

# BRITISH ACCREDITATION COUNCIL INSPECTION REPORT

## Independent Higher Education (IHE) Reaccreditation Inspection

**INSTITUTION:** Varna University of Management

**ADDRESS:** 13A Oborishte Street  
Varna 9000  
Bulgaria

**HEAD OF INSTITUTION:** Associate Professor Todor Radev

**DATE OF INSPECTION:** 14 - 15 December 2016

**ACCREDITATION STATUS AT INSPECTION:** Accredited

### DECISION ON REACCREDITATION:

- Reaccreditation awarded for the full four-year period.
- Decision on reaccreditation deferred.
- Award of reaccreditation refused.

Date: 23 March 2017

### 1. Background to the institution

Varna University of Management (VUM/the University) traces its origins to International University College (IUC) Albena which was established in 1993. In 2007, IUC Sofia, previously an independent organisation, merged with IUC Albena. The expanded IUC became a Higher School of Management reflecting its status as a tertiary institution with provision to award degrees in one academic field. The institution was renamed Varna University of Management (VUM) in May 2015 and operates on three campuses, Dobrich and Varna, in the east of the country and Sofia in the west. VUM's headquarters are in Varna.

From 1996 to 2014 the institution offered University of Portsmouth Bachelor of Arts (BA) programmes. The University's current United Kingdom (UK) partner is Cardiff Metropolitan University (CMU) and it offers CMU Bachelor and Master programmes.

### 2. Brief description of the current provision

An articulation agreement allows students who have successfully completed Year 1 and Year 2 (Levels 4 and 5) of VUM undergraduate programmes to enter Year 3 (Level 6) of the corresponding CMU programme. At the time of the inspection, students were enrolled on the CMU BA (Hons) International Business Management, BA (Hons) International Hospitality Management, BA (Hons) Business and Management Studies with Finance, the Master of Science (MSc) International Hospitality and the Master of Business Administration (MBA) course. There were no students enrolled on either the BA (Hons) International Tourism Management or the BSc (Hons) Business Information Systems. VUM is planning to add its BSc Software Systems and Technologies to its portfolio of CMU programmes, subject to CMU approval. Successful students are awarded joint CMU and VUM degrees. Bulgarian regulations typically require further study following graduation from UK degrees. For example, students graduating from CMU bachelor's degrees are, in Bulgarian terms, awarded a professional bachelor's degree and require a further year's study to graduate with a Bulgarian bachelor's degree.

In addition to the CMU programmes inspected, the University offers a BA Hospitality and Culinary Arts programme, a preparatory English programme and various short, part-time courses. In 2016, the University introduced a summer taught semester aimed at international Erasmus+ students. In addition to the three teaching campuses, VUM uses the facilities of a holiday complex on the Black Sea at Albena for social events and some induction and training activities related to summer internships. These facilities are operative only during the tourist season from May to October.

At the time of the inspection there were 20 full-time and 28 part-time teaching staff, 37 administrative staff and 21 ancillary staff. There were 63 students enrolled on CMU Level 6 BA (Hons) programmes, ten on the MSc and 34 on the MBA. Just over 100 students were enrolled on VUM feeder programmes at Levels 4 and 5. There were 65 students enrolled on VUM's own programmes including the BSc Software Systems and Technologies, BA Hospitality and Culinary Arts, BA Marketing and Management and BA Marketing and Management in the Hospitality and Tourism Industry. A further 12 MBA and 15 BA (Hons) graduates were taking an additional year to meet Bulgarian requirements.

### 3. Inspection process

The inspection was conducted by two inspectors and a student member (the Team) over two days. The Team visited only the Dobrich and Varna campuses. The Sofia campus was inspected during the interim inspection in February 2016. However, the inspection covered the operation of all three campuses. The Team met senior management, teaching and administrative staff and students. They observed teaching and inspected learning resources, social facilities and residential accommodation. In addition, they scrutinised documentation on both campuses.

#### 4. Inspection history:

<b>Inspection type</b>	<b>Date</b>
Full Accreditation	8 - 11 May 2004
Interim	21 September 2005
Full Accreditation	27 - 28 April 2009
Interim	18 May 2011
Full Accreditation	3 - 4 October 2013
Interim	3 February 2016

## PART B - JUDGEMENT AND EVIDENCE

The following judgements and comments are based upon evidence seen by the inspector(s) during the inspection and from documentation provided by the institution.

