



CENTRE FOR QUALITY ASSESSMENT IN HIGHER EDUCATION

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**EVALUATION REPORT**  
**STUDY FIELD of Public Health**  
at Vilnius University

**Expert panel:**

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Report language – English

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## Study Field Data

|  |                             |                              |
|--|-----------------------------|------------------------------|
| Title of the study programme                             | <b>Public Health</b>        | <b>Public Health</b>         |
| State code   | 6121GX012                   | 6211GX012                    |
| Type of studies  | University studies          | University studies           |
| Cycle of studies   | First                       | Second                       |
| Mode of study and duration (in years)                    | Full-time (4 years)         | Full-time (2 years)          |
| Credit volume  | 240                         | 120                          |
| Qualification degree and (or) professional qualification | Bachelor of Health Sciences | Master of Health Sciences    |
| Language of instruction                                  | Lithuanian                  | Lithuanian                   |
| Minimum education required                               | Secondary education         | University Bachelor's degree |
| Registration date of the study programme                 | 25 June 1998                | 25 June 1998                 |

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# I. INTRODUCTION

## 1.1. BACKGROUND OF THE EVALUATION PROCESS

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

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

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

On the basis of this external evaluation report of the study field, SKVC takes a decision to accredit the 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 the evaluation areas is evaluated as unsatisfactory (1 point).

## 1.2. EXPERT PANEL

The expert panel was assigned according to the Experts Selection Procedure as approved by the Director of SKVC on 31 December 2019, [Order No. V-149](#). The expert panel conducted the site visit to the HEI on 26 October 2023.

1. Prof. Dr. Agneta Yngve (Sweden), panel chairperson - academic;
2. Prof. Dr. Róza Ádány (Hungary), panel member - academic;
3. Dr. Eleanor J Hothersall (Scotland), panel member - academic;
4. Ms Irena Taraškevičienė (Lithuania), panel member - representative of social partners;
5. Mr Ömer Faruk Sönmez (Turkey), panel member - students' representative.

## 1.3. GENERAL INFORMATION

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

| No. | Name of the document      |
|-----|---------------------------|
| 1.  | Course descriptions.      |
| 2.  | Examples of final theses. |

#### **1.4. BACKGROUND OF PUBLIC HEALTH FIELD STUDIES AT VILNIUS UNIVERSITY**

Vilnius University (VU) was founded in 1579 and is the oldest and largest higher education public institution in Lithuania. The University has 15 core academic units including 11 faculties, 1 institute, 1 centre, 1 academy, 1 business school and 12 core non-academic units. In 2022, the number of University employees was almost 5500 (of them more than 2500 of the teaching staff and almost 840 of the research staff). Public Health field training belongs to the Medical Faculty, which in 2017 established 4 institutes (Institute of Biomedical Sciences, Institute of Clinical Medicine, Institute of Odontology, Institute of Health Sciences). The institutes comprise 8 departments, among them the Department of Public Health.

In 2022, the Doctoral School of Medical and Health Sciences was launched as a non-academic branch unit of the Faculty of Medicine, responsible for organising doctoral studies in the fields of Medicine, Odontology and Public Health. The most prominent research areas of the Department of Public Health are population health and lifestyle caused by environmental factors, nutrition and public mental health. Currently, there are two study programmes registered and running in the Public Health field: the Bachelor's degree and the Master's degree programmes in Public Health. The Public Health study programmes conducted at Vilnius University were registered in 1998, dating back to 1962 since the Medical Faculty ran the study programme "Hygiene, Sanitation and Epidemiology" and was training specialists in the preventive medicine field, formerly known as doctors-hygienists. In the period of 2007-2013, the Department of Public Health implemented the Erasmus Mundus project funded by the European Commission to implement the joint European Master in Sustainable Regional Health System in English. It is a two-year international Master's programme conducted by 4 European universities.

In 2013, for the purpose of accreditation, both Bachelor's and Master's Public Health study programmes underwent the evaluation procedure resulting in accreditation for 7 years. After taking into account the recommendations, the teaching was reviewed and improved: new relevant topics were included in the subjects of Public Health studies: Digital Health, Digital Public Health Interventions; Vilnius University and the Faculty of Medicine have concluded agreements with other universities regarding the possibility of mobility programmes; the lecturers of the Department of Public Health improved their research activities by joining international research groups; and their international relationships by participating in the activities of international organisations were improved.

## II. GENERAL ASSESSMENT

The *first cycle* of the *Public Health* study field at Vilnius University is given a **positive** evaluation.

*Study field and cycle assessment in points by evaluation areas*

| No.           | Evaluation Area  | Evaluation of an Area in points* |
|---------------|--|----------------------------------|
| 1.            | Intended and achieved learning outcomes and curriculum             | 3                                |
| 2.            | Links between science (art) and studies                            | 2                                |
| 3.            | Student admission and support                                      | 3                                |
| 4.            | Teaching and learning, student performance and graduate employment | 3                                |
| 5.            | Teaching staff   | 3                                |
| 6.            | Learning facilities and resources                                  | 4                                |
| 7.            | Study quality management and public information                    | 3                                |
| <b>Total:</b> |  | 21                               |

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

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

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

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

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

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

*Study field and cycle assessment in points by evaluation areas*

| <b>No.</b>    | <b>Evaluation Area</b>   | <b>Evaluation of an Area in points*</b> |
|---------------|--|---|
| 1.            | Intended and achieved learning outcomes and curriculum             | 3                                       |
| 2.            | Links between science (art) and studies                            | 2                                       |
| 3.            | Student admission and support                                      | 3                                       |
| 4.            | Teaching and learning, student performance and graduate employment | 3                                       |
| 5.            | Teaching staff   | 3                                       |
| 6.            | Learning facilities and resources                                  | 4                                       |
| 7.            | Study quality management and public information                    | 3                                       |
| <b>Total:</b> |  | 21                                      |

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

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

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

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

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



### III. STUDY FIELD ANALYSIS

#### 3.1. AIMS, LEARNING OUTCOMES, AND CURRICULUM

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

*3.1.1. Evaluation of the conformity of the aims and outcomes of the field and cycle study programmes to the needs of the society and/or the labour market*

*(1) Factual situation*

Currently, the Bachelor's of Public Health study programme and the Master's of Public Health study programmes are being conducted at the Public Health Division of Institute of Health Sciences which is a part of Faculty of Medicine of the Vilnius University. As given in the SER, evaluations of the needs of the society and labour market (there is a shortage of Public Health specialists in the labour market) are performed. The capacity of the University is considered in these evaluations. The focus of the University is within the field of community level disease prevention of both communicable and non-communicable diseases with environmental health also being of importance.

