual increase in the number of publications indexed either in the Web of Science or the Scopus database. Teaching staff's publication records related to the evaluated period include numerous high-quality publications; besides 19 articles in top international journals with the highest impact factors (Q1), teachers authored or co-authored 11 articles in Q2-journals, 6 articles in Q3-journals, and 6 articles in Q4-journals (SER, pp. 12-13). Taking lists of other articles, chapters, and books (monographs) into account, the overall publication record of teaching staff of the University during the evaluated period is impressive indeed.

Teachers have established and/or developed several collaborations which were of high importance in terms of the abovementioned internationalisation. First of all, during the evaluated period, the MRU teaching staff collaborated with international scholars and this collaboration led to several joint publications. Despite the suspension of the institutional membership in the NISPAcee (the Network of Institutes and Schools of Public Administration in Central and Eastern Europe) that happened in 2012, this membership has been renewed and it may lead not only to teaching mobility and various joint research initiatives, but also to the promotion of the offered study programmes of MRU. Last but not least, contributions from a few internationally well-known scholars (e.g. Michiel de Vries) brought a high additional value as well as a kind of international academic visibility. This approach should be evaluated as a good practice.

Teaching staff of the University was rather successful in grant competitions and MRU teachers (either as main applicants or members of applying consortiums) won several national or international grants in recent years. Moreover, MRU established the internal "Research Promotion Fund" in 2020 in order to support its own teachers within their research activities, including not only research itself, but also promotion and further exploitation of its results. During the first years, MRU annually allocated ca. 50 thousand euros for the Fund. These facts allow us to conclude that it is a valuable additional measure supporting research at the University.

The contents of research conducted by teaching staff fully correspond to the contents of the courses/subjects offered by MRU within the PA field study programmes at both cycles. This approach is supported by means of collaboration with other stakeholders; namely with other Lithuanian HEIs, the Committee of State Governance and Municipalities of the Seimas of the Republic of Lithuania, the Office of the Government of the Republic of Lithuania, various ministries, municipal/local governments, and local community organisations (SER, p. 14). On this matter, three initiatives and their achievements should be highlighted: 1) MRU in cooperation with the Ministry of Interior established a "Network of Public Management Competences" which tries to facilitate multilateral exchange of knowledge as well as experience between Lithuanian HEIs, and also between them and various public authorities; 2) MRU in cooperation with Kaunas University of Technology established and administer their own international research journal entitled "Public Policy and Administration" which has been indexed in the Scopus database since 2012 (according to the information in the SER, it is a Q2-journal nowadays); 3) most of the present teaching staff are actively involved in

activities of an in-house research laboratory entitled "Public Governance Innovation Laboratory".

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

The research conducted at MRU directly responds to the content of the subjects taught in the PA field study programmes. Study subjects are directly related to research carried out in the field of public administration, while education, environment, health, and energy policies that are researched cover important public policy areas in the studies. Research in other public policies such as diaspora, equal opportunities, and sports policy could also be noted. The links to the latest public administration trends are evident, be it digital government, public sector innovation etc. Teaching staff researches and writes about innovation, but also analyses what innovations social partners need in the public administration field, follows research trends, and looks at what competences will be needed in 5 to 10 years. In addition, part of the research concerns public administration theories, public sector strategic and programming management, public sector organisation management, public sector analysis and information management, public administration systems and cross-sectoral integration, public finance and public procurement administration, public relations and marketing, leadership, and public service in EU countries. Overall, even though the subjects of public administration studies are based on research, the aim of which is to transfer the latest knowledge in the field of public administration to students, one important area of expertise at the faculty and University level – social innovation – does not find reflections in the first-cycle study programme (aims or learning outcomes).

Links between the content of studies and latest developments in the public administration field are made sure by using the latest literature, legal acts, data analytics, and theoretical materials, where tasks for students are integrated into theoretical frames and topics. Also, most relevant problems in Lithuanian public administration are incorporated into studies and social partners provide themes for students' research that keeps the studies up-to-date. Likewise, practitioners from different public sector institutions provide information about practices of these institutions. Overall, from the conducted applied research there is an access to project-related datasets and materials. Thus, one can conclude that the content of the studies is sufficiently linked with the latest developments in public administration discipline and practice.

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

Students in the first-cycle are directly involved in research, especially thanks to the module entitled "Introduction to Research Methodology" (in the third semester of their study). It is expected that students perform tasks like systematic analysis of relevant literature within this module. In addition, first-cycle students can "test" their readiness for involvement in serious research by means of their theses which usually also reflect objectives of teaching staff's

research (applied research in particular). Otherwise, the first-cycle students are prepared for active involvement in research through several compulsory subjects/courses – they obtain information on relevant recent international research, they learn to formulate suitable research questions, etc.

According to the information in the SER, second-cycle students are involved in research from the first semester. All of them must attend a compulsory subject/course entitled "Research Methodology". Themes of Master theses at MRU strongly correlate with applied research conducted by teachers of the University, and students are invited to attend conferences to present the results or findings from their theses.

However, during the site-visit, participating students did not confirm intensive involvement in ongoing research. On one hand, only a few students participated in this event and it cannot be considered as a significant sample; on the other hand, opinions and information presented by them indicate lower interest of students in research activities. MRU should understand this state not only as a shortcoming but also as a challenge that needs to be addressed.

*Strengths and weaknesses of this evaluation area:*

*(1) Strengths:*
1. Studies are linked with global and national developments, in particular, to digitalisation aspects of public administration, and hence, there is a reliance on up-to-date literature and practical use cases in the study process.
2. The results of teachers' research performance during the evaluated period are impressive and MRU seems to be ready for both academic collaboration and competition in the field of public administration.
3. The University has adopted measures in order to enhance research results of its teachers (e.g., the "Network of Public Management Competences", the "Research Promotion Fund", and the "Public Governance Innovation Laboratory").