### INSPECTION AREA - GOVERNANCE, STRATEGY AND FINANCIAL MANAGEMENT

#### 1. The institution is effectively and responsibly governed

- |     |  |   |
|-----|--|---|
| 1.1 | The organisational structure, including the role and extent of authority of any owners, directors or governing body, is clearly defined, documented and understood by stakeholders.                                      | <input checked="" type="radio"/> Yes <input type="radio"/> No |
| 1.2 | The head of the institution, directors and other relevant persons are suitably qualified and experienced, understand their specific responsibilities and are effective in carrying them out.                             | <input checked="" type="radio"/> Yes <input type="radio"/> No |
| 1.3 | Policies, procedures and systems linking governance and management are well documented and effectively disseminated across the institution.  | <input checked="" type="radio"/> Yes <input type="radio"/> No |
| 1.4 | The institution engages in appropriate risk management planning, which is administered and monitored by named individuals.   | <input checked="" type="radio"/> Yes <input type="radio"/> No |
| 1.5 | The head of the institution, directors and other relevant persons are suitably qualified and experienced, understand their specific responsibilities and are effective in carrying them out.                             | <input checked="" type="radio"/> Yes <input type="radio"/> No |
| 1.6 | The governing body conducts regular risk assessment exercises in all areas of the institution's provision.   | <input checked="" type="radio"/> Yes <input type="radio"/> No |
| 1.7 | All relationships with other educational institutions and organisations are defined formally and are fully transparent, with institutions compliant with partner or parent institutions' requirements, where applicable. | <input checked="" type="radio"/> Yes <input type="radio"/> No |

**This standard is judged to be:**  Met  Partially Met  Not Met

#### Comments

VUM have produced a Strategic Plan, an independent review, policies for research and human resources, a financial management and control system, an academic quality handbook and an action plan. However, these documents are in Bulgarian. Consequently, the inspectors were able to confirm they had been prepared but relied upon VUM to translate the key features of these documents.

Although senior management demonstrated a clear understanding of the risks facing the University, the process of risk assessment could be made more explicit.

Given the extent of teaching in English and the desire to further internationalise its offering, in the interests of transparency VUM is advised to ensure that key documents are available in English.

#### 2. The institution has a clear and achievable strategy

- |     |   |   |
|-----|---|---|
| 2.1 | The institution has a clear strategy for the development of its higher education provision which is supported by appropriate financial management.  | <input checked="" type="radio"/> Yes <input type="radio"/> No |
| 2.2 | There is provision for stakeholder input to inform the strategic direction of the institution.  | <input checked="" type="radio"/> Yes <input type="radio"/> No |
| 2.3 | The strategy is well communicated to all stakeholders within and outside the institution.   | <input checked="" type="radio"/> Yes <input type="radio"/> No |
| 2.4 | The governing body and senior management conduct a regular and systematic review of their own and the institution's overall performance and measure this performance against strategic targets. | <input checked="" type="radio"/> Yes <input type="radio"/> No |

**This standard is judged to be:**  Met  Partially Met  Not Met

#### Comments

Key documents are produced in Bulgarian only, so it was not possible to verify the evidence directly, but senior managers are able to articulate clearly the strategic objectives of the University and the necessary conditions for them to be achieved.

### 3. Financial management is open, honest and effective

- 3.1 The institution conducts its financial matters transparently and with appropriate probity.  Yes  No
- 3.2 The institution's finances are subject to regular independent external audit.  Yes  No

**This standard is judged to be:**  Met  Partially Met  Not Met

#### Comments

VUM complies with the relevant requirements of the Bulgarian National Evaluation and Accreditation Agency (NEAA).