Study field of Public Health relies on the Competency Framework for the Public Health Workforce in the European Region issued by WHO-ASPHER<sup>7</sup>. Study courses cover a wide range of study subjects. As given in the SER, planning the scope of study programmes is being developed by cooperating with social partners from the Lithuanian research and Public Health institutions, health care institutions and business entities.

The SER states that the learning outcomes of the study programmes in Public Health correspond to the priorities of Vilnius University's Strategic Action Plan 2021-2025 and contribute to the implementation of the University's vision and sustainability in contributing to the creation of society and the state, developing and carrying out interdisciplinary and international studies and scientific research and experimental development projects in cooperation with national and international partners. The Bachelor's and Master's study programmes in Public Health also meet the priorities of the Strategic Action Plan 2022-2025 of the Faculty of Medicine of Vilnius University. Teachers of the study programme indicate that students of the programmes are strong in Public Health management.

*(2) Expert panel judgement*

Public Health has been taught for decades at Vilnius University and has deep roots in environmental health area studies. Study programmes should be improved to fill in the gaps in graduates' qualifications in practical work to comply with the needs of the labour market. Given a wide spectrum of study subjects proposed to students, it may be supposed that Public Health graduates have skills corresponding to the needs of different areas of employment. Teachers of

the study programmes, involved in the activities of the Ministry of Health, are well informed on the Public Health needs of society and the labour market may positively influence the scope of the programmes. The University could give more attention to analysing the needs of the labour market operating in the environmental health sector and collaborate with other faculties of the University to provide Public Health students with technical and technological knowledge, data processing, and opportunities provided by artificial intelligence. The teachers involved should represent a large variety of social partners and more practice could improve the preparedness of the graduates for work life in different sectors. The skills needed to start to work in Public Health need to be more discussed early on in the programme.

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

#### *(1) Factual situation*

The aims and the learning outcomes are designed to implement the mission of the University which is to “strengthen the cognitive and creative potential of Lithuania and the world, foster academic and other spiritual and social values, educate active and responsible citizens of Lithuania and social leaders.” They state that their objectives aim to: 1) Improve the quality of studies ...; 2) Strengthen research activities...; 3) Invest in employees ...; 4) Increase the involvement in public activities and the impact on society and the state... The learning outcomes correspond to the priorities of the University’s strategic action plan 2021-2025 and contribute to the implementation of the University’s vision and sustainability: to contribute to the creation of society and the state, to develop and carry out interdisciplinary and international studies and scientific research and experimental development studies.

#### *(2) Expert panel judgement*

There is a clear strategy when it comes to the quality assessment and subsequent improvement and research activities are evaluated in comparison with other institutions. Assessment of research is based not only on the number of papers, type of journals and author order but also in regards to social impact on research and the potential of research teams. Assessment reports on the research are published on the Research Council website. The employees are supported when it comes to research activity and some financial support is provided by the University. Small grants to students also from the Science Council for short projects.

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

#### *(1) Factual situation*

In terms of the compliance of the curriculum with legal requirements, tables of formal requirements for first and second cycle studies provided and it is stated that the programmes meet the requirements of national legal acts including the Descriptor of Study Field of Public

Health approved by the Law of the Ministry of Education, Science and Sport and the law on health care institutions and other strategic documents. The development of the course programmes' learning outcomes, aims, curriculum design, and course units is done in accordance with academic and professional requirements. The principles of study credit formation are also described in the SER.

*(2) Expert panel judgement*

The programme curriculums comply with the legal requirements which is also shown in Tables 1 and 2.

**Table No 1.** Public Health Study programmes' compliance to general requirements for first cycle study programmes (Bachelor's).

| Criteria   | General legal requirements    | In the Programmes |
|--|-------------------------------|-------------------|
| Scope of the programme in ECTS                               | 180, 210 or 240 ECTS          | 240               |
| ECTS for the study field                                     | No less than 120 ECTS         | 191               |
| ECTS for studies specified by University or optional studies | No more than 120 ECTS         | 15                |
| 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 | 45%               |
| Individual learning  | No less than 30 % of learning | 30%               |

**Table No 2.** Public Health Study programmes' compliance to general requirements for second study programmes (Master's).

| Criteria   | General legal requirements | In the Programmes |
|--|----------------------------|-------------------|
| Scope of the programme in ECTS                               | 90 or 120 ECTS             | 120               |
| ECTS for the study field Information Services                | No less than 60 ECTS       | 120               |
| ECTS for studies specified by University or optional studies | No more than 30 ECTS       | -                 |
| ECTS for final thesis (project)                              | No less than 30 ECTS       | 30                |

|                     |                               |     |
|---------------------|-------------------------------|-----|
| Contact hours       | No less than 10 % of learning | 36% |
| Individual learning | No less than 50 % of learning | 50% |

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

#### *(1) Factual situation*

The curriculum is mapped to the national and international requirements outlined above. The SER submitted by VU outlined the general competencies for both first and second cycle degree programmes, with an emphasis on core Public Health competencies for the first cycle Public Health programme, and the development of specialist Public Health skills in the second cycle programme. The professional competencies described develop across the programmes of study, and detailed learning outcomes of the modules demonstrate this.

The credit allocation of the programme is defined by one study credit corresponding to 25–30 work hours of a student, including contact and self-study hours. The number of credits allocated to each course unit is determined by the course content, which is designed to achieve the study outcomes and acquire the necessary competencies of a Public Health specialist.

Assessment of each module is described in Annex 3, and methods include written tests, colloquiums, laboratory assignments, practical task performance, writing exams, participation in group discussions.

#### *(2) Expert panel judgement*

Detailed information provided in Annex 1 outlines how the teaching and modules map to the overall aims of the programme. The mapping indicates a wide coverage of learning outcomes in different modules. However, it was felt that the level of detail provided may be insufficient, as many Year 4 modules in the first cycle, and almost all modules in the second cycle programme seemed to map to each learning outcome. This suggests that either the learning outcomes are very generic, and much more detail is needed, or the mapping has not been done correctly, or there is significant overlap and redundancy in teaching. Discussion with senior staff suggested that there was uncertainty about how this might be resolved. In contrast, the teaching staff were keen to ensure a move from learning outcomes per se to competencies, which may allow greater differentiation to be observed between modules. The assessment methods described were appropriate to the module at hand.

