



STUDIJŲ KOKYBĖS VERTINIMO CENTRAS
CENTRE FOR QUALITY ASSESSMENT IN HIGHER EDUCATION

COMMUNICATION FIELD OF STUDY

Vilniaus kolegija

EXTERNAL EVALUATION REPORT

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I. INTRODUCTION

1.1. OUTLINE OF THE EVALUATION PROCESS

The study field evaluations in Lithuanian higher education institutions (HEIs) are based on the following:

- Procedure for the External Evaluation and Accreditation of Studies, Evaluation Areas and Indicators, approved by the Minister of Education, Science, and Sport;
- Methodology of External Evaluation of Study Fields approved by the Director of the Centre for Quality Assessment in Higher Education (SKVC);
- Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area (ESG).

The evaluation is intended to support HEIs in continuous enhancement of their study process and to inform the public about the quality of programmes within the study field.

The object of the evaluation is all programmes within a specific field of study. A separate assessment is given for each study cycle.

The evaluation process consists of the following main steps: 1) self-evaluation and production of a self-evaluation report (SER) prepared by a HEI; 2) a site visit of the review panel to the HEI; 3) the external evaluation report (EER) prepared by the review panel 4) accreditation decision taken by SKVC and its publication; 4) follow-up activities.

The main outcome of the evaluation process is the EER prepared by the review panel. The HEI is forwarded the draft EER to report on any factual mistakes. The draft report is then subject to approval by the external Study Evaluation Committee operating under SKVC. Once approved the EER serves as the basis for an accreditation decision. If a HEI is not happy with the outcome of the evaluation, HEI can file an appeal.

On the basis of the approved EER, SKVC takes one of the following accreditation decisions:

- **Accreditation granted for 7 years** if all evaluation areas are evaluated as exceptional (5 points), very good (4 points), or good (3 points).
- **Accreditation granted for 3 years** if at least one evaluation area is evaluated as satisfactory (2 points).
- **Not accredited** if at least one evaluation area is evaluated as unsatisfactory (1 point).

1.2. REVIEW PANEL

The review panel was appointed in accordance with the Reviewer Selection Procedure as approved by the Director of SKVC.

The composition of the review panel was as follows:

1. Panel chair: Assoc. Prof. dr. Bradley Wiggins
2. Academic member: Prof. dr. Anastassia Zabrodskaia
3. Academic member: Asst. Prof. dr. Lars de Wildt
4. Academic member: dr. Andželika Bylaitė
5. Social partners representative: Svajūnė Marcinkevičienė
6. Student representative: Viktorija Lankauskaitė

1.3. SITE VISIT

The site visit was organised on 23 April 2024 onsite.

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

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

There was a need for translation during the meeting with various members of the staff, faculty and also the current students who attended the meetings.

1.4. BACKGROUND OF THE REVIEW

Overview of the HEI

Vilniaus kolegija, hereafter VK/HEI (Vilnius kolegija/Higher Education Institution), is an accredited state higher education institution in the Republic of Lithuania, and was established in 2000. Its mission is to provide higher education to individuals studying at VK/HEI to prepare them to enter successful professional careers in the Vilnius region and also the larger Republic of Lithuania. Vilnius serves as the location of studies at VK/HEI, with its main academic structural units being the faculties and departments. Study programs at VK/HEI are organised in seven faculties: the Faculty of Electronics and Informatics, the Faculty of Economics, the Faculty of Business Management, the Faculty of Health Care, the Faculty of Pedagogy, the Faculty of Agrotechnologies and the Faculty of Arts and Creative Technologies. The program under review during and after the site visit, namely the Professional Bachelor of Social Sciences in Public Relations, is housed in the Faculty of Business Management.

Overview of the study field

Motivated by a desire to strengthen the competitiveness of Lithuanian society, to create new knowledge and innovations, and to prepare future professionals to compete internationally, the Faculty of Business Management developed the first-cycle program in Public Relations to “provide students with a coherent overview of the processes and innovations in the field of communication, helping them to identify key risks and challenges, while the practical part of the study allows students to master the latest tools and skills used in communication, which are multifaceted” (VK SER, 2023, p. 9). VK/HEI places a lot of emphasis on practical knowledge and experience, and evidence of this is apparent within the design and structure of the Bachelor program in Public Relations. Graduates of the program are able to pursue second-cycle programs at other institutions in Lithuania or abroad.

Previous external evaluations

The study program was accredited in 2016, as described in the Lithuanian report. In 2019, the Ministry accredited the program without external evaluation until the review conducted by this panel in April 2024. A total of seven recommendations were made by previous experts, with the SER listing the measures VK/HEI took to address them.

Documents and information used in the review

The following documents and/or information have been requested / provided by the HEI before or during the site visit:

- *Self-evaluation report and its annexes*
- *Final theses*
- *Additional information about the recognition of qualifications within VK/HEI as it pertains to the study field*
- *Survey from alumni (in Lithuanian)*

Additional sources of information used by the review panel:

The review panel used no additional sources of information.

II. STUDY PROGRAMMES IN THE FIELD

First cycle/LTQF 6

Title of the study programme	Public Relations
State code	6531JX006
Type of study (college/university)	Collegiate studies
Mode of study (full time/part time) and nominal duration (in years)	Full-time studies and full-time sessional studies, 3 years
Workload in ECTS	180
Award (degree and/or professional qualification)	Professional Bachelor of Social Science
Language of instruction	Lithuanian
Admission requirements	Secondary education at the least
First registration date	15-07-2016
Comments (including remarks on joint or interdisciplinary nature of the programme, mode of provision)	The language of instruction, Lithuanian, appears to have limited the scope and abilities of the students' command of English.

III. ASSESSMENT IN POINTS BY CYCLE AND EVALUATION AREAS

The first cycle of Public Relations study field at VK/HEI is given a **positive** evaluation.

No.	Evaluation Area	Evaluation points ^{1*}
1.	Study aims, learning outcomes and curriculum	3
2.	Links between scientific (or artistic) research and higher education	3
3.	Student admission and support	4
4.	Teaching and learning, student assessment and graduate employment	3
5.	Teaching staff	3
6.	Learning facilities and resources	3
7.	Quality assurance and public information	4
Total:		23

1 (unsatisfactory) - the area does not meet the minimum requirements, there are substantial shortcomings that hinder the implementation of the programmes in the field.

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

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

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

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

III. STUDY FIELD ANALYSIS

AREA 1: STUDY AIMS, LEARNING OUTCOMES AND CURRICULUM

- 1.1. Programmes are aligned with the country's economic and societal needs and the strategy of the HEI

FACTUAL SITUATION

- 1.1.1. Programme aims and learning outcomes are aligned with the needs of the society and/or the labour market

VK/HEI's stated aims and learning outcomes were designed to be in line with their stated mission, which is "to provide modern higher education studies that meet European standards, to ensure the development of nationally and internationally recognised applied research and professional arts in effective cooperation with the business world through the efforts of a socially responsible academic community, for the success of students' professional careers and the prosperity of the Vilnius region and the State of Lithuania" (VK SER, 2023, p. 9). In discussions with social partners and employers, it became apparent that VK/HEI's program in Public Relations has a good reputation and successfully prepares students to become working professionals in the Vilnius region and larger Lithuania. VK/HEI's learning outcomes for the Bachelor program in Public Relations are designed to serve the needs of Lithuanian society and labour market. The fact that it is the region's only first-cycle program in Public Relations is an added point of pride for the VK/HEI community.