## INSPECTION AREA - ACADEMIC MANAGEMENT AND ADMINISTRATION

### 4. The institution is effectively managed

- 4.1 The management structure is clearly defined, documented and understood by all stakeholders including governors, management, staff and students.  Yes  No
- 4.2 The head of the institution and other senior managers are suitably qualified and experienced, understand their specific responsibilities and are effective in carrying them out.  Yes  No
- 4.3 There are clear channels of communication between management, the governing body, staff, students and other stakeholders.  Yes  No
- 4.4 There are clearly delineated responsibilities and reporting arrangements at institutional, faculty, departmental, programme and course levels. This should include provision for academic leadership at programme and individual course level.  Yes  No
- 4.5 There is an effective committee structure with appropriate reporting lines which informs management decision-making and provides feedback to stakeholders.  Yes  No
- 4.6 Committees and other meetings have clear and appropriate terms of reference, are scheduled to meet regularly and are minuted accurately.  Yes  No
- 4.7 There is a set of comprehensive policies, regulations and procedures for staff and student conduct.  Yes  No
- 4.8 Management ensures that all information, internal and external, including publicity material, is accurate and fit-for-purpose.  Yes  No
- 4.9 A policy exists and is administered effectively regarding collection of and refund of student fees.  Yes  No
- 4.10 Management compiles reports at least annually presenting the results of the institution's reviews and incorporating action plans. Reports include analysis of year-on-year student satisfaction, retention and achievement, staff performance (including research and other forms of scholarship) and a review of resourcing issues.  Yes  No
- 4.11 Action plans are implemented and reviewed regularly, with outcomes reported to management and subsequently to the governing body.  Yes  No
- 4.12 Management monitors and reviews academic and administrative staff performance through a clearly documented and transparent appraisal system.  Yes  No

**This standard is judged to be:**  Met  Partially Met  Not Met

#### Comments

The University is led by a well-qualified and experienced senior management team who have been in post for many years. Most decision making is conducted through informal discussion, which given the low student numbers and the low turnover of staff, is largely effective.

4.4 4.5 While the small size of VUM does not warrant an extensive committee structure, there is a need for a formal and transparent reporting mechanism and structure that is not reliant on the actions of a few key staff. For example, it is not possible to trace how student and staff comments find their way through the University structure to inform decision-making.

4.6 4.7 Although there is a Student Guide and a Services Quality Guidelines document for staff, there are few fully-documented policies written in English and backed up by a clear statement of the related procedures to be followed. These are needed to underpin statements made in documents such as student and staff guides, covering issues such as equal opportunities, discrimination and anti-social behaviour. It is recommended that the Services Quality Guidelines document is expanded to form a Staff Handbook, or Quality Manual, in which this additional information and guidance is included.

4.8 The website and some internal and external documentation is in need of updating. Email addresses still use IUC rather than VUM and the website refers to Dobrich and Varna as campuses but to Sofia as a study centre. An online application form asks applicants to state a preference for studying at either Dobrich or Varna campuses but Sofia is not included. One link is to a Sofia-specific website. Similarly, the Memorandum of Programme Agreement, for the period between 2013 to 2014 and 2017 to 2018 is between CMU and International University College, Bulgaria, not VUM. The image presented is of a fragmented institution which still retains aspects of IUC rather than the unified VUM.

Although staff performance is monitored and reviewed, there is some inconsistency in how this is achieved across the campuses.

## 5. Academic management is effective

- |     |   |                                      |                                     |
|-----|---|--------------------------------------|-------------------------------------|
| 5.1 | There are appropriate procedures for the proposal, design and validation of programmes of study which take cognisance of the mission of the institution, national imperatives, market demand and resource issues and reflect international norms. | <input checked="" type="radio"/> Yes | <input type="radio"/> No            |
| 5.2 | Management ensures that the stated curricula are delivered as presented in the prospectus and other related documentation, and that requirements from professional or other relevant bodies are met.  | <input checked="" type="radio"/> Yes | <input type="radio"/> No            |
| 5.3 | There are regular scheduled and minuted meetings of academic staff to review academic programmes.   | <input checked="" type="radio"/> Yes | <input type="radio"/> No            |
| 5.4 | There is an appropriate policy and effective procedures exist for the acquisition of academic resources to support programmes.  | <input type="radio"/> Yes            | <input checked="" type="radio"/> No |
| 5.5 | Appraisal of academic staff includes regular classroom observation which is used for the dissemination of good practice.  | <input type="radio"/> Yes            | <input checked="" type="radio"/> No |
| 5.6 | Academic staff are supported in their continuing professional development and enabled to develop further pedagogic techniques to enhance the learning of students.  | <input checked="" type="radio"/> Yes | <input type="radio"/> No            |

**This standard is judged to be:**  Met  Partially Met  Not Met

### Comments

5.4 VUM works closely with CMU to manage its CMU provision effectively. However, some inadequacies in the computing provision point to a less than effective means of ensuring that adequate resources are available to support programmes.