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

### *(1) Factual situation*

As mentioned in 3.1.4 there is a mapping document outlining how the intended learning outcomes of the programme map to individual modules.

The first cycle programme contains over 140 credits for topic directly related to Public Health, plus topics such as Academic and Research English take around 20 credits. There are approximately 50 credits for medical topics such as Biochemistry, Microbiology and Immunology. The internship and thesis are 15 credits each, with an additional 3 credits for a preparatory course for the thesis.

The second cycle consists of over 75 credits directly relating to Public Health, plus thesis (35 credits), and 6 credits for Internship, totalling 120 ECTS credits. There are no elective topics listed. There is a range of topics, across Public Health (for example, Advanced epidemiology, and Public Health Policy, Management, Economics, Ethics and Law).

### *(2) Expert panel judgement*

From the review of documentation, the outcomes listed in Annexe 1 are essentially competencies, and this has been mapped across the programmes, with the caveats noted in 3.1.4 relating to the level of detail included in this. It should also be noted that the teaching and leadership teams do not seem as confident in the terminology relating to “competency based education.” It is likely that this is an area which will need ongoing development over time, particularly as the requirements for the new Lifestyle Medicine specialists are clarified.

In the meeting with the senior management, the expert panel heard enthusiastic descriptions of the implementation of teaching on Lifestyle Medicine and the changes this had brought to the curriculum but it is noted that the phrase does not appear in either programme’s learning outcomes at all. The learning outcomes of the programme may not have the same level of emphasis that is assumed by colleagues.

### *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*

#### *(1) Factual situation*

In the SER, it is stated that students in the first cycle study programmes can study “at least one foreign language”, and have 15 credits assigned to General University studies modules, with 60 credits of free choice being offered to students from 2023 onwards (of which 30 credits are in integrated studies). There is no evidence of individualised studies for second cycle students, except for non-credit language modules. Students from both cycles will have some degree of flexibility in their choice of research project.

#### *(2) Expert panel judgement*

Opportunities for personalisation are improving for first cycle students, but remain essentially absent for second cycle students. This reduces the flexibility of the programme.

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

#### *(1) Factual situation*

Theses and titles were provided for review, for the first and second cycles from 2019-2021, about 30-40 theses on the first level per year and about 15 on the second level per year. The supervision is well divided between faculty members and the preparation and assessment of theses are done in relation to procedures approved by the Council of the Faculty of Medicine and these procedures are published on public websites. Students are well prepared through seminars on research where students are introduced to the concept of writing a paper. A specific defence commission is used to assess the quality of the theses. This commission includes teachers, researchers, practising professionals and social partners.

#### *(2) Expert panel judgement*

As all theses viewed were written in Lithuanian, only the abstracts could be reviewed. The titles were in English and are appropriate. They show a very broad perspective of Public Health, from healthy nutrition to anthropometry of children to burn-out and the need for health promotion among University staff. Topics were well aligned with the curriculum content and seemed to be written to a good standard. It is not clear whether any of the theses were commissioned by the social partners of VU.

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

#### ***(1) Strengths:***

1. Clear curriculum plan with intended outcomes.

#### ***(2) Weaknesses:***

1. Lack of confidence in competency based curriculum design.
2. Lack of flexibility in student choice in the second cycle programme.

## **3.2. LINKS BETWEEN SCIENCE (ART) AND STUDIES**

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

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

#### ***(1) Factual situation***

The Public Health Department belongs to the Faculty of Medicine. As they estimate the number of research publications corresponds to the size of the Department. In the evaluation period 132 papers were published in peer-reviewed journals – among them 43 are indexed in the Web of Science. 49 innovations were patented in the Public Health field. Four projects in Horizon 2020 and 5 national projects were implemented in the period of 2016-2023. The staff members participate in international and national studies or focus on the Public Health of the population of a specific Lithuanian region.

## *(2) Expert panel judgement*

In the absence of a list of publications by Public Health faculty as part of the SER, research activity can be estimated on the basis of the documentation in Annex 5, which lists the three most important publications by staff during the last five years. The impression is that the number of publications in prestigious international journals is relatively low (five papers in Q1 journals) and that in these papers Public Health faculty members are rarely in qualified positions (i.e., as first or last/corresponding author). Lecturers are not satisfied with the level of international collaboration. There is no list of patents reported in the SER, as it was said at the staff meeting that most of them are in the digital field. The effectiveness (i.e., in terms of publication results) of international collaborations is not convincing. It should also be considered that at the meeting, teachers reported research activities as 'free time' work, and there seemed to be an almost universal view that in order to maintain their accreditation they have to “deliver” in research, but “in reality the priority is teaching which stemming from the tradition that the University is primarily a place for teaching rather than scientific work.”

VU has prepared a very extensive list of publications for the period 2019-2023, sometimes 2018-2023. It is difficult for the expert group to evaluate the publication list in its present form as it is structured by name and year only. It would have been desirable to provide these publications in the breakdown below:

- international peer-reviewed publications (highlighting publications in Q1 journals and highlighting in bold authors teaching in the field of public health);
- publications in Lithuanian in national journals;
- abstracts from conferences (which of course do not qualify as extenso publications, and their inclusion in the list of publications is not necessarily justified).

A review of the list of publications in its present form reveals that an abundant number of abstracts are in the list, while the number of papers published in prestigious international journals - in which Public Health academics are first/last of corresponding authors - is very low. In total, 28 publications in Q1 journals are in the list. Of these, the publications available at the doi link provided are typically neither first nor corresponding authors by Public Health teachers. The Q1 journals are predominantly clinical journals (such as the European journal of Clinical Oncology) and Public Health journals appear in the list only rarely. The original opinion based on three publications per faculty member in the SER seems to be well-founded, and it is reasonable to recommend that Public Health faculty should strive to publish as first or

corresponding authors in international Public Health journals, rather than only as co-authors, typically in clinical journals.

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

#### *(1) Factual situation*

As mentioned in the SER, staff integrate their research findings into the subject they teach. During the evaluation period, the curricula of “Public Mental Health”, “Nutrition and Public Health”, “Advanced Epidemiology”, “Public Health Law”, “Population Health” and “Environment and Health” were significantly changed. Each year, lecturers update the descriptions of the units they teach and also update the lists of compulsory and recommended readings for students based on the latest developments in science and technology. The seminars and presentations are based on the latest research articles and the most relevant news in the field of Public Health events/practice is also evaluated. During the preparation of their theses, students are required to carry out a detailed review of the literature on the topic, and the selected literature for self-study is assessed by the lecturers of the degree programmes as one of the assessment criteria.