*(2) Weaknesses:*
1. A distinctive area of expertise at the faculty and University level – social innovation – is not reflected in the first-cycle study programme (in learning aims or learning outcomes).
2. Besides the possibility to focus their final theses on questions linked to some ongoing research, students are not sufficiently familiar with other options of how they can be actively involved in scientific activities.

## 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*

The application and admission procedure for the first-cycle study programmes at MRU is organised and administered by Lithuanian Centralised Admissions Information System (LAMA BPO). In order to enter the first-cycle study programme (PAL) in 2021, all candidates

that applied for state-funded and not-state-funded places had to have two state maturity exams passed (Lithuanian language and literature; history). Additionally, the competitive score had to be not lower than 5.4 (out of 10). Entrants who have made noteworthy achievements in olympiads, volunteered, or participated in military service, can be awarded with additional points (SER, p. 16). Meanwhile, the application procedures for the second-cycle study programmes are established by MRU based on the rules of the University. The calculation of competitive scores is made up of two parts: 1) the arithmetic mean of the bachelor thesis / final examinations; 2) the arithmetic mean of the grades from the diploma supplement. Additionally, the entrants have motivation interviews with the head of the Study Programme Committee. Information related to admission criteria and student selection for the study programmes is accessible at the University webpage in Lithuanian and English (https://www.mruni.eu/en/admission_procedure/).

The number of applicants to the first-cycle PA study field remained similar within the period analysed (2018-2020). Every year, there were between 58 to 62 first priority and between 296 to 323 other priority applicants. Meanwhile, the number of entrants who signed study contracts has increased: 15 (2 SF and 13 NSF) in 2018; 10 (only NSF) in 2019; 28 (9 SF and 19 NSF) in 2020. In addition, according to the additional information provided to the Panel members, there were from 22 (2018) to 14 (2020) graduates in the PGL programme. Summarising the admission score of the first-cycle PA entrants within the review period, it differs depending on the year: the average in 2018 was 5.13 (8.44 highest, 3.04 lowest; in 2018 a different formula was used for calculation); the average in 2020 was 6.74 (9.26 highest, 5.40 lowest).

Furthermore, there were from 56 to 65 first priority and from 138 to 177 other priority applicants to the second-cycle PA programme (and ESPM specialisation) within the analysed period (in 2020 the total number has increased). The number of students who signed contracts has been dropping every year: 96 (33 SF and 63 NSF) in 2018; 84 (23 SF and 61 NSF) in 2019; 66 (13 SF and 53 NSF) in 2020. Meanwhile, the admission score from 2018 to 2020 remained stable: the average in 2018 is 14.69 (17.14 highest, 12.25 lowest); 2019 average – 14.98 (17.05 highest, 12.91 lowest); 2020 average – 14.63 (17.62 highest, 11.64 lowest).

In general, admission to the first- and second-cycle study programmes is carried out efficiently according to established procedures. However, the expert panel noticed several admission related issues. Although the overall number of entrants to the PA study field (both first- and second-cycles) remains rather high and stable, a decrease in the number of students who sign contracts to study master programmes in both state funded and non-state funded places is observed (SER, p. 18). Additionally, for example, as commented by the SER team during the site-visit, the second-cycle programme (PA) is perceived as "too broad in scope" by some students. Consequently, few of them are interested in this programme as they prefer more specific master degree studies. Therefore, aspects related to the attractiveness as well as the focus of the study programmes (especially second-cycle studies) should be discussed by the parties concerned in order to ensure their sustainability.

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

MRU's procedure for the recognition of foreign qualifications, partial studies and prior non-formal and informal learning follow the applicable national legislation as regulated by the University decisions.

In all cases the students must submit an application providing all relevant information. For the recognition of informal and prior non-formal learning candidates must meet 3 requirements: 1) have at least a secondary education; 2) have at least 3–5 years of work experience in the field relevant for the learning objectives of the study field; and 3) provide evidence of learning achievements acquired in the system of non-formal adult education, certifying the compliance of the achievements with the learning objectives of the subject(s). The recognition of foreign qualifications is included in the University entrance application process, the decision is made within one month of application date and is subject to appeals in case the student does not agree with the decision. Qualifications acquired by MRU students within the Erasmus+ mobility period are fully recognised.

According to the SER (first-cycle SER, p.17 and second-cycle SER, p.19), there were no applications submitted with requests to recognise prior/other learning in the PA study field. Foreign qualifications of 6 applicants from India, Afghanistan, Nigeria, and Guinea for the admission years 2019–2020 and 2020–2021 were not recognised: in four cases due to failed entry exams, in two cases due to inadequate qualification for second-cycle studies at the University.

Considering the above, the evaluation panel considers that the procedure for the recognition of foreign qualifications and its application is adequate but the application of the procedure for the prior/informal learning cannot be assessed at this time due to the lack of data.

### 3.3.3. Evaluation of conditions for ensuring academic mobility of students

MRU students can participate in national and international exchange programmes, the main of which are: Erasmus+ (mobility for studies or traineeships); bilateral university agreements; traineeships in global Lithuanian communities and Lithuanian schools; mobility under cross-border contracts, Nordplus. Information related to student mobility opportunities (including the list of main exchange destinations) is easily accessible on the University website (https://www.mruni.eu/en/university/internationalization/) and it is shared during specific events and lectures, via posters.