5.5 Before appointment, applicants for teaching positions are required to give a mock teaching presentation and there is some provision for follow-up classroom observations during the probationary period and beyond. However, in meetings with staff it is clear that this process is not applied consistently across the University.

## 6. The institution if effectively administered

- |     |   |   |
|-----|---|---|
| 6.1 | Administrators are suitably qualified and experienced and understand their specific responsibilities and duties.  | <input checked="" type="radio"/> Yes <input type="radio"/> No |
| 6.2 | The size of the administrative team is sufficient to ensure the effective day-to-day running of the institution.  | <input checked="" type="radio"/> Yes <input type="radio"/> No |
| 6.3 | The administrative support available to the management is clearly defined, documented and understood and appropriately focused to support its activities. | <input checked="" type="radio"/> Yes <input type="radio"/> No |
| 6.4 | Policies, procedures and systems are well documented and disseminated effectively across the institution.   | <input type="radio"/> Yes <input checked="" type="radio"/> No |
| 6.5 | Data collection and collation systems are effective and accurate.   | <input checked="" type="radio"/> Yes <input type="radio"/> No |
| 6.6 | Classes are timetabled and rooms allocated appropriately for the courses offered.   | <input checked="" type="radio"/> Yes <input type="radio"/> No |
| 6.7 | Comprehensive administrative records are organised and stored efficiently, easily accessed and used effectively.  | <input checked="" type="radio"/> Yes <input type="radio"/> No |

**This standard is judged to be:**  Met  Partially Met  Not Met

### Comments

Administrators are well-qualified and have a clear understanding of their roles and responsibilities. However, there is considerable reliance on a small number of key staff.

6.4 Clearer documentation would be useful in some areas, particularly in relation to procedures that must be followed. For example, when issues arise in relation to bullying and discrimination. This could usefully be included in a Staff Handbook or Quality Manual.

## 7. The institution employs appropriately qualified and experienced managerial and administrative staff

- |     |  |   |
|-----|--|---|
| 7.1 | There are appropriate policies and effective procedures for the recruitment and continuing employment of suitably qualified and experienced staff. | <input checked="" type="radio"/> Yes <input type="radio"/> No |
| 7.2 | There are effective procedures for the induction of all staff.   | <input checked="" type="radio"/> Yes <input type="radio"/> No |
| 7.3 | There is a transparent and well-documented appraisal system for all staff.   | <input checked="" type="radio"/> Yes <input type="radio"/> No |
| 7.4 | There are clear and appropriate job specifications for all staff.  | <input checked="" type="radio"/> Yes <input type="radio"/> No |
| 7.5 | All staff are treated fairly and according to a published equality and diversity policy.   | <input checked="" type="radio"/> Yes <input type="radio"/> No |
| 7.6 | The institution has a clear policy regarding the handling of legal issues relating to the employment of staff.                                     | <input checked="" type="radio"/> Yes <input type="radio"/> No |
| 7.7 | Staff have access to a complaints and appeals procedure.   | <input checked="" type="radio"/> Yes <input type="radio"/> No |
| 7.8 | Opportunities are provided for the continuing professional development of administrative and managerial staff.                                     | <input checked="" type="radio"/> Yes <input type="radio"/> No |

**This standard is judged to be:**  Met  Partially Met  Not Met

### Comments

While there is an appraisal system for staff, as reported earlier, its implementation, such as the role of classroom observations, is inconsistent across the University.

There is no suggestion that staff are not treated fairly and there are documentary references to the University's commitment to equality and diversity.

The University's Service Quality Guidelines document sets out University expectations for staff in a number of areas. However, it does not contain reference to a formal, easily accessed, complaints and appeals procedure. Although staff have access to such procedures, their formal inclusion in a Staff Handbook or Quality Manual would be useful.