#### *(2) Expert panel judgement*

In the SER only general statements can be found regarding the implementation of the latest research, technology and policy developments. Teachers at the site visit meeting mentioned the regular updating of subjects in the curriculum and the implementation of their research findings in lectures/seminars, also taking into account international practice. At the same time, teachers find it challenging to introduce a new subject into the curriculum because it is difficult to “find a place” in the already fixed structure of the curriculum.

Following the original visit, the panel have been made aware that some more up-to-date information may not have been made available to them, following the original submission of the SER for the period 2018-2021. The panel is aware that there was an opportunity to update information, so are unable to comment on any changes made in the intervening period as information was not provided. The panel is pleased to hear that there are improvements in choice for students, but the comments from staff referred to above remain valid. Naturally, the weighting of compulsory and optional subjects in the curriculum is very different, and the teaching of certain subjects should not depend on whether the students choose it or not. Teachers characterised the curriculum structure as very rigid and installation of new subjects is very cumbersome.

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

#### *(1) Factual situation*



According to the SER, students are involved in the implementation of research projects in relevant subtopics and research topics are defined for the preparation of their thesis. They are also encouraged to prepare publications on their results obtained. In the year of 2019, there were 8, in 2020 39 and in 2021 21 students who published their research articles. In most cases, the articles are published in scientific journals of the Index Copernicus database “Public Health” and “Health Sciences”. The best research results are promoted by submitting abstracts to international conferences, preferably to the annual European Public Health Association (EUPHA) conference. Students organise annual conferences of the Student Scientific Network and present their work in the Public Health section.

### *(2) Expert panel judgement*

In accepting the developments mentioned in the SER, it was also recognised at the meeting with the students that only one person had been invited to participate in a research project. A Students Scientific Network exists but no detailed information is available on the programmes/conferences organised by this network.

From the meeting with students, it appears as if the students who work on their theses do some research, but it is not equal to the participation of students in the research projects of the department, i.e., inviting students and motivating them to participate in research activities.

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

#### ***(1) Strengths:***

1. Strong participation of students in published papers and abstracts.

#### ***(2) Weaknesses:***

1. Publication record is relatively poor. Public Health faculty members are rarely in qualified positions (i.e., as first or last/corresponding author).
2. International collaboration is not on a good level.
3. Discrepancy in the perception and prioritisation of research and teaching responsibilities among teachers.
4. Participation of students in research is sporadic according to students.

## **3.3. STUDENT ADMISSION AND SUPPORT**

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

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

#### ***(1) Factual situation***

VU has a detailed and transparent student selection and admission process that adheres to the learning outcomes of the field such as ASPHER. The University's admission requirements for field study programmes are clearly stipulated and are overseen by the Lithuanian Higher Institutions Association for Organizing Joint Admission (LAMA BPO). Admission requirements are made publicly available, both in Lithuanian and English. The admission process for the first cycle studies in the field is highly competitive. The University provides additional points for various achievements, such as international Olympiad prizes and accomplishments, high school paper scores, and participation in volunteer activities. During the evaluation period, the competitive scores of those admitted to Master's studies significantly increased. VU publicises admission conditions and information is available via multiple platforms, including University and faculty websites, and participation in study fairs and school visits. The University's active engagement with aspiring students through initiatives like "Children's University" further promotes awareness of study opportunities.

### *(2) Expert panel judgement*

VU adopts suitable, well-defined procedures in student admissions and aims to increase the student profile through multiple recruitment activities. VU has the advantage of being an old and top university and being located in the capital city. Besides the high demand, VU also plans and monitors the admission procedures.

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

#### *(1) Factual situation*

VU has a legal framework for recognising foreign qualifications, partial studies, and prior non-formal and informal learning. The University adheres to the principles of the Lisbon Recognition Convention and national guidelines while assessing foreign qualifications on an individual basis to ensure equivalence with Lithuanian educational standards. The University has limitations on the volume of credits that can be recognised. VU receives a small number of recognition requests every year.

#### *(2) Expert panel judgement*

Recognition information is not widely communicated with the students. Students have provided feedback about the recognition process being a possible obstacle for those who would like to go abroad for an exchange semester. The intro week should possibly include more information about the recognition pathways.

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

#### *(1) Factual situation*

The academic mobility of students at VU is coordinated by the International Relations Department and faculty-specific staff. In this case, the administrative staff responsible for international cooperation and studies abroad is in the Faculty of Medicine. Students in various cycles have opportunities for international exchange, including semesters abroad, internships, and short-term visits. VU participates in international alliances and networks, such as ARQUS and COIMBRA, providing students with options for international experiences. Information on mobility programmes is made publicly available through the University's website and various promotional activities. Only one student took part in the student exchange programme in the last 3 years. SER identifies some challenges for mobilities such as the duration of studies, lack of flexibility in the study programmes, employment commitments, and financial constraints. The COVID-19 pandemic also significantly impacted student mobility during the evaluation period.

## *(2) Expert panel judgement*

VU evaluates the student mobility as 'optional' and it is not impressive. Students mention strict curricular demands as an obstacle, as well as low language skills. The Erasmus+ exchange catalogue of the Public Health study programme does not offer many places to go. The panel acknowledges the barriers to mobility of students such as language, family and work commitments but also highlights that VU needs to provide alternatives and encourage students for such mobility. Encouraging students may be held via experience sharing sessions of the exchange students inspiring the ones who have not applied yet.

The panel, in the external evaluation report, "acknowledges the barriers to mobility of students such as language, family and work commitments", however, the mobility is not limited to Erasmus+ and various shorter alternatives can be available to students such as international conferences, virtual mobilities and short term exchanges.

The data that SER originally collected was indeed for the period 2018–2021, however, the panel was informed that it was possible for the HEIs to provide additional data on later dates regarding important changes leading up to the review visit date. As this has not been the case, it is hard to delineate the mobility culture of the institution. However, discussions with the students have shown that a few but not many of the students might need to get more inspiration and information about mobilities.