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

VK/HEI's program in Public Relations represents clear and evident ways to fulfil its mission, goals, and strategy. Accordingly, VK/HEI aims to increase the competitiveness of Lithuanian society, create new knowledge and innovations, and prepare future professionals capable of competing internationally with their knowledge and skills. The program's emphasis on practical knowledge and experience figures prominently in the design and delivery of its aims and learning outcomes as aligned with VK/HEI's mission, goals, and strategy.

ANALYSIS AND CONCLUSION (regarding 1.1.)

Overall, the Bachelor of Social Sciences in Public Relations at VK/HEI addresses and serves the needs of current and potential students, especially those with professional goals of working within Vilnius and the larger Lithuanian region. However, the factual situation gives reasons for recommendations to augment the program to ensure its relevance and viability in a changing labour market. Feedback from alumni and current students suggests a strong need for more preparation within the program for graphic design, photo editing software (such as Photoshop) as well as general visual communication skills.

- 1.2. Programmes comply with legal requirements, while curriculum design, curriculum, teaching/learning and assessment methods enable students to achieve study aims and learning outcomes

FACTUAL SITUATION

- 1.2.1. Programmes comply with legal requirements

Tables 1 illustrates the compliance with the legal requirements. The program is viewed as in *full* compliance with the requirements.

Table 1. Compliance of the program **Public Relations** with general requirements for *first cycle study programmes (bachelor)*

Criteria	General legal requirements	Public Relations
Scope of the programme in ECTS	180, 210 or 240 ECTS	180 ECTS
ECTS for the study field	No less than 120 ECTS	Is above 120 ECTS
ECTS for studies specified by the HEI or optional studies	No more than 120 ECTS	Does not exceed 120 ECTS
ECTS for internship	No less than 15 ECTS	20 ECTS (40 ECTS, as there are two internships)
ECTS for graduation thesis (project)	No less than 9 ECTS (for college level studies)	10 ECTS
Contact hours	No less than 20 % of learning	Minimum of 20% contact work
Individual learning	No less than 30 % of learning	Minimum of 30%

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

VK/HEI's approach to aligning program aims, learning outcomes, teaching/learning and how these are assessed in practice is multifaceted and represents many levels of assessment. Assessments are conducted through various means, including but not limited to cumulative assessments, surveys, criteria-based results, student progress and feedback analyses, cooperation between and among teaching faculty and administrative support.

1.2.3. Curriculum ensures consistent development of student competences

VK/HEI has developed the Bachelor's program for Public Relations to consider and ensure the core competencies, providing a foundation for future professional activities of communication, and business professionals. From the site visit, there was clear demand from employment agencies and social partners for the program; yet there was a clear need for some revision to the program given the comments made by both groups and also alumni. Specifically, the alumni and employers/social partners agreed for some basic graphic design knowledge in the program, and some photo-editing skills need to be incorporated into the curriculum. In addition, while some programs (not Public Relations) at VK/HEI do indeed incorporate graphic design

and/or Photoshop skills, the program under review does not. Current students reported similar concerns about apparent missing yet necessary skills. Again, this underscores the recommendation for a final portfolio of student work to be submitted, perhaps during the final semester, for review and comment by faculty and employers/social partners, but that could also be practically used when seeking gainful employment.

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

The SER prepared by VK/HEI clearly demonstrates the range of opportunities for students to personalise the curriculum and their overall learning experience alongside meeting the intended learning outcomes of the respective program. Students may select the topic of both their final thesis and internships, often in communication with faculty and/or relevant social partners and employers. Students also consult directly with teaching faculty, and they have opportunities to express their opinions about the program, the assessments, course content, delivery of teaching, and more in student evaluations of teaching and surveys.

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

Students at VK/HEI complete their studies by engaging in an independent research project in the Bachelor’s program, Public Relations. Students submit their independently prepared thesis and defend it in front of teaching faculty and social partners and/or employers. First cycle students prepare their Graduation Thesis (GT) over one semester for a total of 10 ECTS.

ANALYSIS AND CONCLUSION (regarding 1.2.)

Overall, the aims and learning outcomes of the Bachelor of Social Sciences in Public Relations is in line with the needs of society and the regional labour market. However, several points address both strengths and weaknesses as well as recommendations, indicated below.

AREA 1: CONCLUSIONS

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

COMMENDATIONS

1. It is clear that the Public Relations profession is in demand and is a growth area.
2. The program is aligned with the demands of social partners, students with applied skills, and employers.

RECOMMENDATIONS

To address shortcomings

1. Required portfolio: recommendation to add a required (digital) portfolio to the PR program due to unanimous feedback from alumni, social partners and employers, but also based on input from current students.
2. English proficiency: given the clear and present need of PR professionals to engage with others in English, it seems the PR degree in its current form would definitely benefit from more English literature and discussions in the course of their program. In light of internationalisation ambitions, we highly recommend English as a language of instruction for more courses beyond the 10 ECTS of Business English.
3. Publication in the same academic year as when articles or similar are submitted for review is not realistic. VK/HEI should change this toward a more academic and realistic publication track. Journal submissions under review should be considered as works in progress. Revisions take time but these lead to higher quality impact and would support VK/HEI's goal to pursue Horizon, ERC, etc. third-party funded grants.

AREA 2: LINKS BETWEEN SCIENTIFIC (OR ARTISTIC) RESEARCH AND HIGHER EDUCATION

- 2.1. Higher education integrates the latest developments in scientific (or artistic) research and technology and enables students to develop skills for scientific (or artistic) research

FACTUAL SITUATION

2.1.1. Research within the field of study is at a sufficient level

Strengthening the level of Applied Scientific Research Experimental Development (hereinafter - ASRED) and art activities in Vilnius kolegija Higher Education Institution (VK/HEI), through the implementation of the VK/HEI 2021-2025 strategy and influence on the region of the country is one of the aims of the Institution's ASRED and art activity programme (SER, p.15). During its implementation, VK/HEI has formed scientific groups of researchers by science fields and is actively involved in applied scientific research. Taking into account the achieved ASRED and art activity results, EUR 70K were allocated to the Faculty of Business Management (FBM) in 2020, in 2021 – EUR 84K, in 2022 – EUR 117K (SER, p.16). In 2020-2023 teachers of the Field prepared 209 publications, including 1 monograph, 16 scientific articles published in Claritive Analytic Web of Science database, and 150 reviewed articles published in other databases, including Scopus database. Appendix 2.1 of the SER account mostly lists interdisciplinary scientific research completed or still implemented by Field Teachers, but there is a perceived deficiency in the area of research in the Field of Communication. Appendix 2.2 shows that the institution's partnership in project activities with the Lithuanian and foreign partners in the context of the communication field should be strengthened. It can be seen from the Appendix 2.4, that the majority of the Field teachers present their reports only in the national conferences.