The situation of incoming and outgoing students in both first- and second-cycle study programmes differs. Within the review period (only in 2018), there were two first-cycle students who went for studies or practice abroad, and no incoming students as PGL is conducted in Lithuanian language only. Meanwhile, there were also only two PA field outgoing students (1 in 2018 and 1 in 2019) from the second-cycle. Where incoming students are concerned, the numbers are significantly higher, and have been growing recently: 7 (6 admitted; 1 came to study) in 2018; 34 (17 admitted; 17 came to study) in 2019; 46 (27 admitted; 19 came to study) in 2019. The numbers greatly increased due to the fact that MRU

and Taras Shevchenko National University of Kyiv (Ukraine) signed a contract, resulting in the arrival of many students from Ukraine.

According to the SER (p. 19), MRU students are encouraged to take part in mobility abroad; however, only a small number of them (from the discussed programmes) took advantage of this opportunity. Additionally, during the site-visit, the expert panel noticed that students present appeared to lack awareness about mobility and internships in general. This issue needs to be addressed and might require a review of the internationalisation strategy, including additional incentives and awareness raising activities. For example, issues to consider could be: mobility promotion; response to the Lithuanian demographic situation; the contract with Taras Shevchenko National University of Kyiv (Ukraine) as an example to be followed for future mobility agreements; remote formats for internships abroad, etc.

### 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

MRU offers its students support in different spheres: academic, financial, social, psychological, and personal. Information about every form of support can be found on the University webpage (https://intranet.mruni.eu/en/current_students/).

In every instance, MRU students can be consulted and helped individually as well as in groups. For instance, their designated study manager as well as other staff members can be addressed when students have questions related to the study process, while the Psychological Consulting Department helps them to cope with study challenges, communication, and other problems. Furthermore, the MRU community tries to maintain a healthy students' work-leisure balance. Teachers and university staff (e.g. Career Center) offer individual consultations related to career opportunities, share information about available work positions, while the University Health and Sports Center invites its members to a list of activities and groups. It is important to note that in 2021 the Community Welfare Center was created in order to coordinate the arrangement of support services.

MRU provides students with the opportunity to receive various types of financial support. From 2018 to 2021, 44 incentive scholarships were given to first-cycle PA field best performing students and 59 to second-cycle PA students. Furthermore, the University also awarded social scholarships for students who are in difficult situations (experiencing financial, family, health and other problems). During the same period, 32 such scholarships were granted to PA field bachelor students as well as 23 to PA field master students. Additionally, MRU students can submit applications in order to receive: Group Coordinator's Scholarship; Patron scholarship; International Ambassador's Scholarship. In some cases, students can get their tuition fees reduced or can be fully exempted from paying them.

The expert panel noted that the University has created a good student support system. It was observed that, for example, informal student-faculty communication was well evaluated by online site-visit participants, and an overall environment of trust has been established.

### 3.3.5 Evaluation of the sufficiency of study information and student counselling

Once entrants begin their studies at MRU, faculty representatives (e.g. the director of the institute that supervises the study programme) organise meetings and share general and most relevant information with them: about the University and its legal acts, library, study programmes, contact persons, etc. As in most universities, MRU students are introduced to each subject by lecturers during the first lectures. Reacting to different needs expressed by students, consultations are offered both remotely and face-to-face, including on weekends. The information related to the study programmes is accessible via MRU intranet, teachers' consultation hours can be found on the website of the institute.

Students are surveyed in order to monitor whether they receive sufficient information on issues related to their studies. According to the results (from 2018-2020), approximately 85% first- and 80% second-cycle PA field students stated that they receive the necessary information and assistance from the University.

Overall, the University has created a well-functioning information sharing and student counselling system. However, as mentioned in section 3.2.3, the expert panel observed that students present in the online site-visit discussions appeared not to be aware of possibilities to engage in research activities (e.g. as research assistant) and lacked information about conditions for internships (particularly bachelor students). This matter should be discussed by the programme management.

### *Strengths and weaknesses of this evaluation area:*

### *(1) Strengths:*
1. The University has established a good student support mechanism.

### *(2) Weaknesses:*
1. A decrease in the number of students signing contracts for master programmes is observable.
2. Students seem to lack awareness about mobility programmes abroad and internship possibilities (in particular young students).

## 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*

MRU emphasises a student-centred teaching and learning approach, fostering students' participation by usually also broadcasting face-to-face lectures and seminars via Moodle or MS Teams platforms. Teaching and learning methods are diverse and include, inter alia, technology-based learning forms. Besides physical presence, remote and hybrid formats are increasingly applied. Corresponding didactic and technological challenges are taken into

account by regularly offering special training for teaching staff. Cumulative assessments and diverse assessment methods, which are determined separately for each subject, shall also ensure that the intended learning objectives are met. Teachers provide regular and ongoing feedback to students in various forms (written/orally, during/after class) by addressing their strengths and weaknesses as well as areas for further improvement. For the first-cycle study programme *Public Governance and Leadership* there are also special consultations during and after the students' internships. Students have also the possibility to contact and consult teaching staff by various means (face-to-face, remote, if necessary even on weekends). This is, however, not a one-way-process because lecturers as well as the Study Programme Committees also discuss and take into consideration the experiences and expectations of the students in order to improve study and assessment methods. Therefore, multiple mechanisms are in place to ensure that students are informed about their achievements, that teaching and learning processes take into account the needs of the students and to enable them to achieve the defined learning outcomes.