## INSPECTION AREA - TEACHING, LEARNING AND ASSESSMENT

### 8. Academic staff are appropriately qualified and effective in facilitating student learning

- |      |  |  |
|------|--|--|
| 8.1  | Academic staff are appropriately qualified in terms of subject knowledge, pedagogic and communicative skills, and experienced for the courses to which they are allocated.   | <input checked="" type="radio"/> Yes <input type="radio"/> No                          |
| 8.2  | The programmes and their constituent courses are delivered and assessed in ways that enable students to succeed by developing the knowledge and skills which will be required for final examinations or assessments. | <input checked="" type="radio"/> Yes <input type="radio"/> No                          |
| 8.3  | Learning outcomes for all programmes are articulated and are publicly available.   | <input checked="" type="radio"/> Yes <input type="radio"/> No                          |
| 8.4  | Academic staff are effective in recognising individual learning needs and preferred learning styles and adapting their delivery to meet these.   | <input checked="" type="radio"/> Yes <input type="radio"/> No                          |
| 8.5  | Academic staff ensure the active participation of all students in class activities.  | <input checked="" type="radio"/> Yes <input type="radio"/> No                          |
| 8.6  | Academic staff use a mixture of large and small group and individual activities, to encourage and support students' learning.  | <input checked="" type="radio"/> Yes <input type="radio"/> No                          |
| 8.7  | Academic staff supply students with access to any additional learning materials as appropriate to support student learning.  | <input checked="" type="radio"/> Yes <input type="radio"/> No                          |
| 8.8  | Academic staff produce schemes of work and detailed lesson plans and lodge these with the administration.  | <input type="radio"/> Yes <input checked="" type="radio"/> No                          |
| 8.9  | Academic staff draw upon current research in their teaching.   | <input checked="" type="radio"/> Yes <input type="radio"/> No                          |
| 8.10 | Students are encouraged and enabled to develop independent learning skills.  | <input checked="" type="radio"/> Yes <input type="radio"/> No                          |
| 8.11 | Where appropriate, students are given the opportunity to obtain relevant workplace experience.   | <input checked="" type="radio"/> Yes <input type="radio"/> No <input type="radio"/> NA |
| 8.12 | Students have access to teaching staff outside teaching and learning sessions.   | <input checked="" type="radio"/> Yes <input type="radio"/> No                          |
| 8.13 | The institution provides students and academic staff with access to appropriate resources and materials for study and encourages and supports their use of these.  | <input checked="" type="radio"/> Yes <input type="radio"/> No                          |

**This standard is judged to be:**  Met  Partially Met  Not Met

#### Comments

Academic staff are well-qualified and committed to the success of students. In the classes observed, students were engaged in their learning and participated effectively in class. All teaching is undertaken in English and both tutors and students demonstrated a high level of proficiency in the language. Tutors are available for students to contact outside class hours and students were very positive about the support they receive.

8.8 The quality of lesson plans is variable. Some are excellent and could usefully be shared through staff development activities.

Undergraduate students are required to undertake work experience in the summer vacation period at the end of Years 1 and 2 and there is a well developed system for ensuring that suitable placements are found.

Although student access to resources to support their learning is generally good, the provision of computing facilities, in terms of hardware and software, would benefit from further investment.

9. **Assessment is fair, well-organised and appropriate for the level and nature of the courses, and students receive timely and supportive feedback on their work**
- 9.1 Students are provided with an assessment schedule in which required coursework and revision periods are detailed in advance with clear submission dates.  Yes  No
- 9.2 Assessment strategies are relevant to the content and nature of the courses and focused on measuring students' achievement of the intended learning outcomes.  Yes  No
- 9.3 Assessment tasks are clearly written, indicating what students need to do to achieve stipulated levels of achievement.  Yes  No
- 9.4 Students receive detailed and supportive oral and written feedback on their assessments and overall performance and progress, which are effectively monitored.  Yes  No
- 9.5 There are secure and efficient procedures for the administration of examinations and other means of assessment.  Yes  No
- 9.6 The institution takes appropriate steps to identify and discourage cheating, including plagiarism and other misdemeanours, and to penalise offenders.  Yes  No
- 9.7 There are clear policies and procedures for students to claim mitigating circumstances and to appeal against marks awarded.  Yes  No
- 9.8 There are effective procedures for internal and external moderation at pre- and post-assessment stages.  Yes  No
- 9.9 The institution makes student records and transcripts available to its students in a timely manner.  Yes  No

**This standard is judged to be:**  Met  Partially Met  Not Met

#### Comments

The University follows CMU policies to ensure compliance with Quality Assurance Agency (QAA) expectations.