During the visit administration, organisers and teachers confirmed that the VK/HEI implements scientific activity. According to the administration, scientific research is becoming increasingly relevant. The quality of scientific products will determine whether the VK/HEI will acquire the status of University of Applied Sciences in 2028. For quality assurance and accountability to the Research Council of Lithuania (it assesses the quality of publications and correspondingly allocates funding to the VK/HEI), professors, doctors publish their articles in paid journals. As the teachers noticed, there is a problem with free articles – it takes time to publish them (1.5 year wait). This leads to another problem – in case of a failure to collect the right amount of publications, the possibility of the VK/HEI to get funding from the Research Council of Lithuania decreases and the ranking of the VK/HEI among other colleges in the area of science falls.

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

Applied scientific activities implemented by the Field researcher groups and teachers as well as the carried out research are related to the content of teacher lectures. Participation of teachers in ASRED enables them to present the latest and the most relevant examples during studies, to relate theory and practice. Results of commissioned research of social partners are successfully adapted to enrich the content of studies. Therefore additional tasks of independent work appear in the study process, tasks for project work are prepared, students' abilities to interpret scientific research, to understand their applicability in professional activities are developed, etc. Consistent cooperation with social partners enriches lectures with guest lecturers, outgoing lectures, variety of offered topics for the Graduation Thesis, testing of the latest technologies in internship places, students are introduced to the innovative teaching/learning spaces etc.

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

Students are involved in the scientific activity of the Institution during the preparation of FT. The Field students also have a possibility to join an active scientific society in the Faculty. In SER is stated, that every year the Faculty organises 2 international scientific events for students, where they present their scientific reports. During the analysed period, 30 teachers of the Field prepared 94 students of the Field for scientific conferences. The students published 12 scientific publications. The Field students also presented their scientific reports in the conferences organised by other Lithuanian higher education institutions.

Only one student during the visit confirmed his participation in the student conference, where he made his presentation. Other students stated that they do more research in the third year, when writing a Graduation Thesis. The library introduces them to the usage of international databases for the search of literature not only for the Graduation Thesis; the information is provided when studies commence during introductory studies week. Additionally the head of the library carries out training on how to correctly perform the analysis of scientific literature and how to use databases for first year students. Even though teachers are willing to help, first year students find it quite difficult to participate in student scientific conferences with a report, because they are not yet familiar with the research methodology, the plagiarism system (these course units are taught only in the second year) and so on. One student mentioned that when a teacher gives a task, related to research competences, he had to change it, because students did not have enough skills to carry out the task. First year students state that they have heard that the Vilniaus kolegija has an active Student Research Society, but they do not actively participate there, because they lack understanding of what is its purpose. During the visit, the alumni also could not tell how research competences were developed during their studies and how they can apply them in the labour market after graduation.

ANALYSIS AND CONCLUSION (regarding 2.1.)

Though during the analysed period 90 percent of the Field teachers were actively involved in the activities of applied science research and integrated the research results, it should be noted that the number of publications in other databases is much higher than that in the highest level scientific journals, which shows the strengthening of scientific products in this area. The increase in the number of larger-scale scientific works should also be noted, because only 1 scientific monograph has been published so far. Overall, there is a noticeable a minority of the research is in the Field of Communication and dissemination of this research at the international level.

During the visit, it was noticed that it is important for VK/HEI to maintain a high position in the ranking of higher education institution scientific research. Achieving this goal is difficult when publishing articles for free. Such a situation gave the impression that there is an obvious aspect of top-down pressure within the VK/HEI to publish in the same academic year, which causes teachers to choose university funds for potentially predatory APC journals. All this shows that the administration should reconsider the strategy of submitting scientific production and the availability of indicators in the research ranking among higher education institutions.

Reviewing the development of research competences of VK/HEI students, it was noticed that the participation of first-year students in the conference was low, which is completely acceptable since it is complicated for the first year students to get involved into scientific activities. It is necessary to consider the methods and possibilities of how to deepen research competencies of students in the Study Programme of

the Field. A more active participation of first-year students in the Student Research Society could also help this situation. In this case, advertising campaigns for the society should be considered. During the visit, the graduates' lack of understanding about the development of students' research competences and the usefulness of research in the labour market also showed that it is necessary to strengthen research competences of the Field students in the study process.

AREA 2: CONCLUSIONS

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

COMMENDATIONS

1. Sufficient research and development is carried out in the VK/HEI.
2. The applied scientific activities carried out by teachers and students of the Field are purposeful, based on practical application, integration of scientific innovations into the study content.

RECOMMENDATIONS

To address shortcomings

1. With the help of the administration, VK/HEI should improve or rather simplify the system of presenting teachers' scientific production and achieving indicators in the VK/HEI.
2. The number of teachers and students making presentations at international scientific-practical conferences in the Field of Communication should be increased.
3. VK/HEI should develop the Science Workshop activities by involving more students in research and development activities.
4. VK/HEI should improve students' research competences (by reviewing the place of the Research Methodology subject in the study grid and the subject content, the form of teaching citation and search of sources of scientific literature, familiarization with plagiarism, etc.). Students should understand the practical benefits and applicability of research competencies after graduation.

For further improvement

1. Increasing the scientific production in the highest-level scientific journals and larger scientific works in English **in the Field of Communication** (lack of scientific production in the Field of Communication).
2. More relevant applied research, project activities with national and international partners and publicising (dissemination) results in the Field of Communication.

AREA 3: STUDENT ADMISSION AND SUPPORT

3.1. Student selection and admission is in line with the learning outcomes

FACTUAL SITUATION

3.1.1. Student selection and admission criteria and procedures are adequate and transparent

The admission to the field study programme in VK/HEI takes place during the centralised admission organised by the Association of Lithuanian Higher Education Institutions for Centralised Admission (LAMA BPO). Students can be admitted to state-funded and non-state funded places.

For state-funded places, the requirements are as follows: 3 state maturity exams with a passing grade, including Lithuanian Language and Literature, Mathematics, and any other subject. Additionally, the arithmetic average of the annual grades of five compulsory subjects have to be at least 6, when rounded up. The minimum competitive score is 4,3. For non-state funded places, one state maturity exam with a passing grade is enough, but the minimum competitive score also has to be 4,3 (for secondary education completed in 2022 and 2021).

The SER notes that the faculties also have time until the 31st of August to organise additional institutional admission, after the centralised one ends.

Information about the procedures and requirements is available on VK/HEI website, their Facebook page, as well as by email.

During the analysed period, the study programme saw slightly fluctuating student numbers. The number of applicants were as follows: 152 first priority applicants, and 644 applicants with remaining priorities in 2020, 102 first priority applicants, and 425 applicants with remaining priorities in 2021, and 111 first priority applicants, and 459 applicants with remaining priorities in 2022 (full time, part time, state-funded and non-state funded places combined).

Out of these applications, 147 (61 state funded, and 86 non-state funded places) students were admitted in 2020, 93 (46 state funded and 47 non-state funded places) were admitted in 2021, and 105 (29 state funded and 76 non-state funded places) were admitted in 2022.

While the SER notes the fluctuations, no concerns are raised, as the numbers even out once a closer look is taken at specific sections of those numbers: state funded and non-state funded places, full time and part time, or later sessional students, and so on. The differences in numbers among these groups are lower, thus natural. The bigger difference in 2021 admissions is attributed to the COVID-19 pandemic and its aftermath.