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

MRU offers a wide range of financial, social and psychological support for students with special needs. Its premises are adapted for people with mobility and visual impairments; elevators, adapted toilets and special workplaces with appropriate technical/ software equipment are available. The policy to reach and support students with special needs seems to be systematic, as, for instance, a questionnaire is uploaded in each student's e-record book, where students can indicate their needs and which provides the base for the individual adaptation of their study environment. Apart from that, students with academic, financial, social, psychological, personal, and other problems can potentially also get support from MRU. For example, tuition fees can be reduced and "Social scholarships" can be awarded etc. An institutional novelty is the "Community Welfare Center", founded in 2021 in order to improve the coordination of support services and measures offered by MRU. During the online site-visit it was however observed, that at least for the evaluated programmes there was obviously no real definition/ understanding what "socially vulnerable groups" are and how to identify and assist them (the only reference was to "disabled" persons). Therefore it is concluded that a better familiarisation with the existing mechanisms and their potential target groups might be a useful point of discussion for the programme management as well as for the teaching staff.

### 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

In accordance with the "Procedure for the Assessment of Learning Outcomes at MRU (from 01.02.2021)" the study progress of students is assessed cumulatively during and at the end of each course. 50-60% of the final grade is made up of cumulative grading while 50-40% depend on the final examination, which allows for a constant monitoring of the individual achievements throughout the entire term. Multiple feedback by teachers (see above 3.4.1) and

group/ individual discussions of assessments ensure that students have the necessary information for their self-assessment and the subsequent planning of their studies. The study progress of the students is not only monitored at the level of the individual courses but also at the level of the Study Programme Committees, which regularly monitor the quality of studies and are in close contact regarding the respective issues with teachers, group curators and student representatives. The systemic exigencies for monitoring are specified by the "Study Regulations" of MRU. One point of special concern is the monitoring and possible reduction of drop-out rates with the assistance of contact persons, counselling and the individualisation of studies. All in all, at the level of students, teaching staff and programme management, the conditions for systematic monitoring are in place and enable perceptive users to assess their performance and to plan accordingly.

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

MRU monitors the careers of its graduates constantly via the Study Programme Committees that do so by relying on the following instruments: 1) data from the karjera.lt website; 2) direct communication with graduates via email, social media, and telephone; and 3) meetings with graduates at MRU alumni events.

Data on objective career monitoring (employability of graduates 6 months and 3 years after graduation) are monitored by MRU relying on karjera.lt and SODRA (State Social Insurance Fund Board) data. SER indicates that according to Sodra, in 2018, MRU graduates ranked first among Lithuanian HEIs in terms of the percentage of those employed 6 months after graduation (77.6%). In 2019, the employability of graduates 6 months after graduation was 73.1%. In 2020, this figure reached 75.1%. The patterns of first-cycle graduate employment followed the same trend with a decrease in 2019 and a slight increase in 2020 (~10% lower than that of the second-cycle graduates).

According to a survey conducted by MRU in June 2021, PA field second-cycle graduates work mostly in the public sector (74%), around 24% work in the private sector, and 2% work in the non-governmental sector. MRU did not present the data on the first-cycle graduates.

Considering the above the panel feels that career monitoring measures are adequate and the employability of the alumni is good. However, it would be useful to increase graduate response rate to the questionnaires as it currently varies between 36% and 52%. This would help understand better how MRU PA programmes contribute to career advancement after the graduation as well as complement the information that is currently unavailable (e.g. statistics on the self-employed graduates and their career dynamics).

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

MRU has established policies and procedures to ensure academic integrity which have been implemented effectively. The principles of integrity are defined in the Code of Academic Ethics, adopted in 2015, which is based on the principles of the Magna Charta Universitatum. The Code states that "The University shall not tolerate any form of academic dishonesty (data

forgery, fraud, partiality, fraudulence, theft, plagiarism, bribery, purchase and sale of works, presentation of other authors' works as own, unjustifiable co-authorship, cheating during examinations and other unfair behaviour). For violations of the principle of fair competition, plagiarism, or any other form of academic dishonesty related to assessments, students must be expelled from MRU, as for the serious violation of academic ethics, without the right to enter MRU for up to five years" (SER, pp. 24-25). MRU pursues a non-discriminatory study and research policy, as set out in the Code. According to the SER, Gender equality is ensured in accordance with the national recommendations on how to ensure equal rights for men and women in Lithuanian HEIs. The SER also states that the development of MRU's academic ethics infrastructure is directly coordinated with the development of the quality assurance system, and measures exist that are intended to instil academic integrity as the norm of the process of studies at MRU. Tools for plagiarism checks have been implemented.

The Academic Centre of Ethics was established at MRU in 2011. In 2011, MRU joined the International Academic Integrity Centre and has applied the "Academic Integrity Assessment Guide" developed by the centre. MRU has also organised the International Transparency School for 10 years now. Teaching staff of MRU undertake research and publish papers on aspects of academic integrity. MRU, together with its partners, has organised international conferences on academic ethics. In 2019, an international conference on academic integrity was held at MRU, where 100 researchers and practitioners from more than 20 countries shared their insights. MRU also participated in the international Erasmus+ Strategic Partnerships project "European Network for Academic Integrity" (ENAI) (launch in 2016 for three years, MRU was responsible for tasks related to academic integrity, self-evaluation for students, lecturers and researchers, departments and organisations, as well as developing a dictionary of academic integrity terms).

The MRU Student Body has an academic and social affairs committee which provides information and organises public lectures on academic integrity, prevention, and statistics. In addition, MRU Library offers a wide scope of training for students, including topics on measures of implementation of academic integrity, and the reference management tools Mendeley and Zotero.

Overall, as described in the SER and confirmed by respondents at the site-visit, no violations of the principles of academic honesty, tolerance and non-discrimination were recorded among the students studying in the first- and second-cycle study programmes during the period covered by the SER. Appropriate information on rules and requirements, including dedicated training and research activities and the collaborative approach between teachers and students have contributed to a culture of mutual trust. Regarding written exams/assignments as well as bachelor and master theses, cases of plagiarism are very rare and potential problems are detected and mitigated early on.