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

#### *(1) Factual situation*

VU offers constant academic, financial, social, psychological, and personal support services. Academic support is provided both centrally and within academic units. A mentorship programme is also introduced by the VU. Career counselling and various training sessions are provided and have increased participation over the years. The University offers various

scholarships, state loans, and dormitory accommodations, yet sometimes insufficient to meet student needs. Students also have access to spiritual and religious support through the University's Ignatian tradition, and the VU Counselling and Training Centre offers psychological counselling and workshops to improve mental health. Sports and cultural activities are encouraged through the Health and Sports Centre and the Culture Centre, with various clubs, ensembles, and facilities available. The Student Representation addresses student concerns and organises events to support student well-being and integration. The University participates in international initiatives like the Erasmus Student Network (ESN) to help foreign students integrate into the community.

### *(2) Expert panel judgement*

VU has many student support services in place, most of them being offered by a centralised approach and which students value. Students expressed feeling welcomed and supported.

Even though the SER mentions VU's financial scholarships being offered on a transparent criteria, some discussions during the site visit highlighted that despite getting excellent grades one might not get offered any financial support because the financial support is at present very competitive.

VU cannot collect consistent and sufficient feedback systematically and therefore does not assess the effectiveness of the support services.

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

#### *(1) Factual situation*

VU utilises pre-semester camps and an Integration Week for new students, engaging Study Programme Committee members to explain programme objectives and individualisation options. Information on the study process is provided through various channels, both centrally and at academic units. The Student Representation organisation and academic staff play active roles in student guidance. Periodic evaluations ensure students have the support they need, in alignment with the evaluation criteria for study information and counselling sufficiency.

#### *(2) Expert panel judgement*

Due to poor attendance in feedback meetings and poor communication from the students' side, it is hard for VU to recognise the issues being faced by students in terms of study information and student counselling. However, mechanisms such as tutors, student union, and representation are in place to address student guidance. The mentoring programme did not appear to be commonly known among students during the site visit.

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

**(1) Strengths:**

1. Students' overall feeling of welcome and belonging.
2. High student satisfaction with support services.

**(2) Weaknesses:**

1. Limited awareness, participation and opportunities about mobilities.

### **3.4. TEACHING AND LEARNING, STUDENT PERFORMANCE AND GRADUATE EMPLOYMENT**

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

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

*(1) Factual situation*

This is outlined in Annexe 2 and the course descriptor documents provided to the panel. All teaching appears to be in Lithuanian except the courses specifically on Academic English. For each module in the first and second study cycle, there is a document outlining prerequisites, learning outcomes (with teaching/learning methods and assessment methods), a detailed syllabus of each teaching session, with the details of the responsible lecturer, key references, distribution of work tasks and influence on the final grade. The range of topics covered is mentioned in section 3.1.5, and assessment is discussed in 3.4.3.

*(2) Expert panel judgement*

There is a detailed mapping of the teaching and learning to the intended learning outcomes. These in turn are mapped clearly to the competencies outlined in Annexe 1.

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

*(1) Factual situation*

Details about supporting students with special needs are provided in the SER and mentions all types of impairment and vulnerability. The facilities are designed to support immobile students and to provide support to audiovisual impaired students. Grants for students with financial constraints are mentioned and they are provided depending on academic outcomes. Psychological and medical support is provided when needed at the University.

*(2) Expert panel judgement*

The panel was not able to obtain any information about the systematic evaluation of academic outcomes to determine if students in special needs groups are achieving their academic potential.

Some areas of the University, for example, the lab areas that were shown for the panel, do not appear to have obvious access for students or staff in a wheelchair (it is separated from the corridor with a chair lift by 3 or 4 steps with no lift. It is noted that the panel have been assured that ramps exist but these were not visible during the visit. Due to the age of the building, several areas have chairlifts rather than elevators, which are difficult for people with limited mobility who are not in a wheelchair (for example, those with severe arthritis) to use.

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

#### *(1) Factual situation*

The assessment and self-assessment approaches used by the programme are outlined in the SER and Annexe 3. A range of assessment modalities are used across the modules. The SER highlights the value of formative assessment for both students and staff, and mentions the use of both self-assessment and cumulative assessment as formats for developing student understanding.

#### *(2) Expert panel judgement*

Summative assessment modalities are appropriate for the content of the course.

Despite the positive description within the SER, there is little detail provided about the implementation of cumulative assessment, making it difficult to evaluate the implementation at the module level. Similarly, although there are examples of excellent practice (e.g., VPSV 7115 Public Mental Health), there is no systematic implementation of self-assessment and the use of feedback to direct students in their studies. The programmes would benefit from the implementation of a strategic approach to student feedback so that students can adapt their studying in advance of summative assessments.

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

#### *(1) Factual situation*

After completing the first cycle Public Health study programme, graduates can work in Public Health Centre, municipal Public Health Bureaus, State Food and Veterinary Service, Non-Food Products Inspection, Institute of Hygiene, Radiation Protection Centre, Departments of the Ministry of National Defense, Military Service, Quality Inspection, and in the private sector as occupational hygienists. Graduates of second cycle studies can work in the same institutions as those who graduated from Bachelor's studies, only their functions and positions correspond to a Master's degree, and they can also work as epidemiologists in personal health care

institutions and Public Health care institutions, higher education institutions, scientific institutions, ministries.

As given in the SER, graduate career tracking is implemented through the Career Tracking Information System (CTIS) *karjera.lt* tools. Indicators about graduate careers are received from state information systems and the government and departmental registers within five years after graduation and are annually twice upgraded. Data from sociological surveys expose the opinions of graduates on various career-related matters. Such surveys are performed three times: graduates are surveyed one year, three years, and five years after graduation. The aim of the first survey (for graduates who graduated 12 months ago) is to evaluate student employability; the second survey (3 years after graduation) assesses the ability of graduates to successfully establish themselves in professional performance; the third survey (five years after graduation) is conducted to determine graduate career and work satisfaction.

According to VU data, in Lithuania in 2020, one year after graduation, more than 88.24% of graduates of the first cycle of Public Health studies and above 93.75% of graduates of the second cycle of Public Health studies are working under employment contracts. Employment data is rather stable through the years.

## *(2) Expert panel judgement*

The University has a high rate of employment in the first cycle of Public Health studies as well as a high rate of the second cycle graduates. Several of the alumni were present during the site visit who were already working and, in some cases, even lecturing at VU.