The highest competitive score of admitted students has been decreasing, with it ranging from 9,17 in 2020, to 7,76 in 2021, and 7,49 in 2022 for full time studies. The lowest competitive score has been decreasing as well, with 4,54 in 2020, 4,48 in 2021, and 4,33 in 2022. While the possible reasons for the decrease are not provided, the SER indicates additional effort to accommodate the different levels of students with additional academic support, and group work as a way for students to support each other.

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

The Vilnius kolegija offers recognition of foreign qualifications, periods of study and prior learning. *The Description of the Procedure for the Evaluation and Recognition of Achievements Acquired through Non-*

formal and Informal Learning and the *Description of the Procedure for Crediting Partial Study Results* are available on the college website, but the information on their implementation is limited.

Partial study results have been credited for 15 students over the analysed period.

ANALYSIS AND CONCLUSION (regarding 3.1.)

The admission procedures are clear and adequate to the study field. Although the numbers of applicants and admitted students are fluctuating, they remain high in comparison to other HEIs, and overall demographic situation in Lithuania. Additionally, while the competitive scores are decreasing, probably affected by the difficulties in maturity exams, especially mathematics, the Vilnius kolegija puts extra effort in making sure the students reach and maintain a similar academic level through consultations and group work, and encourage peer support.

3.2. There is an effective student support system enabling students to maximise their learning progress

FACTUAL SITUATION

3.2.1. Opportunities for student academic mobility are ensured

The Vilnius kolegija provides opportunities for student academic mobility with Erasmus+ programme. The information about these opportunities is provided in seminars organised at the beginning of each semester that cover both study and internship placements. Students who have gone on the study exchange share their experience as well. The information is also disseminated on social media platforms of the Vilnius kolegija, as well as their official website.

The Communication study field programme had no full time students from abroad during the evaluated period.

Regarding partial studies, there were 12 students participating in Erasmus+ mobility during the evaluated period, with 2 students in the year 2020–2021, 7 students in the year 2021–2022, and 3 students in the year 2022–2023. One of these students participated in a Blended Intensive Programme (BIP). BIP is also popular among incoming students, with 24 students coming from Belgium, Poland, and Latvia. 2 outgoing student internships and 2 graduate internships are also noted in the SER.

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

The Vilnius kolegija provides different types of support for students, relying on the Law on Research and Higher Education of the Republic of Lithuania, orders of the Minister of Education, Science and Sports of the Republic of Lithuania, normative documents of VK/HEI / HEI, as described in SER. Academic support includes academic consultations provided by the teaching staff, consultations regarding any study processes provided by the administration and the heads of study departments. Issues that might affect the entire study group are often referred to through the elders elected in the study group. Student Information Manager also informs the students about various study related issues and acts as the first point of contact for other issues. Meetings with student representatives and administration are also organised. The student opinions and experiences in the evaluation visit reflect these practices, and students are satisfied with the timely provided information and prompt responses to issues.

Financial and social support covers scholarships, allowances, benefits for persons with disabilities, loans, and accommodation in Vilnius. State regulations provide the procedure for allocating allowances for persons with

disabilities or social grants. One-time incentive scholarships for extracurricular activities are also available at the end of each academic year. According to SER, during the evaluated period, the VK/HEI's scholarship fund distributed 129 scholarships, 3 Basic Social Allowances each (1 BSA – 39 euros in 2020, 42 euros in 2022, 49 euros in 2023, and 55 euros in 2024). State Study Foundation has distributed 102 scholarships, 1 BSA each. Social grants were given to 49 students (6,5 BSA). Regarding the incentive scholarships, during the evaluated period, 14 students were awarded.

Psychological support is available in the form of consultations, free of charge for students and staff of the VK/HEI. The students participating in the evaluation visit were aware of the availability of the consultations, but noted that a lot of psychological support comes from teachers as well.

The effectiveness of the support available to students is evaluated in student surveys where they can express their level of satisfaction with the support provided. The results of the survey conducted in 2022 indicate that 12% of students were not entirely satisfied with certain aspects of the support available, leaving the majority of students happy with the support they receive. Similar opinions were reflected in the evaluation visit.

3.2.3. Higher education information and student counselling are sufficient

The students are introduced to the VK/HEI and the study programme in several ways. First of all, the VK/HEI organises an introductory week, where students are informed about the study processes, main documents and procedures at the HEI, academic integrity and other related issues. The information related to their chosen study programme is also provided. Meetings with the Head of the Study Programme and teachers are organised. Library resources and other services are also introduced.

ANALYSIS AND CONCLUSION (regarding 3.2.)

Various types of support available for students create a welcoming learning environment to students. While the teachers have limited hours for consultations officially, the students still write emails, might call, and ask support from teachers despite working hours. Teachers also make themselves available more than the hours agreed.

The level of financial support is also adequate, given the ratio of students that are eligible for scholarships. Students indicate being happy with the support available.

Psychological support of students appears to a large degree to be the responsibility of staff, without clear boundaries for the extent of their support, which might risk adversely affecting psychological support for staff themselves.

AREA 3: CONCLUSIONS

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

COMMENDATIONS

1. Although slightly fluctuating, the student numbers are impressive, though it is unclear exactly what efforts of VK/HEI lead to these results.
2. Academic, and psychological support and various timely consultations available to students.

RECOMMENDATIONS

For further improvement

1. Although the VK/HEI offers exemplary support for psychological needs, support may sometimes risk falling on teaching staff, so some practices to ensure the balance would be beneficial to both students and staff.

AREA 4: TEACHING AND LEARNING, STUDENT ASSESSMENT, AND GRADUATE EMPLOYMENT

4.1. Students are prepared for independent professional activity

FACTUAL SITUATION

4.1.1. Teaching and learning address the needs of students and enable them to achieve intended learning outcomes

Students mentioned the importance of internships, which are a great way to apply theoretical knowledge and a great opportunity to get a foothold in the labour market.

Attention should be paid to the coherence of the modules taught to avoid duplication of content. The Institution has its own policy on AI. Each lecturer individually gives permission to students for the use of AI in lectures. Students are trained and encouraged to use AI ethically. Students miss basic applications, especially visual ones. Visual applications such as Photoshop were also identified as a major deficiency on the part of students.

It becomes a challenge for the VK/HEI to keep those students who are working and to help them to combine their studies and work.

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

The SER notes that VK/HEI provides study opportunities for socially vulnerable groups and students with special needs. If a student informs that he/ she has special needs, the staff of the Study Division informs the Department and teaching staff in charge of the study programme about such case.

The necessary facilities for studying are provided and adaptations to the study place are ensured. The infrastructure of the faculty is sufficiently developed to accommodate students with special needs. There are sloping accesses to the building entrance, there is an elevator, all classrooms are threshold-free and wheelchair accessible.

Toilets are accessible for people with special needs. If there are students with special needs at an academic group, when scheduling lectures, classrooms are selected on one floor to allow easy mobility for students in wheelchairs. Students with disabilities are provided with information on access to financial and academic support during their studies, individual timetables are prepared if needed, students receive additional counselling, the study process is personalised according to special needs, and more flexible forms of knowledge checks are made available (e.g. tests on VMA Moodle can be changed to an oral or written test). If a student is unable to have his/ her knowledge check on time for objective reasons, he/ she will be granted an extension of the deadline. In order to enable students with hearing impairments to participate in lectures and practicums, the Vilnius City Sign Language Centre cooperates with sign language interpreters who translate all the information provided orally into the sign language. The library's reading rooms are equipped with computer spaces for wheelchair users and a book magnifier for the visually impaired users.