10. **The institution encourages and supports its staff to undertake research and other forms of scholarship and to engage in other professional activities**
- 10.1 Academic staff are encouraged and supported to undertake research in relevant fields and to publish their findings.  Yes  No
- 10.2 Academic staff contracts require academic staff to engage in research and/or scholarship relevant to their teaching and other duties.  Yes  No
- 10.3 The institution encourages and supports staff to obtain additional qualifications.  Yes  No
- 10.4 There is a fair and transparent procedure for staff to seek financial support for their research and other professional development activities.  Yes  No
- 10.5 The institution provides time for staff to meet regularly to share and discuss current research activities and, if appropriate, invites external speakers.  Yes  No

**This standard is judged to be:**  Met  Partially Met  Not Met

#### Comments

The University has a strong research record and all staff are contracted to undertake research. Some students are invited to collaborate on research projects with staff.

## INSPECTION AREA - STUDENT RECRUITMENT, SUPPORT, GUIDANCE AND PROGRESSION

### 11. Publicity material, both printed and electronic, gives a comprehensive, up-to-date and accurate description of the institution and its curriculum

- |      |  |   |
|------|--|---|
| 11.1 | Text and images provide an accurate depiction of the institution's location, premises, facilities and the range and nature of resources and services offered.        | <input checked="" type="radio"/> Yes <input type="radio"/> No |
| 11.2 | Information on the programmes available is comprehensive, accurate and up-to-date.   | <input checked="" type="radio"/> Yes <input type="radio"/> No |
| 11.3 | There are effective procedures to update information on a regular basis.   | <input checked="" type="radio"/> Yes <input type="radio"/> No |
| 11.4 | Students are informed of the status of the qualifications offered, including the awarding body and level of award.   | <input checked="" type="radio"/> Yes <input type="radio"/> No |
| 11.5 | Students are given some indication of the type of careers graduates may follow and any professional body exemptions that may be available.                           | <input checked="" type="radio"/> Yes <input type="radio"/> No |
| 11.6 | Students are informed of the full cost of all programmes, including costs of assessments and any required materials.   | <input checked="" type="radio"/> Yes <input type="radio"/> No |
| 11.7 | Students are informed as to the necessary English language requirements for entry on to programmes.  | <input checked="" type="radio"/> Yes <input type="radio"/> No |
| 11.8 | The institution has a clear policy on the accreditation of prior learning and prior experiential learning which is brought to the attention of prospective students. | <input checked="" type="radio"/> Yes <input type="radio"/> No |

**This standard is judged to be:**  Met  Partially Met  Not Met

#### Comments

Information for prospective students on the curriculum and related issues is comprehensive and up-to-date. However, more detailed photographs of residential accommodation would be helpful.

As pointed out elsewhere in this report, some of the more generic information about VUM is out of date and can be confusing. The University is encouraged to accelerate its updating of information to reflect VUM as a whole rather than its IUC constituents.

### 12. The institution takes reasonable care to recruit and enrol suitable students for its courses

- |      |   |  |
|------|---|--|
| 12.1 | Entry requirements for each programme are set at an appropriate level and clearly stated in the programme descriptions seen by prospective students.                            | <input checked="" type="radio"/> Yes <input type="radio"/> No                          |
| 12.2 | A formal application process ensures that students meet the entry requirements and any claimed qualifications are verified.   | <input checked="" type="radio"/> Yes <input type="radio"/> No                          |
| 12.3 | Prospective students are properly briefed on the nature and requirements of the programme(s) in which they are interested and provided with advice on choosing their programme. | <input checked="" type="radio"/> Yes <input type="radio"/> No                          |
| 12.4 | All application enquiries are responded to promptly and appropriately.  | <input checked="" type="radio"/> Yes <input type="radio"/> No                          |
| 12.5 | Any recruitment agents are properly selected, briefed, monitored and evaluated.   | <input checked="" type="radio"/> Yes <input type="radio"/> No <input type="radio"/> NA |
| 12.6 | Students receive a proper initial assessment, which includes language ability, to confirm their capability to complete the programmes on which they are enrolling.              | <input checked="" type="radio"/> Yes <input type="radio"/> No                          |
| 12.7 | Students with special needs are identified so that appropriate support can be provided.   | <input checked="" type="radio"/> Yes <input type="radio"/> No                          |
| 12.8 | Entry on the basis of accreditation of prior learning and prior experiential learning is subject to a rigorous process and is clearly documented.                               | <input checked="" type="radio"/> Yes <input type="radio"/> No                          |

**This standard is judged to be:**  Met  Partially Met  Not Met

#### Comments

CMU application forms invite applicants to declare any special needs. VUM provides support where necessary for physical

disability, such as wheelchair access. There is no record of any other types of disability being declared, although VUM says that it will respond as necessary if such needs are identified.