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

#### *(1) Factual situation*

Policies to ensure academic integrity, tolerance and non-discrimination in the Public Health Division are common to other structural entities of the University. The University obliges itself to mutual respect, openness to ideas, trust, and tolerance in accordance with principles outlined in the Statute of Vilnius University and other documents. Cases of the breach of the principles of academic integrity, tolerance, and non-discrimination are handled at the University in accordance with the Regulations of the Central Academic Ethics Commission of Vilnius University and the Regulations of the Academic Ethics Commission of Core Academic Units. Students who encounter problems during their study process or in their personal lives may require consultations provided by a specialist. As given in the SER, the University also has an anonymous trust hotline that any member of the academic community can use to report violations of academic ethics or of the principles of tolerance and non-discrimination.

At the request of the student, the Disability Affairs Coordinator prepares recommendations for the adjustment of studies to the needs arising from a disability. Students who have a disability

are asked to complete a special form before the start of the semester. If needed, a student volunteer can provide individual help (e.g., to accompany, overcome existing physical obstacles, learn to navigate in a new environment, etc.). VU has been continuously seeking to improve the physical accessibility of the campus for individuals with mobility and visual impairments.

#### *(2) Expert panel judgement*

The policies to ensure academic integrity, tolerance and non-discrimination seem to be well known and set in place. At the faculty library, not all measures were yet in place for students with audiovisual disabilities. It was observed that mobile stair climbers are not available on the upper floor of the faculty building.

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

#### *(1) Factual situation*

Students that disagree with the evaluation of their academic progress may appeal in accordance with the procedure determined by the Regulations of the Dispute Resolution Commission of Core Academic Units within 5 days after the publication of examination results. A decision of the Appeals Commission regarding evaluation is final, while a decision regarding the examination procedure can be contested to the Vilnius University Dispute Resolution Committee. In the last 3 years, 2 appeals were submitted by the Public Health students, both decisions were in favour of the students.

Students of Public Health study programmes are subject to the Procedure for Submitting Complaints and Appeals to the Dispute Resolution Commission and the regulations of the Divisional Dispute Resolution Commission in force at the Faculty of Medicine. All students must submit statements and appeals in writing. The terms and timing of submission of appeals are presented in the SER report.

#### *(2) Expert panel judgement*

The procedure of examination of appeals is detailed and is good. It is important though to emphasise that there is a need for a systemic approach in regards to disadvantaged groups, rather than looking at individual students.

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

#### *(1) Strengths:*

1. Wide range of taught content.
2. Good understanding of educational principles of formative assessment.

#### *(2) Weaknesses:*



1. No mapping of formative feedback provided to students or consistent approach to self-evaluation.
2. Need to identify student groups who are struggling academically (differential attainment related to impairment or vulnerability).

### 3.5. TEACHING STAFF

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

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

*(1) Factual situation*

The number of lecturers of the field of Public Health (employed for no less than 0.5 of the position and for no less than 3 years) is 31. 84.34% of the teaching staff in the first cycle have a research degree, while in the second cycle, 94.44% of the teaching staff have a research degree. Currently, Public Health students are taught by 8 professors, 12 associate professors, 14 assistants, 5 junior assistants and 2 lecturers. Recruitment of new lecturers is from those studying in the department's doctoral programme in Public Health Science. Doctoral students are employed as junior assistants. In order to determine whether the qualifications of research and teaching staff are appropriate to their current position, a certification process is carried out every five years. When it comes to scientific publications among staff, the number was 13 papers published in 2021, listed in Web of Science, while the total number was 61.

*(2) Expert panel judgement*

The number of staff and their qualifications are in line with the subjects envisaged. Lecturers are evaluated on the basis of the number of published research articles, participation in conferences, research management, lecturing, preparation of methodological materials, participation in doctoral training programmes, supervision of students' research, organisational and other scientific work. Feedback from students on the work of teachers subject to accreditation is also taken into account. The representation of medical subjects seems to be oversized (as commented above in 3.1.5, approximately 50 credits for medical topics such as Biochemistry, Microbiology and Immunology). A brief list of publications was provided, which shows a slight decrease in papers published in Web of Science. Among the papers listed as published by teachers during the last five years, it is noted that these papers only in some cases had teachers as first or last authors. Furthermore, a large proportion of the papers published were related to clinical work rather than Public Health. In regards to the new list of publications that the expert panel has received, it does not change the impression of representation in high-quality international journals etc. This is further discussed in 3.2.1.

Development of a publication strategy for more effective scientific publication for the upcoming years should be facilitated and promoted.

The expert panel appreciates the involvement of the faculty in international organisations. The list of publications, however, contains only a few reports published by international teams.

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

#### *(1) Factual situation*

Academic exchanges through ERASMUS+, NORDPLUS, ISEP and on the basis of bilateral agreements are the most popular forms of academic mobility for teaching staff. Public Health teachers usually use the Erasmus+ exchange programme for individual learning mobility. Their study visits abroad usually last 7 days. Visits within the programmes are financed by the EU funds specifically allocated to these programmes. The international relations coordinators constantly inform the teaching staff about the exchange opportunities, advise them and provide organisational support. During the evaluation period, 9 visits were carried out under the academic mobility programme.

#### *(2) Expert panel judgement*

The expert panel agrees with the statement in the SER that there is a need for more exchanges of academic staff and increased international mobility. Teachers complain about bureaucratic subordination. It is mentioned that some funding is available for staff to attend conferences, but these tend to be medical (rather than Public Health) and researchers with oral rather than poster presentations are more likely to be funded. Support by the University administration for Public Health staff and activities appears to be inadequate, and collaboration with members of the Medicine and other faculties is sometimes difficult as some teachers complained that they are not able to build sufficient collaboration.

### *3.5.3. Evaluation of the conditions to improve the competencies of the teaching staff*

#### *(1) Factual situation*

Since the first semester of the 2017/2018 academic year, the central administration has been organising teaching skills development training for the teaching staff of Vilnius University. Lecturers receive information about the courses to be organised by e-mail, for which they can register via the electronic system. Annual appraisal interviews have been held at the University, during which the head of a department discusses with each member of the teaching staff the issues related to the improvement of competencies, the need is explained and opportunities are offered.

As it is mandatory for VU teaching staff to improve their teaching skills, all Public Health lecturers attend at least one training session per year, and those employed full-time attend two or three. The training programmes focus on the coherence of the competencies developed by the course units with the study and assessment methods, the development of diversity and

equal opportunities at the University, different teaching and learning methods, and strategies for assessing student performance. During the evaluation period, the Public Health faculty was encouraged to use the possibilities offered by the Virtual Learning Environment. During the pandemic period, the teaching staff actively participated in distance learning events. Lecturers involved in the delivery of Public Health programmes improve their research skills mainly through participation in national and international conferences, while their practical professional skills are improved through participation in governmental and non-governmental cultural and educational programmes.