### 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*

MRU has established policies and procedures for the submission and examination of appeals and complaints. According to the SER, MRU's Appeal Regulations grant students the right to

appeals on "1) the validity of the regulations for admission to MRU, i.e., the decision not to admit to MRU; 2) the procedure of a session of examination and defence of a yearly paper; 3) the assessment of session or study results and/or an examination; 4) the procedure of the defence of a final paper and the taking of a final examination; 5) the crediting of study results; 6) the recognition of the achievements and competencies acquired in a non-formal way; 7) the decision of MRU not to confer a scientific degree; and 8) an expert assessment of the dissertation/monograph submitted externally." The Appeal Commission has to be formed within five working days to deal with the complaint according to internal rules, according to information provided in the SER.

During the evaluation period, no appeals were received from first- and second- cycle study programmes regarding examination and thesis defence procedures and assessments (cf. SER and discussions during the site-visit). According to the SER, students are introduced to the legal regulations on assessments and appeals during introductory lectures. However, feedback during the site-visit from students was rather limited due to the low number of students participating in the online site-visit. Those present seemed to be familiar with the rules and support services for complaints and appeals only in part. That said, graduates and (the few) students (present) confirmed that teachers are approachable, flexible and responsive to students' complaints, and most issues/complaints are solved in an informal and amicable manner.

*Strengths and weaknesses of this evaluation area:*

*(1) Strengths:*

1. In addition to well established rules, principles and tools to ensure academic integrity, a broad range of activities is offered to ensure the principles and rules are implemented in practice (including research activities dedicated to aspects of academic integrity and international events).
2. Structures/mechanisms which allow for the systematic assessment, (self-)evaluation and monitoring at individual, course and programme levels are in place.
3. A wide range of financial, social and psychological support for students with special needs is available.

*(2) Weaknesses:*

1. Evidence of familiarisation regarding the definition/ understanding what "socially vulnerable groups" are and how to identify and assist them was lacking.
2. Limited graduate response rates in the case of career monitoring and feedback questionnaires.
3. Relatively low and inconsistent response rates to post-graduation surveys within both study cycles might not provide reliable data for the evaluation of employability of graduates and graduate career tracking.
4. Limited feedback from students during the site-visit on internal policies and procedures related to internal support and complaints and appeals mechanisms (also due to the low participation rate).

## 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*

Approximately 20 teachers are involved in teaching in each cycle of PA field studies at MRU, and according to the information in the SER, their numbers, qualification structure as well as competences correspond with all relevant legal requirements. The University also declares a stability of its teaching staff. This is an important feature confirming the interest of teachers to work for MRU. In addition, it gives a rationale for all MRU's investments in development of its human resources.

The ratio of teaching staff to students varies from 1:9.9 to 1:15.1 (in the first-cycle) and from 1:15.2 to 1:18.6 (in the second-cycle) and the workload of teachers can be evaluated as adequate. More precisely, according to the SER, this allows each teacher to ensure quality of studies, as well as providing excellent conditions for individual academic support, counselling, and feedback to each student (SER, p. 26/28). Besides, one can positively assess official efforts leading to engagement of internationally recognized scholars from abroad or various experts from practice (e.g., policy makers) to deliver guest-lectures.

Taking the focus or recent research activities of teaching staff, their qualification, and declared competences into account, MRU's teaching staff is competent and ready to ensure high-quality education and achieve desired learning outcomes within the offered study programmes in each cycle.

*3.5.2. Evaluation of conditions for ensuring teaching staff's academic mobility*

Academic mobility and participation in various programmes for academic mobility seem to be very well developed in the case of MRU. Its teachers actively used Erasmus+ teaching mobility programme during the evaluated period: as for the outgoing first-cycle teachers, 9 of them participated in the programme in 2018, 13 teachers in 2019, and 3 other teachers in 2020 (SER, p. 29); as for the outgoing second-cycle teachers, 7 teachers participated in the programme in 2018, 8 teachers in 2019, and one teacher in 2020 (SER, p. 31). However, teaching staff of MRU also used other programmes supporting or facilitating academic mobility, including the NordPlus programme, funding of researchers' visits provided by the Lithuanian Research Council, internships, and visits under MRU bilateral agreements or other specialised programmes (e.g., Fulbright Scholar, DAAD, Swiss Government Excellence Scholarships, etc.). The first-cycle teachers participated in total in 95 outgoing visits in the 2018-2020 period, and the second-cycle teachers participated in total in 82 outgoing visits in the same period. MRU belongs to the Lithuanian HEIs which broadly exploit various mobility programmes for incoming visits, too.

During the online site-visit, teachers declared efficient and proactive assistance from administration as well as sufficient information in cases when somebody wants to take part in

international academic mobility. Representatives of the University administration who participated in the site-visit confirmed that active involvement in international teaching mobility programmes is considered an important condition for personal academic development as well as for achieving further academic career steps.

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

Continuous training and improvement of teachers' competences is one of the areas to which MRU has paid a lot of attention since the last external evaluation. As it has been stressed by representatives of the University administration during the online-site visit, these efforts have been accompanied by increasing requirements linked to teaching staff positions. The University has adopted this approach in order to improve its own readiness to be actively involved in international academic collaboration as well as competition.