There is currently 1 student with special needs.

ANALYSIS AND CONCLUSION (regarding 4.1.)

Overall, VK/HEI presents many ways for students to gain practical knowledge and experience to prepare them to enter professional opportunities. Considerations of AI were addressed, and the panel of experts acknowledges VK/HEI has a policy and communicates this to students, faculty and staff. The needs of socially vulnerable groups and students with other needs are met. Access to higher education for socially vulnerable groups and students with individual needs is ensured.

4.2. There is an effective and transparent system for student assessment, progress monitoring, and assuring academic integrity

FACTUAL SITUATION

4.2.1. Monitoring of learning progress and feedback to students to promote self-assessment and learning progress planning is systematic

The SER notes, and it was noted during the interviews, that the end of each module, a student survey on the quality of teaching is organised in accordance with the established procedures in order to provide feedback. The aim of the surveys is to ensure that each module is evaluated by students who have studied it, thereby contributing to its improvement. The results of the annual surveys are analysed by the faculty's administration, the Department, the Student Representation and the Field Committee.

Providing continuous feedback to students is one of the most important factors in encouraging students to take personal responsibility for their learning progress. According to the Procedures for the Evaluation of Student Achievement, there is not only cumulative and criterion-based evaluation (graded), but also formative evaluation, where students do not receive grades for their achievements. In this type of evaluation, teachers provide students with continuous constructive feedback (written or verbal) on their learning achievements, enabling them to anticipate, consolidate and reinforce progress, and encourage them to analyse their achievements or gaps. After each practice, a student questionnaire survey is carried out to clarify students' expectations and to analyse the results achieved. Depending on the content of the practice, public presentations of the work are held at the end of the practice, followed by a discussion to ensure feedback.

4.2.2. Graduate employability and career are monitored

The SER notes that Career monitoring of graduates of VK/HEI is carried out by analysing the data of the Employment Service under the Ministry of Social Security and Labour, the Career Management Information System (KVIS) and the Department's graduate surveys. The level of employability of graduates in the field during the period under analysis was excellent, indicating a high demand for graduates on the labour market and high quality of studies.

The opinions of graduates and employers are collected in accordance with the Description of the Procedure for Collecting Feedback for Improving the Quality of Studies. Graduates are surveyed no earlier than 6 months after graduation on the programme, the competences acquired and the placement on the labour market. Employers are surveyed about graduates' preparation for professional activities during students' professional and final internships in enterprises, as well as during the work of the Graduation thesis Defence Committee, in communication with employers and performing commissioned projects.

Career Management Information System (KVIS) data is analysed, information is given in SER. Student employability data is only tracked on LinkedIn. The LinkedIn account is managed by one person. It seems risky to have all the information about graduates on one platform.

The VK/HEI has a career counsellor who organises career days and also helps students to make a proper CV and LinkedIn profile.

The SER notes that they make a report of the department's graduate survey data, but during visiting faculty manager staff do not answer about this report. It also becomes clear during the interview, that the problem with contacting alumni - some do not want to be contacted after graduation.

Students who need help with their careers can send an email and ask for assistance.

The VK/HEI cooperates with various companies that come to the lectures to talk about specific topics, tell about professions and motivate students to look for a job.

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

The most serious breaches of academic integrity are plagiarism, fraudulent payment for a course or part of a course, assisting another to commit an academic dishonesty and bribery. Academic integrity is not only addressed by lecturers, but also by student academic groups and the student representation, and is discussed at the annual meetings of the Dean's Office. The Code is overseen by the Academic Ethics Committee, which is approved by order of the Rector of VK/HEI. The Committee is composed of 9 members: 7 are appointed by the Academic Council of the College; 2 are appointed by the Student Representation of the VK/HEI. The activities and composition of the Committee are regulated by the Regulations of the VK/HEI Ethics Committee.

The SER notes during the period under review, one case of violation of the principles of academic integrity was recorded in the Direction: in 2023, one Graduation Thesis was found to be plagiarised. The student was not allowed to defend themselves and was expelled from the student lists.

The SER notes the VK/HEI uses the Original screening system to check for plagiarism in written academic works. During the interviews, students mentioned that they do not use plagiarism software.

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

The SER notes that the appeals are heard and decisions are made at VK/HEI in accordance with the Appeals regulation of VK/HEI. Having received an appeal, the Appeals Commission consisting of 5 members is brought together to hear the appeal. There have been no appeals or complaints submitted by students of the field under evaluation in the last 3 years.

ANALYSIS AND CONCLUSION (regarding 4.2.)

At VK/HEI, continuous feedback to students is one of the most important factors encouraging students to take personal responsibility for their own learning progress.

Teachers provide students with continuous constructive feedback (written or verbal) on their learning achievements, allowing them to anticipate, consolidate and reinforce their progress, and encourage them to analyse their own achievements.

Career Management Information System (KVIS) data is analysed, information is given in SER.

The VK/HEI employs a career counsellor who organises career days and also helps students to prepare their CVs and LinkedIn profiles properly.

During the interview, it also becomes clear that the problem is contacting alumni - some do not want to be contacted after graduation. It is welcome that students who need help with career issues can send an email and ask for help. VK/HEI implements a policy of academic integrity, tolerance and non-discrimination.

Academic integrity issues are addressed not only by lecturers, but also by student academic groups and the student representation, and are discussed at the annual Dean's Office meetings.

SER notes that the VK/HEI uses an original screening system to check for plagiarism in written academic work, but during the interviews students mentioned that they do not use plagiarism software.

The procedures for appeals and complaints at VK/HEI are effective. Appeals are handled and decisions are taken by the VK/HEI in accordance with the VK/HEI Appeals Regulation.

AREA 4: CONCLUSIONS

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

COMMENDATIONS

1. The expected learning outcomes meet the requirements of the labour market for the training of professionals, are consistently and progressively developed from cognitive abilities to practical skills and competences, and constitute a set of competences and abilities necessary for the award of the professional bachelor's degree in communication studies.
2. Overall, the programme in Public Relations at VK/HEI has opportunities for students to express their needs and ways to seek support.
3. The teaching staff at VK/HEI communicates frequently to students about feedback on their courses and their status in the programme generally.
4. VK/HEI provides study opportunities for socially vulnerable groups and students with special needs.

RECOMMENDATIONS

To address shortcomings

1. Attention should be paid to the coherence of the modules taught to avoid duplication of content.
2. It is also recommended that the modules be updated to take account of the latest contemporary trends.

3. It is recommended that more attention and credits should be given to the English language and professional literature in English.
4. It is recommended to focus more on cooperation with graduates, and to look for additional ways to monitor and collect information on graduate employability.