### *(2) Expert panel judgement*

The University provides teachers with courses to improve their competencies, particularly in pedagogics. Public Health competencies could be improved by inviting teachers from the international arena through the framework of the Erasmus+ programme. Introducing team teaching and increasing outgoing mobilities would also contribute to increasing staff competencies.

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

#### ***(1) Strengths:***

1. High percentage of the teachers have scientific degrees.

#### ***(2) Weaknesses:***

1. International collaborations are not intense enough.
2. The importance of Public Health training appears to be insufficiently appreciated by the University administration.
3. Incoming and outgoing mobilities of teachers are low despite good opportunities through Erasmus+.
4. Not much of the research activity resulting in international publications is Public Health related or has teachers as the first or last authors.

## **3.6. LEARNING FACILITIES AND RESOURCES**

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

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

### ***(1) Factual situation***

The main studies in the programmes take place in the central building of the Faculty of Medicine. Recently, the Faculty of Natural Sciences was moved out of the buildings to a new

building, leaving more space for the Public Health Study Programmes. A good number of classrooms and auditoriums, well equipped with computers and video projectors, are now available for the students and they also have several more places for individual work in near vicinity to the library and also in two large corridors where students have work space. Laboratories are moving to the Science Center as well.

#### *(2) Expert panel judgement*

A lot of change for the better has happened in regard to the infrastructure since the area for Public Health studies was increased. Refurbishment of several of the facilities has taken place recently. A virtual learning environment is used and eduroam is available in all areas. There is good access to electronic journals through the library. There is space for the student union, along with a compact area designated for student relaxation. Some complaints were made by the students that they had to move all over town to take part in the studies in the three different buildings and that there is no cafeteria in the main building any more.

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

#### *(1) Factual situation*

The planning and upgrading of resources is related to the number of students and is updated annually. Every 3 years, a plan for conducting studies by the Faculty of Medicine and from that, annual plans for improvements in both infrastructure and supplemental resources are developed and agreed in collaboration between deans and directors and the Chairman of the Faculty Council. The plans and the annual budget are then approved by the Council of the Faculty of Medicine. The size of the resources used for upgrading equipment and facilities was very big in the years 2019 and 2020, compared to the amount for 2021, probably due to refurbishment and other departments moving out from the premises. Funding for literature is requested from the library based on a list from teachers and researchers, and the central library asks each year about the needs of lecturers and students for printed literature as well as databases with scientific publications.

#### *(2) Expert panel judgement*

It is evident that a lot of refurbishment has taken place and there is now lots of working space for students.

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

#### *(1) Strengths:*

1. Refurbished facilities and enlarged area for Public Health studies.
2. Room available for student union and a small room for student relaxation.
3. Computers with needed software available for students.
4. Good access to electronic journals through the library.

## **(2) Weaknesses:**

1. Students complained that teaching takes place all around the VU campus in different buildings across the city.

### **3.7. STUDY QUALITY MANAGEMENT AND PUBLIC INFORMATION**

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

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

##### *(1) Factual situation*

A study quality assurance system has been developed within a project at the VU and it is implemented in accordance with the standards and guidelines for quality assurance in the European Higher Education Area. The regulation for study programmes at VU states that each Programme Committee is responsible for ensuring the quality and continuous improvement of the study programmes. Study Programme Committees are organised under the Faculty Board and changes that are suggested go to the Faculty Board to be approved if they are substantial. Stakeholders are involved in the discussion regarding the quality of the study programmes and so are the students. Obviously, the previous evaluation is used as a template for improvements. The Study Programme Committee analyses feedback from surveys from students, teachers, social partners. The Study Programme Committee also plans the resources needed for upcoming years.

##### *(2) Expert panel judgement*

The evaluation of quality is based on comparison with other institutions: related to research quality, social impact, and potential of research teams. This evaluation is done and presented by the Research Council on their website. Some changes based on student opinions have been installed during the last few years. Quality assurance is based on the number of students as well as the number of students graduating and terminating and reasons for terminating among other things. Employability is also used as a measure of the quality of study programmes. There seems to be no communication with the VU Study Quality and Development Department other than when study programmes are updated and the VU Study Quality and Development Department is supervising this process. The Study Programme Committees are responsible for ensuring the quality as well as introducing enhancements or changes in the study programmes. However, it was made clear to the experts that changes in the study programmes were difficult to implement due to the density of the programmes.

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

### *(1) Factual situation*

Social partners are involved in ensuring the quality and integrity of the study programmes, helping to identify market needs in terms of competencies and learning outcomes to be developed, providing suggestions on the course units (modules) to be taught and organising internships. Information on the quality of studies and feedback from stakeholders at VU is collected in accordance with the procedure for organising feedback from VU stakeholders to improve the quality of studies and is linked to the indicators of the VU Strategic Plan. Periodic feedback at the University is collected from students, residents, doctoral students, and graduates through 9 different types of surveys. Survey of the competencies acquired during studies are carried out by Services and Careers Division and in 12, 36 and 60 months after graduation. VU conducts a centralised survey of first and second cycle students twice per study year.

### *(2) Expert panel judgement*

The panel got the impression that only a few employers are involved in the improvement of study programmes. It could be advised to involve representatives from wider employment areas to collect information on skills needed for specific jobs and how they are met. It is expected that employers provide practical teaching to students although students inform that their practice is focused on getting acquainted with the activity of the entity conducting practice rather than practise itself. Also, the need to improve student skills in children's health promotion, especially as concerns children with special needs was emphasised by employers. Certain employers gave the opinion that even a few years are required to prepare graduates so that they are capable of performing job duties independently. Practices from the start of studies could improve the skills of graduates. Stakeholders operating in the environmental area mentioned the need for improving study programmes in technical, technological and data processing areas. The impression was that students are not well aware of what type of employment they may plan for and what skills they will need to be able to compete with other candidates for the job.

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

#### *(1) Factual situation*

A VU Study information system called VUSIS is used for the collection of information about the management of the field study programmes. In this common system, all course plans are stored and can be updated and edited. Results of the assessment of studies are published publicly on the VU website. Information on the quality of studies and feedback from stakeholders is collected in accordance with the procedure of organising feedback to improve the quality of studies and is linked to the indicators of the VU Strategic Plan. Student surveys, surveys of staff, teachers and doctoral students as well as graduates are collected. Also, a special survey of the internship students and of incoming/exchange students is performed. Reasons for termination

of studies are also collected and analysed. Surveys of graduates are performed 12, 36 and 60 months after graduation.