Speaking of the development of competences of the teaching staff, MRU offers a set of internal courses or training for its own teachers (e.g., a teacher training programme entitled "Educational and Scientific Environment at the University" or library modules like "Getting to Know the Library" and "Searching for Scientific Information in Electronic Sources") (SER, p. 31). During the evaluated period, the highest demand as well as the highest offer was in the field of teachers' ICT competences. This might be explained by both recent trends in HEI education and limitations evoked by the COVID-19 pandemic. Speaking on the latter reason, one can point out that more than 70 training sessions focused on conducting remote classes and distance learning methods were held and almost 600 MRU teachers (i.e. teachers from all units of the University) took part in these sessions in the spring semester 2020 (SER, p. 31). Moreover, the University established the so-called Distanced-Work Assistance Group. Its main mission is monitoring distance-work and a fast intervention in cases of some issues (for instance, members of the Group reviewed the virtual environment of courses, proposed some recommendations linked to the active use of Moodle tools, and assessed the quality and volume of information offered to students).

Teachers are encouraged to participate in other (i.e. externally offered) courses or training, too. Within this context, teaching staff of MRU took part, for instance, in training organised by the Council of Europe in cooperation with the Institute of International Sociology and the Dainava Training Centre: during the evaluated period, three teachers took part in the programme entitled "Training of trainers course for the civil participation in decision-making", and four teachers participated in the programme entitled "Training of trainers course for the ELoGE. European Label of Governance Excellence" (SER, p. 30).

### Strengths and weaknesses of this evaluation area:

#### (1) Strengths:
1. Teaching staff involved in both cycles of the offered study programmes adequately fulfils all legal requirements linked to their qualification structure and competences.
2. The University systematically exploits its own (in-house) training and courses in order to improve the competences of teaching staff.

3. Teachers of MRU are very active in international teaching mobility programmes, and they do not only focus on the Erasmus+ mobility programme, but actively use other mobility programmes, too.

*(2) Weaknesses:*
   Not identified.

## 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*

There is a sufficient number of class-rooms equipped with up-to-date technologies for both face-to-face and online studies. To add value to studies and research, MRU has established a research laboratory of Public Governance Innovation (MRU LAB). MRU uses Moodle as an electronic study platform for studies. Various software licences have been obtained for studies and research. Likewise, systems of plagiarism check have been adopted. Existing equipment, IT tools are fully sufficient for the Public Administration programme's needs. Facilities and study processes have been adapted to the special needs of students. Thus, disabled people are not disadvantaged in accessing study buildings or partaking in study, i.e. there are special applications and devices for students with reduced mobility and visual impairment.

Library services are of very good quality and accessible to students physically or electronically. Visitors of the Library also have an opportunity to access individual and group work rooms, workplaces for visitors with disabilities and discussion spaces. Study materials – literature, databases etc. – are updated in cooperation between lecturers and the library. Library resources are formed in a targeted way, considering MRU study fields and the programmes. Hence, the latest scientific literature is bought and most important databases are subscribed, but the possibility to obtain study materials via open access has also been used.

Arrangements for internship are clear and there seem to be no significant problems in the communication of expectations and tasks to students nor social partners, who host students for internship purposes. Students' internship is organised in accordance with the MRU Student Internship Regulations. While students can find the internship organisation on their own, they also have the possibility to select an internship place from the social partners' database, but they seem to be not aware of this option (see above point 3.3.5). Prior to the start of the internship, a tripartite student internship agreement is signed by the student, the dean of the faculty, and the head of the organisation where the internship takes place. Students' internships are led by the MRU internship supervisors and supervisors appointed by the organisations. The internship supervisor appointed by the organisation provides feedback on the student's internship, and the MRU internship supervisor conducts the final evaluation of the internship. Besides the one mentioned above, another shortcoming, as

perceived by hosting organisations, is a relatively short duration of internship at public sector organisations and – as suggested by social partners at the site-visit – it could be extended up to several months.

The main finance sources of study programmes are state appropriations for studies and student tuition fees. The evident challenges for teaching staff are related to technical aspects and Moodle limitations when using hybrid teaching, i.e. issues concerning user-friendliness and didactical matters, even though the overall technological infrastructure is considered to be of good quality. That said, there is training and support offered by the University on hybrid teaching and various aspects of a study process, and overall, physical, informational and financial resources are sufficient and adequate for carrying out studies effectively, as stipulated per guidelines of the Ministry of Education, Science and Sports.

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

To maintain the quality of studies, the department – Faculty of Public Management and Business – takes care of the maintenance of material and information resources, collects and analyses quantitative and qualitative information, is responsible for updating and supplementing resources, and provides annual public procurement plans to the management of MRU. For instance, a budget for the improvement of infrastructure and an energy sustainability plan for 2021–2025 has been approved that would foresee the instalment of solar panels, infrastructure improvements, start-up space creation, installation of energy-efficient servers etc. to be more energy-efficient, green and sustainable. MRU also has a common goal of regularly updating ICT equipment and software every 5 years. The library's public purchases are made 2-3 times a year, where first, books published by international publishers are selected by the academic staff of the study field, who follow the information on recently published books in their subject(s), cooperate with the director of the institute, and fill in the form on the library webpage or send a list of books needed to the Information Resource Acquisition Group by email. Finally, regular meetings are held in September/October with representatives of the labour market and society, where main trends and issues in the public administration field are discussed as well as plans are made on what upgrades must be introduced starting from next study year or sometimes, from the next semester. Thus, it can be concluded that learning facilities and resources available at MRU are planned, updated and enable the current number of students to achieve their learning outcomes both by face-to-face studies and by distance studies.

### Strengths and weaknesses of this evaluation area:

#### (1) Strengths:
1. Of very good quality library services, modern facilities and adjustment of premises and facilities to people with special needs.
2. Strong emphasis on green transition and sustainability (cost-effectiveness) in operating facilities and premises.