AREA 5: TEACHING STAFF

5.1. Teaching staff is adequate to achieve learning outcomes

FACTUAL SITUATION

5.1.1. The number, qualification, and competence (scientific, didactic, professional) of teaching staff is sufficient to achieve learning outcomes

The Self-Evaluation Report states that the qualification and number of teachers of VK/HEI are adequate for the achievement of the foreseen learning outcomes of the Public Relations Study Programme, the structure of academic staff is balanced. In 2021 – 2023, modules in the Communication Field were taught by 30 teachers, including doctors (23.3 percent), 20 percent of whom – associate professors and 80 percent lecturers. All teachers working in the Field have at least 3 years teaching work experience. 87 percent of the teachers are permanent teachers and only 13 percent teachers also worked in other higher education institutions and business companies.

Teachers of the Field have at least a master qualification degree or an equivalent. Strength of the academic staff of the Field – 40 percent teachers of the Field are teachers-practitioners, who work in business companies, staff turnover is minimal. The ratio of the Field students and teachers is optimal.

During the visit, teachers unanimously emphasised that they know the competencies that the students will acquire after graduating from the Study Programme. They clearly identified how the learning outcomes of the courses they teach are compatible with each other and with the learning outcomes of the programme for the achievement of these competences, which shows that the academic staff is suitable for the implementation of the Public Relations Study Programme. As presented in the Self-Evaluation Report, during the visit, both the administration and the organisers, as well as the teachers, confirmed that the optimal workload for the teachers is created for working with students, developing competences and carrying out organisational and scientific research activities.

In 2021-2023, one teacher of the Field had on average 41-42 hours for the development of subject, didactic, general and research competences. The VK/HEI provides appropriate conditions for development. A teacher can develop his/her competences both in Lithuania and abroad. In all cases, except the personal decisions of teachers, competence development is mostly funded by the VK/HEI funds.

During the visit, the administration and teachers emphasised that the VK/HEI does not require all teachers to work in the area of science, however, teachers, who take part in an open competition or certification are interested in winning it, therefore, every 5 years they have to submit significant performance evidence, including in the area of science. However, Development of the Field Teacher Competence in 2021-2023, presented in Table 5.5. in the Self-Evaluation Report shows, that duration of the development of research competences in hours is still the least among other hours of teacher competence development.

During the visit, when asked to specify the international organisations or associations the VK/HEI cooperates with, only Businet was mentioned. Analogous situation is also presented in Appendix 2.3 to the Self-Evaluation Report, which shows that the VK/HEI must strengthen international cooperation relations. According to the administration, the VK/HEI is still not successful in writing and participation in project “Horizon Europe”. It has already been started to plan, search for people, who could write grants for the

funding of “Horizon” projects, the workload of teachers is already supplemented with the hours for writing scientific projects.

ANALYSIS AND CONCLUSION (regarding 5.1.)

Both the Self-Evaluation Report and the visit revealed that the VK/HEI provides teachers of the Field with conditions to develop their professional, teaching and general competences. In comparison with the mentioned competences, the number of hours needed to raise the research competences of teachers should be increased. At most, teachers devote half of their workload to working with students and competence development, the other half of their workload is for research (including project writing). Scientific activities are mainly carried out by teachers with a doctorate degree or the title of associate professor. Their contact hours are reduced, so that they could allocate more hours for research activity.

Teachers-practitioners are not involved in research activity.

Neither the administration nor the teachers could boast of the abundance of the projects. Teachers could contribute to the involvement of the VK/HEI in the “Horizon Europe” Programme and would ensure successful funding of scientific research projects therein.

5.2. Teaching staff is ensured opportunities to develop competences, and they are periodically evaluated

FACTUAL SITUATION

5.2.1. Opportunities for academic mobility of teaching staff are ensured

The Self-Evaluation Report states that Vilnius kolegija Higher Education Institution provides the entire academic staff with equal opportunities to participate in all activities of academic mobility. Based on the information presented in Table 5.2 of the Self-Evaluation Report, in 2020-2023 there were 16 outgone teachers in the Field, who had visits for academic activities and internships abroad (see Table 5.2). This activity was stopped by the Covid-19 pandemic, but since 2021-2022 the number of the visits has increased. This is also evident in Table 5.2 in the Self-Evaluation Report. Furthermore, during the visit teachers mentioned that internationality of studies is the aspiration of the VK/HEI and the Study Field. During the evaluation period, teachers of the Field had gone to 33 visits in 19 different countries, however Table 5.3 shows that during this period all the visits were implemented by only 9 teachers out of 22 teachers of the Field.

Academic exchange implemented in the VK/HEI provides possibilities for incoming visits. The VK/HEI organises international teaching weeks every year to promote the mobility of incoming staff. Both the teachers and students of the Field are active participants in the lectures of foreign guests.

According to the data presented in Table 5.4, 6 teachers came to teach during the period under evaluation, and only 4 teachers came on the issues of the Studies in Communication Field.

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

During the visit teachers confirmed that the VK/HEI provides them with the conditions to raise qualification. Every year, the Department of Training and Cooperation Development prepares a list of seminars and other

activities for raising qualification. Certification of teachers is very important for development. It motivates teachers to raise their qualification, apply different teaching methods, and prepare teaching material for independent work of students. The management also promotes teachers to pursue a doctor degree. One teacher defended the doctor's dissertation during the period under evaluation. Teachers also develop their professional qualification in courses, seminars, internships, conferences, international exchange programmes, and etc. Erasmus+ provides teachers with possibilities to develop their subject and teaching competences.

The Self-Evaluation Report states that 40 percent of the Field teachers are practitioners. The latter ones, in the opinion of teachers, help students to effectively apply theoretical knowledge in practice, i.e. by sharing examples from their practical experience, teachers-practitioners bring students closer to the real business world and its challenges and help search for certain solutions.

ANALYSIS AND CONCLUSION (regarding 5.2.)

Vilniaus Kolegija Higher Education Institution has created suitable conditions for the development of teacher competences. Teachers can choose a very wide range of professional development opportunities: to participate in academic mobility programmes and to get involved in other activities. These competencies are also consolidated by invited lecturers, business representatives, who come to share their experience in lectures or during other events of the VK/HEI.

From the experts' point of view, establishing closer partnership relations with foreign social partners or field researchers, who can provide co-authored scientific publications or international research projects, is not an adequately or fully used area in the VK/HEI. Moreover, Erasmus+ possibility is mostly used by the same teachers every year, though mobility is one of the activities planned and recorded in the Teacher's full-time workload accounting card for each Field. This situation doesn't help ensure the systematicity of the development of all teachers in the Field. By the way, incoming visits to Vilniaus kolegija Higher Education Institution are also not characterised by a large number and geographical diversity.

AREA 5: CONCLUSIONS

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

COMMENDATIONS

1. The qualification and number of teachers of the Field are adequate for the achievement of the foreseen learning outcomes of the Public Relations Study Programme, and the structure of academic staff is balanced.
2. VK/HEI provides teachers with possibilities for academic mobility and the development of teacher competences.

RECOMMENDATIONS

To address shortcomings

1. The hours of development of teachers' scientific competencies should be increased, because the duration of research competence development in hours is still the smallest among the hours of development of other teacher competences (especially development is needed in the hours for writing scientific projects).
2. The academic mobility of outgoing teachers should be increased by encouraging new personnel to use it.
3. The number of visiting teachers should be increased. Although the VK/HEI secures funding for visits from foreign lecturers annually, the number of visiting lecturers is limited (approximately three per year).

For further improvement

1. International cooperation relations in research and development activities and the involvement of teachers in participation in it should be strengthened.