*(2) Expert panel judgement*

Very good with follow-up surveys of graduates. Sometimes low participation in student feedback, but the student union is also providing feedback about study programmes' content and process. Very good that internship students as well as mobility students are surveyed.

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

*(1) Factual situation*

VU collects feedback through student software in a centralised way. Student union and student representatives also play a role in collecting opinions. There are meetings organised periodically to address the students' requests.

*(2) Expert panel judgement*

VU has problems collecting consistent and sufficient feedback systematically and therefore does not effectively address the weaknesses. Students seem to be not active in providing feedback and participating in meetings. VU needs to address student participation in evaluation and feedback using innovative methods.

A few student feedbacks identified by the panel are as follows:

- Certain lecturers have a lot of different topics that they are lecturing, and sometimes teachers have other commitments than teaching and may sometimes not be present for their lecture or have to reschedule.
- Lack of statistical teaching for Public Health epidemiologists especially.
- Lack of research activities for students.
- Lack of time for practice

*Strengths and weaknesses of this evaluation area:*

*(1) Strengths:*

1. Good intention with follow-up of graduates, drop-outs, mobility students.
2. Good information about the programme to the public through social media, website, personal communication and newsletters.

*(2) Weaknesses:*

1. Students feel that information on skills needed for graduates is not provided from the beginning of studies and a detailed plan of practising skills is not followed during practical studies.

2. There is insufficient time for practice.
3. Insufficient collaboration with employers from different areas of Public Health on improving the quality of study programmes.
4. Poor participation of students in evaluation surveys.



## IV. RECOMMENDATIONS

| Evaluation Area  | Recommendations for the Evaluation Area (study cycle)  |
|--|--|
| Intended and achieved learning outcomes and curriculum             | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Continue to explore the implementation of competency based education, with particular vigilance for the changes that might come due to the Lifestyle Medicine speciality training.</li> <li>2. Increase flexibility in student choice in the second cycle programme.</li> </ol>  |
| Links between science (art) and studies                            | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Research strategy should be strengthened to improve the publication record.</li> <li>2. International collaborations should be improved and more visible in publications.</li> <li>3. Ample time should be allocated for teachers' research.</li> <li>4. The curriculum structure should be more flexible to accommodate new elements, especially in the second cycle.</li> <li>5. Student involvement in research needs to be improved.</li> </ol>  |
| Student admission and support                                      | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Students should be better informed and encouraged about the possible ways of getting their prior learning recognised.</li> <li>2. There should be more information in terms of Public Health careers after graduation.</li> <li>3. The effectiveness of student support services should be monitored and evaluated with robust and consistent systematic feedback.</li> </ol>  |
| Teaching and learning, student performance and graduate employment | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Consider an assessment strategy which identifies sources of formative assessment and how to support students using it, or encouraging the implementation if already in place.</li> <li>2. Consider implementing a systemic approach to assessing differential attainment related to impairment or vulnerability.</li> <li>3. Ongoing evaluation of access for students and staff with limited mobility.</li> <li>4. Need for an inventory of support to physically and audiovisually impaired students.</li> </ol> |
| Teaching staff   | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Incoming and outgoing teacher mobilities should be increased.</li> <li>2. Not only international but also national within faculty(s) collaborations should be facilitated.</li> <li>3. More intensive support for participation in conferences could be proposed.</li> </ol>   |

|  |   |
|--|---|
|  | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>4. There is very limited teaching in English, so this could be increased, perhaps by first increasing staff confidence in English.</li> <li>5. A higher appreciation of the research activities of teachers would be beneficial.</li> <li>6. A publication and research strategy needs to be formulated.</li> </ol>  |
| <p>Learning facilities and resources</p>               | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Creative solutions regarding equal access to software usable on Macintosh computers are needed.</li> </ol>  |
| <p>Study quality management and public information</p> | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Need for more student participation in assessment of modules and study programme</li> <li>2. Students should be encouraged to participate in decision-making, meetings and feedback.</li> <li>3. A need for more feedback from a range of employers and social partners on the study design.</li> <li>4. Integrate information on requisite skills for graduates from the outset of their studies, coupled with a structured plan for skill development during the internship.</li> </ol> |

## V. SUMMARY

The VU Public Health Faculty is located in three different buildings in the centre of Vilnius. The buildings have undergone quite a bit of refurbishments over the last few years and more room has been made available in the main building, due to the Life Sciences faculty moving to a new building. There are now lots of rooms for students to use computers, library, classrooms, laboratories and auditoriums. Some complaints were made by the students that they had to move all over town to take part in the studies in the three different buildings and that there is no cafeteria in the main building any more. There is, however, a room for the student union and another, small room for student relaxation.

The VU Public Health programmes were developed in the framework of the Faculty of Medicine. The example of the demand for the Health Management course shows that articulating the need for training at the administrative level significantly improves the quality of students entering the course. It is to be welcomed that the recent degree has made the employment of Public Health professionals a requirement at the primary care level, which could significantly increase the prestige of the Public Health field in the future and make training more attractive even at the level of student enrolment. Following this, the content of the Lifestyle Medicine programme needs further scrutiny.

Students mentioned that some teachers were very busy and sometimes did not adhere to the teaching schedule due to other appointments and sometimes due to other jobs. The staff reported some dissatisfaction with the perceived lowered status of the faculty and that they were sometimes overburdened with teaching. A comment was that their main task was teaching, not research.

Teachers need to have support to find the time and motivation to do research work. Collaborative relationships should be improved not only at the international level, but also within the University and with other universities in the country and with a breadth of social partners, and as a result, a substantial improvement in the level of publication activity can be expected. It would be a good idea to set up a publication strategy, to more effectively target publication channels and motivate and promote teachers to publish. The VU Public Health Faculty has a lot of potential to build high-quality programmes.

The expert panel was very well taken care of by the VU representatives, and we thank you for this and for writing the comprehensive SER. We especially appreciated the art present in the building, the beautiful glass windows in the meeting room and the impressive auditorium. We met with very supportive teachers, students, staff, alumni and social partners and were able to build a good picture of the situation. They were all honest and sincere in their statements to us.

Expert panel chairperson signature:

Prof. Dr. Agneta Yngve