#### (2) Weaknesses:

1. Shortcomings in using and conducting hybrid studies from the perspective of infrastucture's user-friendliness and didactical aspects, even though the overall technological infrastructure is considered to be of good quality.
2. For the arrangements of internship, the students' placement in host organisations is considered to be of too short duration by social partners and students' awareness of internship possibilities could be increased, including at an early stage in their studies.

## 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*

MRU indicates that its internal quality assurance mechanisms and practices follow national legislation as well as international standards. SER (p. 35) indicates that the most important quality assurance activities are concentrated in the primary chain – in the interaction of the study programme coordination, teachers, other members of MRU staff, students, and other stakeholders. MRU also engages in international evaluations such as the NISPA PAQUALITY: the Public Administration Education Quality Enhancement (Erasmus+ "Strategic Partnership" KA203 project).

The MRU Academic Affairs Centre ensures that on-going evaluations are supported and conducted in a transparent manner.

The Study Programme Committee is responsible for the quality of the content of the study field curriculum and its implementation as well as compliance with the needs of stakeholders, the supervision of teachers' competencies, the adequacy of material resources, the supervision of the preparation of various study tools, and the publicity of study programmes within the field. One of the most important tasks of the Committee is to maintain a feedback system with students, graduates, and other stakeholders of the programmes of the study field, and to adjust the LOs, student workload, and the criteria for assessment. During the site-visit it was clarified that first- and second-cycle study programmes have separate Study Programme Committees.

In line with the adopted internal quality assurance procedures the content of the study field programmes is reviewed, evaluated, and updated annually including study plans, subject, topics, teaching, learning and assessment methods, resources, etc. The study plan of both the first- and the second-cycle PA studies and the descriptions of study subjects are reviewed annually, and modifications are made on the grounds of objective reasons related to changes in national legal acts and MRU regulations, as well as on students and teachers' feedback.

The University provided several examples of changes implemented based on the internal quality assurance results. For example:

- [...] in view of the changing environment and trends, where the duration of studies is shorter and young people seek to enter the labour market more quickly, after discussion with teachers and students, the SPC proposed to

shorten the first-cycle study programme (PGL) from 210 to 180 ECTS (from the 2018– 2019 study year). This also responded to the needs of employers, as people without a bachelor's degree are not eligible to work in the civil service.

- Some common subjects have been abandoned in favour of more focus on matters relating to PA. For example, "Strategic governance" has been replaced by "Public sector strategic and programme management", etc.
- The adoption of the Law on Strategic Management of the Republic of Lithuania prompted the modernisation of the subject of "Public sector strategic and programme management" and other relevant subjects.
- The Civil Service Department approved the competency model for civil servants and, accordingly, the subject "State service in the countries of the European Union" was updated.

Considering the information presented in the SER and the data collected during the site-visit, the expert panel assessed that internal quality assurance mechanisms are adequate/regular and function well, leading to positive changes in the curriculum and/or contents.


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

Both first- and second-cycle Study Programme Committees include student and social partner representatives as their members. Furthermore, as mentioned in section 3.4.4., MRU periodically circulates questionnaires among its graduates and students in order to receive feedback on its programmes and their quality as well as relevance to student careers. Furthermore, during the site-visit, MRU indicated that in the PA study field, those who implement these programmes have regular meetings usually in the beginning of the academic year with representatives of labour market and society where they discuss on the main trends and issues in PA field in order to review the demands and to plan what upgrades must be introduced starting from next study year (sometimes – from the next semester). Aside from the formal channels, social partners pointed out that informal feedback mechanisms also exist, i.e. faculty conduct occasional conversations, conferences and various events to engage alumni and social partners and garner feedback and inputs for study programme improvement (e.g. MRU Nights event). As a result, MRU receives periodic feedback from social partners on market demands.

Additionally, first- and second-cycle study programme alumni also provide their feedback to the heads of study programmes through periodic alumni meetings, various events and guest lecturer formats for experience sharing and their integration into studies.

While the above measures for stakeholder engagement are adequate, the site-visit demonstrated that MRU does not provide feedback to the social partners and other stakeholders on the changes implemented in response to their comments. This aspect of the stakeholder engagement in quality assurance could be improved and implemented more systematically, e.g. holding meetings with social partners immediately after the final thesis defence sessions to share the results and contents of the theses elaborated based on their

suggestions, formalising some of the currently individually undertaken initiatives mentioned above, recording feedback results for the future.

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

The information generated through formal and informal quality assurance and quality feedback channels is used effectively for the improvement of the study process and contents as evidenced by the examples presented in the section 3.7.1 above. The information on quality assurance mechanisms as well as reports produced are easily accessible on the main MRU website just one step away from the home page through a dropdown list under the item 'Studies' (https://www.mruni.eu/studiju-kokybe/). During the site visit the stakeholders also commented that feedback/quality assurance information is available on MRU social networks as well.

Based on the above evidence the panel evaluated the collection, use and publication of information on studies, their evaluation and improvement processes and outcomes, procedures and practices as adequate. However, as already addressed in section 3.7.2., MRU should – in response to the social partners comments at the site-visit – share the information on the follow-up to feedback received and changes implemented in a more systematic and institutionalised manner.

### 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)

When MRU students were met during the online site-visit, they shared their impressions of the studies that in principle were positive. Students, for example, stated that they had a successful start of their studies (first semester). They had meetings with the director and teachers of the programme, learning about their expectations, study methods and outcomes, etc. Those students who did not have such meetings received information by email. Moreover, they appreciated the fact that the programme design is adapted to the needs of working students, and the workload is manageable. Additionally, students said that they are aware of whom to contact in case a certain issue appears, they know and follow MRU's communication channels, suggesting that the University has a sufficient communication / information sharing function.