AREA 6: LEARNING FACILITIES AND RESOURCES

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

FACTUAL SITUATION

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

The VK/HEI offers 33 classrooms of varying capacity including six computerised classrooms and eight dedicated for practical and project work, as well as a professional studio for filming. Students have access to a central library and seven faculty libraries, with 265 workstations, of which 57 are equipped with computers, as well as to faculty classrooms for individual work. Laptop users have wireless access throughout the building and 20 laptops are available to borrow; but there are limited charging spots. Rest and lounge areas are available for staff and students as well.

Teaching is supported by the virtual study environment *Moodle*. There is an impressive range of professional equipment, including camcorders, cameras for Photography course, stabilising equipment, graphic tablets, and printing related equipment for advertising practice. Software resources include the Office suite, as well as limited access to the Adobe suite and other relevant software (hotel management systems).

The VK/HEI offers disability access in the form of elevator and bathrooms, as well as remote access through VPN and where possible recorded lecture material. These include recorded audio-visual resources for those who need library training, as well as recorded learning material from social partners available through the Lithuanian Marketing Association (LIMA).

The VK/HEI benefits from Institutional membership with LIMA: aside from learning resources students can gain access to LIMA internships and their professional network. Psychological help is offered to staff and students free of charge; and needs are monitored quantitatively through survey questions; and qualitatively by holding regular meetings with students. The VK/HEI is aware that since COVID-19, the need for psychological help has increased. Further career resources include a career centre at the university level, and at the faculty level they have access to a dedicated and experienced staff member who organises career days, and consults students on relevant skills (e.g., how to make a CV, and how to maintain a professional online presence) on an everyday basis.

A yearly review is conducted of necessary library and software resources. Students and staff have adequate access to all the necessary databases (EBSCOhost, Taylor & Francis, etc.). The VK/HEI library users have access to 449,500 titles of books, 30,200 titles of journals, and 61,600 titles of other resources in the subscription databases, as SER states. As of 2023, the VK/HEI library offered 140,000 items and 45,000 titles of printed publications, with 87 sets of 116 periodicals subscribed to in 2022. The faculty library, as of January 2023, offered 21,763 items and 10,701 titles. The faculty library also subscribed to 24 periodicals in 2023, with 16 of them in Lithuanian and 8 in English.

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

In addition to this, the VK/HEI invests in continuous expansion of their library material in Lithuanian and foreign languages. An additional room will be redesigned to provide more space for group work and practical

skills (which will include access to professional camera equipment and computers). Students also indicate a desire for resources to help them build a portfolio: social partners confirm that this would be an added benefit.

Funds from sponsors has been used for office furniture, the expansion of lounge areas, acquisition of technology for future projects (including Virtual Reality headsets) and for extracurricular activities (including a large amount of walking sticks and a paraglider).

ANALYSIS AND CONCLUSION (regarding 6.1.)

Although laptop use is necessary outside of computerised workspaces, and twenty laptops are available for students with limited personal means to borrow, most rooms currently have very limited support for laptop use, particularly in terms of wall sockets.

While the open-source virtual learning environment Moodle presents some problems (expensive expansions, troublesome updating processes, security issues, lack of developer documentation), the VK/HEI has access to full-time permanently employed people who provide continuous support for the system on the university level.

Other software resources, particularly the Adobe Creative Suite programmes relevant to the programme such as Photoshop and Illustrator, suffer from limited availability for students – depending on specific computer labs and limited availability for students of the Public Relations programme, while students and social partners alike indicated that students lack experience with creative software use in practice. Photography classes are offered as an elective but (in accordance with industry needs and the VK/HEI aims), they may need to be offered by default in the PR programme, as they are in the advertising management programme. Students were not aware of the availability of Adobe software, nor of the available electives.

Additional resources to develop students' English proficiency appear necessary, given the clear and present need of PR professionals to engage with others in English. The PR degree in its current form would benefit from more English literature and more English-language discussions in the course of their program.

The library's reading rooms are equipped with computer spaces for wheelchair users and a book magnifier for the visually impaired users.

While the institutional membership with LIMA adds to the VK/HEI own offering of resources, this may come at the risk of excluding involvement with the Lithuanian Communication Association (LCA).

Financial resources are distributed among staff, based on their submission of financial plans. Much of these resources is currently spent on journals with article processing charge [APC]. In light of the department's funding ambitions and the resulting quality of education, the current preference for such journals might not be the best choice, as this often means trading in quality (of peer review, and journal status by indexation and metrics) for quick publication.

One person is currently in charge of the entire alumni network hosted on the commercial social media platform LinkedIn. This presents a lot of work, but may additionally present the risk inherent to depending on one commercial platform. Diversifying this reliance might also serve to address the low rate of responses to alumni surveys and the VK/HEI ambition to build an alumni club. Similarly, the reliance on Meta/Facebook for the use of the acquired Oculus Virtual Reality headsets may present a risk. IT services are ready to offer

generic profiles for students who do not use Facebook, but potential privacy issues, which the company is known for, remain.

AREA 6: CONCLUSIONS

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

COMMENDATIONS

1. The material resources and spaces available are impressive.

RECOMMENDATIONS

To address shortcomings

1. Lack of skills for Adobe software is/could be harmful, Relevant courses may need to be included in the programme by default, or electives should be more clearly offered.
2. English proficiency: given the need of PR professionals to engage with others in English, it seems the PR degree in its current form would definitely benefit from more English literature and discussions in the course of the program. In light of internationalisation ambitions, we highly recommend English as a language of instruction for more courses beyond the 10 ECTS of Business English.

For further improvement

1. Resources to compile a portfolio should be allocated to students; social partners confirm that this would be an added benefit.
2. We recommend more patience with regard to the VK/HEI policy on publication requirements, in order for quality research publications to be developed, especially in light of potential for successful future funding applications.

AREA 7: QUALITY ASSURANCE AND PUBLIC INFORMATION

- 7.1. The development of the field of study is based on an internal quality assurance system involving all stakeholders and continuous monitoring, transparency and public information

FACTUAL SITUATION

7.1.1. Internal quality assurance system for the programmes is effective

The internal quality assurance system at VK/HEI is structured around fostering a culture of quality and adherence to multiple regulatory frameworks, including national laws, European guidelines, and institutional documents such as the Quality Manual and internal quality assurance procedures. This system involves comprehensive multi-level activities: Monthly meetings of various commissions (Academic Affairs, Management Affairs, Directorate) ensure continuous oversight and strategic decision-making. Students assess the quality of their studies twice per semester, and their feedback is integral to the quality assurance processes. Regular meetings at various organisational levels (faculty, department, program) facilitate coherent planning, organisation, and control. Faculty members engage in team-building meetings, and faculty administration holds weekly and bi-monthly meetings to address quality issues. Formal committees (Field Committee, Graduation Thesis Defence Committee) and informal activities (Alumni Day, International Entrepreneurship Week) involve students, graduates, and social stakeholders in quality assurance.

Teaching staff are responsible for ensuring the internal coherence of study modules and adapting to market changes, working in teams for collaborative problem-solving. The Department of Advertising and Communication ensures the relevance of study programs to societal and market needs, organises internships, and maintains feedback loops with social stakeholders. Normative documents regulate the study process, with information managed through systems like Kontora and AIS for transparency and accessibility.