The University does not have an explicit Accreditation of Prior Learning (APL) or Accreditation of Prior Experiential Learning (APEL) policy document. However, it does engage extensively in student exchanges and transfers with numerous institutions, including involvement in the Erasmus+ scheme. Each case is considered on an individual basis. CMU application documentation alludes to opportunities for APL/APEL although this does not appear to be made explicit in any VUM documentation.

### 13. Students receive pastoral support appropriate to their age, background and circumstances

- |      |   |                                      |                                     |
|------|---|--------------------------------------|-------------------------------------|
| 13.1 | There is at least one named staff member responsible for student welfare who is suitably trained, accessible to all students and available to provide advice and counselling. | <input checked="" type="radio"/> Yes | <input type="radio"/> No            |
| 13.2 | Students receive an appropriate induction and information on the pastoral support available to them.  | <input checked="" type="radio"/> Yes | <input type="radio"/> No            |
| 13.3 | Students are issued with a contact number for out-of-hours and emergency telephone support.   | <input checked="" type="radio"/> Yes | <input type="radio"/> No            |
| 13.4 | The institution has policies to avoid discrimination and a published procedure for dealing with any abusive behaviour.  | <input type="radio"/> Yes            | <input checked="" type="radio"/> No |
| 13.5 | There are effective systems to communicate with students out of class hours.  | <input checked="" type="radio"/> Yes | <input type="radio"/> No            |

**This standard is judged to be:**  Met  Partially Met  Not Met

#### Comments

In case of emergency, students are advised to use the national emergency number. The University does not provide an emergency contact number of its own although University security personnel are briefed to respond to any contact made by students or the emergency services in relation to its students. For international students in particular, a direct University contact number is advised to cover situations where an issue is serious for the student but not sufficiently so to warrant emergency services attention. For example, being locked out of accommodation or getting lost.

13.4 Although the University makes it clear that it will not tolerate discriminatory and abusive behaviour, there is no published procedure for dealing with such an eventuality. While this may not be an issue at present, as the University expands it will need to be prepared for such eventualities. Such information could usefully be included in student and staff handbooks.

### 14. Students receive appropriate guidance

- |      |  |                                      |                          |
|------|--|--------------------------------------|--------------------------|
| 14.1 | Students are given an induction to the institution, their programme of study and guidance on the use of facilities such as the library and IT.                         | <input checked="" type="radio"/> Yes | <input type="radio"/> No |
| 14.2 | Additional support or advice on alternative programmes is provided to students who are judged not to be making sufficient progress to succeed.                         | <input checked="" type="radio"/> Yes | <input type="radio"/> No |
| 14.3 | Students have access to a fair complaints procedure of which they are informed in writing at the start of the course and offered guidance in submitting a complaint.   | <input checked="" type="radio"/> Yes | <input type="radio"/> No |
| 14.4 | Students have access to careers advice and guidance, including progression to further study, from a designated and suitably qualified and experienced member of staff. | <input checked="" type="radio"/> Yes | <input type="radio"/> No |
| 14.5 | Students have access to careers information including prospectuses for further study.  | <input checked="" type="radio"/> Yes | <input type="radio"/> No |

**This standard is judged to be:**  Met  Partially Met  Not Met  NA

#### Comments

Students have access to a complaints procedure. However, there is scope for increasing student awareness of it.

Considerable careers guidance is provided but there is relatively little on opportunities for progression to further study outside VUM.