On the other hand, a remark was given about an occasion when only a single elective course was available in a second-cycle study programme. Also, students stated that it is not possible to participate in international mobility due to existing personal commitments. These facts can be deemed as limitations in study experience. As a response, a bigger list of master degree electives could be maintained, and flexible international mobility alternatives could be proposed (e.g. remote internships).

In general, the expert panel is left with a positive impression regarding the students' feedback on their study programmes (note, however, that as mentioned above only few students attended the site-visit). However, topics related to availability of elective courses (second-

cycle study programme) and internship possibilities (including international mobilities) should be discussed by the organisers of the PA field study programmes.

*Strengths and weaknesses of this evaluation area:*

*(1) Strengths:*
1. Well-designed formal quality assurance procedures that were known to all actors engaged in the evaluation exercise.
2. Ample formal and informal stakeholder engagement mechanisms.

*(2) Weaknesses:*
1. Topics related to availability of elective courses (second-cycle study programme) and internship possibilities (including international mobilities) should be discussed by the organisers of the PA field study programmes.
2. MRU does not provide feedback to the social partners and other stakeholders on the changes implemented in response to their comments. This aspect of the stakeholder engagement in quality assurance could be improved and implemented more systematically.

# IV. RECOMMENDATIONS

| Evaluation Area | Recommendations for the Evaluation Area (study cycle) |
|---|---|
| Intended and achieved learning outcomes and curriculum | ● In both study cycles, there should be consistent use of representatives of other HEIs and social partners in thesis defence committees as per the Descriptor of the Study Field of Public Administration.<br><br>● There should be a higher share of electives in the total programme of second-cycle studies and a broader basket of elective courses to choose from. Various law topics, leadership skills, or data analysis competencies could be integrated into a basket of elective courses.<br><br>● For both cycles of studies there should be a discussion about the revision/supplementation of existing subjects and their sequences as indicated in point 3.1.5. |
| Links between science (art) and studies | ● Social innovation / governance innovation as a niche topic could be more visible in the first-cycle studies to distinguish MRU from other Lithuanian public administration study programmes and attract students due to this specificity. |
| Student admission and support | ● The orientation and composition of the master programme should be reviewed to attract more students (for example, some students consider the second-cycle study programme of Public Administration as 'too broad').<br><br>● Alternative approaches to the internationalisation of the study programmes could be explored in order to stimulate student mobility abroad (e.g. via signing/extending bilateral agreements). |
| Teaching and learning, student performance and graduate employment | ● Programme management and teaching staff might develop a better understanding of "socially vulnerable groups" and how to identify/assist them on the basis of the existing mechanisms and their potential target groups. |

| | |
|---|---|
| Teaching staff | ● Further development of courses for teachers to improve their skills is desired, and, perhaps, more intensive involvement of social partners would be beneficial for both parties.<br><br>● A total number of outgoing visits of the teaching staff is impressive, and as for the incoming visits, their total number is sufficient. However, one can see room for some improvement at this point, especially if the university wants to host more scholars from top Western universities. |
| Learning facilities and resources | ● The challenges encountered by teaching staff on using equipment for hybrid studies should be further addressed.<br><br>● The duration of internship placements at hosting organisations in the public sector could be prolonged up to several months and further efforts made to raise the awareness of students on various internship possibilities also at early stages of their studies. |
| Study quality management and public information | ● Topics related to the availability of elective courses (master degree) and internship possibilities (including international mobilities) should be discussed by the organisers of the programmes.<br><br>● MRU should provide feedback to the social partners and other stakeholders on the changes implemented in response to their comments in a more systematic and institutionalised manner. |

# V. SUMMARY

Overall, the expert panel found that in the evaluation period MRU has systematically developed all seven evaluation areas of the first- and second-cycle study programmes in the Public Administration study field in line with the legal requirements, the needs of the labour market and the specific needs of the public sector. No fundamental shortcomings have been identified by the expert panel in the evaluation period. The panel noted that all recommendations of the previous evaluation have been taken into account and MRU has taken appropriate action to mitigate shortcomings identified at the time.

One of the strengths of MRU's study programmes in the field of Public Administration is their transdisciplinary approach. Strong links to PA practice have been established by the teachers based on the collaboration with a broad range of social partners. Teaching staff has ample opportunities for professional development. Their research performance is remarkable and also MRU support measures for research activities are noteworthy. Furthermore, well-functioning policies, procedures and tools are in place, e.g., for quality assessment and academic integrity, which has contributed to an environment of mutual trust.

That said, there is still room for improvement in most of the seven evaluation areas, notably related to the sustainability of the study programmes in terms of numbers of students and competition among HEIs offering public administration study programmes. In this context, MRU could sharpen the focus and profile of their programmes (in particular for the bachelor studies, social innovation / governance innovation as a niche focus could be more visible in the programme's learning outcomes and course titles). Furthermore, it would be advisable to further institutionalise the cooperation with social partners, including at the international level. This would also allow a more effective integration of internships into the study context. Other issues that will need further attention are a clearer perspective / more strategic view on internationalisation activities (e.g., in relation to NISPAcee membership and the resumption of a double-degree programme), transparency and communication related to research and internship opportunities for students, personalisation (electives) in second-cycle studies and the motivation for students to engage more actively in activities such as research and study programme improvements.

In conclusion, the expert panel would like to express their thanks to the team at MRU for compiling the self-evaluation report, for organising the online site-visit and for providing additional information in response to our requests for clarification. The panel also wishes to thank all site-visit participants for sharing their valuable insights.

**Expert panel chairperson signature:**

Dr. Christine Leitner