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

The system is underpinned by self-evaluation and strategic action plans, supplemented by quantitative and qualitative surveys from all stakeholders. Regular surveys and feedback mechanisms involve all stakeholders, and results are used to refine study programs and teaching methods.

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

The internal system includes annual evaluations, strategic planning, and improvements based on performance assessments and stakeholder feedback. VK/HEI fosters national and international partnerships, involving alumni and employers in quality assurance activities and engaging in collaborative projects. The internal quality assurance system at VK/HEI is comprehensive, involving multiple stakeholders, regular evaluations, strategic planning, and continuous improvement, ensuring the programs remain relevant and of high quality.

7.1.4. Student feedback is collected and analysed

Students assess the quality of their studies twice per semester, and their feedback is integral to the quality assurance processes. Faculty administration meets regularly with students to discuss concerns and potential

improvements. The system is student-centred, involving students in surveys, meetings with coordinators and faculty administration, and ensuring their feedback is analysed and acted upon.

ANALYSIS AND CONCLUSION (regarding 7.1.)

The internal quality assurance system at VK/HEI is multifaceted, designed to foster a culture of continuous improvement and adherence to regulatory standards. VK/HEI's quality assurance system is built on a foundation that includes national laws, European guidelines, and institutional documents like the Quality Manual and internal procedures. This alignment ensures compliance with broader educational standards and consistency in quality assurance practices. The system features a comprehensive set of activities at various organisational levels, which include: Monthly Meetings: Commissions on Academic Affairs, Management Affairs, and the Directorate oversee and make strategic decisions regularly. Regular Faculty Meetings: Weekly and bi-monthly meetings within faculty administration ensure that quality issues are promptly addressed.

Students play a critical role in the quality assurance process by providing feedback twice per semester. This feedback is crucial for assessing and improving the quality of education and student experience. The involvement of students, graduates, and social stakeholders in formal committees (e.g., Field Committee, Graduation Thesis Defence Committee) and informal activities (e.g., Alumni Day, International Entrepreneurship Week) ensures a broad perspective in quality assurance. These activities promote a holistic approach to quality that includes insights from various sectors of the community. Teaching staff ensure the internal coherence of study modules and adapt them to market changes. Their collaborative problem-solving approach and engagement in team-building meetings support a cohesive and responsive educational environment.

The Department of Advertising and Communication focuses on aligning study programs with societal and market needs. By organising internships and maintaining feedback loops with social stakeholders, they ensure that the curriculum remains relevant and practical. VK/HEI uses systems like Kontora and AIS to manage information, ensuring transparency and accessibility for all stakeholders. This facilitates effective communication and data-driven decision-making within the institution.

Annual evaluations, strategic planning, and performance assessments are integral to the system. VK/HEI uses these tools to make informed improvements based on stakeholder feedback and performance data. Information about programs, external evaluations, improvement processes, and outcomes is collected and made publicly available. This transparency fosters trust and accountability among stakeholders. VK/HEI's internal quality assurance system is comprehensive.

AREA 7: CONCLUSIONS

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

COMMENDATIONS

1. VK/HEI implements a detailed institutional and faculty-level quality management structure. This includes regular meetings at different levels (Academic Affairs Commission, Management Affairs Commission, Directorate, Faculty Council) and active involvement of students in quality assessment.
2. The system places significant emphasis on student involvement. Students participate in surveys, meetings with faculty administration, and quality management processes. This ensures that their feedback directly influences improvements in teaching quality and study processes.
3. There is a continuous feedback loop where data from surveys and evaluations are analysed and used to make informed decisions. For instance, the Field Committee's periodic review leads to actionable improvements in the curriculum and student support mechanisms.
4. The involvement of a wide range of stakeholders, including students, alumni, employers, and public bodies, ensures that the study programs remain relevant and aligned with market needs. This collaborative approach also helps in enhancing the quality and employability of graduates.
5. VK/HEI actively develops strategic partnerships at both national and international levels, which helps in maintaining high standards and staying updated with global educational trends.
6. Regular evaluations through annual self-assessments and external feedback (e.g., from Graduation thesis Defence Commissions) ensure that VK/HEI can adapt and enhance its study programs continuously. For instance, the introduction of new elective modules based on student feedback demonstrates responsiveness to student needs.

RECOMMENDATIONS

For further improvement

1. Measurable outcomes should be established for all quality assurance activities. Use key performance indicators to track progress and make data-driven decisions.
2. Clearly communicate how feedback from students and staff is being used to make improvements. Regular updates and reports on actions taken based on feedback can enhance transparency.
3. The system heavily relies on surveys, which may not capture the full spectrum of issues and may lead to survey fatigue among students and staff.
4. Alternative feedback mechanisms should be incorporated such as focus groups, suggestion boxes, and open forums to complement surveys. This can help capture a broader range of insights and reduce survey fatigue.
5. Robust communication strategy should be developed to ensure that all stakeholders are aware of the changes made based on quality assurance processes. Regular newsletters, emails, and updates on the institution's website can be useful.

IV. SUMMARY

VK/HEI's first cycle program in Public Relations clearly meets and fulfils its mission, goals and strategy, and its emphasis on practical applications aligns with the programme's learning outcomes and opportunities for students. With input from alumni, social partners and employers, it became clear how one of the main strengths at VK/HEI is the program in Public Relations itself given the demand for it also as a growth area. In light of the evaluation and analysis of the teaching and research activities at VK/HEI , several recommendations have been identified by the expert panel to further enhance the learning experience for students and promote their active involvement in research projects and activities but also to introduce a required portfolio of student work. This last point also received strong support from alumni, social partners and employers but also from current students as well. By addressing the areas for improvement and building on its strengths, VK/HEI can ensure that its curriculum remains relevant and closely aligned with the latest developments in science, art, and technology.

The learning outcomes are aligned with the content and delivery of the curriculum, and flexibility is offered to the students through online and on-site choices in individual modules. However, it was noted that more attention should be given to module coherence to avoid any potential duplication of course content. Students have options to express their feedback about the learning experience through surveys and interactions with staff and faculty. In terms of ensuring student success after graduating, more credits should be given in the English language and more professional literature covered in the modules and courses should also be in English. Students have mobility options to them, especially because of the Erasmus+ programme.

In terms of teaching staff, both the qualification and numbers of teaching staff appear to be in good alignment with learning outcomes and the overall mission and goals at VK/HEI. In addition, teaching staff also make use of mobility options; however, it was noted that the same faculty tend to make use of the mobility options, and VK/HEI is therefore encouraged to increase the numbers of new faculty mobility experiences.

Materials to support learning experiences at VK/HEI and its resources and spaces that are available were impressive and in alignment with VK/HEI's mission overall. VK/HEI clearly offers students excellent support for any psychological needs, though one concern raised was that often this support might fall too frequently on the teaching staff themselves as opposed to trained counsellors, for example. Despite the strengths overall, the VK/HEI should increase the awareness among the students of Adobe software as well as the available elective that may have production aspects students actually seem to want more of.

It was obvious to the panel that VK/HEI takes higher education very seriously and is passionate about learning processes and ensuring a meaningful learning experience for their students as well as for their teaching staff.