15. **Student progress is measured and recorded regularly on the basis of adequate and explicit data and effective remedial action taken where necessary**

- |      |   |   |
|------|---|---|
| 15.1 | Assessment outcomes are monitored to enable the identification of students who are not making satisfactory progress and there is prompt intervention where appropriate. | <input checked="" type="radio"/> Yes <input type="radio"/> No |
| 15.2 | There is a clear and published policy on required student attendance and punctuality, with effective procedures and systems to enforce it.                              | <input type="radio"/> Yes <input checked="" type="radio"/> No |
| 15.3 | Accurate and secure records of attendance and punctuality at each session are kept for all students, collated centrally and reviewed at least weekly.                   | <input type="radio"/> Yes <input checked="" type="radio"/> No |
| 15.4 | Student absences are followed up promptly and appropriate action taken.   | <input type="radio"/> Yes <input checked="" type="radio"/> No |
| 15.5 | Students are each allocated a personal tutor who is responsible for the regular review of students' progress.   | <input type="radio"/> Yes <input checked="" type="radio"/> No |

**This standard is judged to be:**  Met  Partially Met  Not Met  NA

**Comments**

15.2 There is a published policy on required student attendance but evidence from the Team's observations of teaching indicates low attendance levels. Attendance records show that, for many students, attendance is consistently poor. That such absences continue suggests that enforcement is not working.

15.3 15.4 15.5 The lack of a personal tutor, or similar system, means that in the short-term, at least, student attendance is not seen in the round, but only by each class teacher independently and in isolation. CMU programme handbooks emphasise the importance of the personal tutor system but, as yet, it has not been adopted by VUM.

16. **International students are provided with specific advice and assistance**

- |      |  |   |
|------|--|---|
| 16.1 | Before their arrival, international students receive appropriate advice on travelling to and living in the country or location.                              | <input checked="" type="radio"/> Yes <input type="radio"/> No |
| 16.2 | On arrival, international students receive an appropriate induction in issues specific to the local area.  | <input checked="" type="radio"/> Yes <input type="radio"/> No |
| 16.3 | Information and advice specific to international students continue to be available throughout their time at the institution.                                 | <input checked="" type="radio"/> Yes <input type="radio"/> No |
| 16.4 | Provision of support takes into account cultural and religious considerations. Where possible, students have access to speakers of their own first language. | <input checked="" type="radio"/> Yes <input type="radio"/> No |

**This standard is judged to be:**  Met  Partially Met  Not Met  NA

**Comments**

Considerable advice is provided to international students in advance of their travel to Bulgaria. The international students whom the Team met reported satisfaction with VUM's provision of advice and assistance.

17. **Where residential accommodation is offered, it is fit-for-purpose, well maintained and appropriately supervised**

- 17.1 Any residential accommodation is clean, safe and of a standard which is adequate for the needs of students.  Yes  No
- 17.2 Any residential accommodation is open to inspection by the appropriate authorities.  Yes  No  NA
- 17.3 A level of supervision is provided appropriate to the needs of students.  Yes  No
- 17.4 Students are provided with advice on suitable private accommodation.  Yes  No

**This standard is judged to be:**  Met  Partially Met  Not Met  NA

**Comments**

Residential accommodation is provided for students in both Dobrich and Varna. In Dobrich, this is an apartment block with secure access used only by students. There are a number of well-appointed apartments with one, two or three twin bedrooms and a small kitchen, and a central lobby area with a coffee machine where students can congregate socially. A cleaning and laundry service, the latter at a small additional cost, is provided. The building is relatively new and a short walk from the town centre and the University.

In Varna, students are accommodated in unused offices and classrooms in a building which is shared with another organisation. Although access to the building as a whole is secure, there is no separate security for student accommodation. Each room has a bed, wardrobe and study space and has access to a small kitchen and shared bathroom facilities. Students are content with the provision.

18. **The institution provides an appropriate social programme for students and information on activities in the locality**

- 18.1 Students are provided with appropriate information on opportunities for participation at events and other leisure activities which may be of interest.  Yes  No
- 18.2 The social programme is responsive to the needs and wishes of students.  Yes  No
- 18.3 Any activities within the social programme have been chosen with consideration of their affordability by the majority of students.  Yes  No
- 18.4 Any activities organised by the institution are supervised by a responsible representative with suitable qualifications and experience.  Yes  No
- 18.5 Students are encouraged to develop and participate in extra-mural activities.  Yes  No

**This standard is judged to be:**  Met  Partially Met  Not Met

**Comments**

Students appreciate the wide range of social activities provided, including the opportunity for foreign travel.

## INSPECTION AREA - PREMISES, FACILITIES AND LEARNING RESOURCES

### 19. The institution has secure possession of and access to its premises

19.1 The institution has secure tenure on its premises.  Yes  No

19.2 The institution has the legal right to use these premises for the delivery of higher education.  Yes  No

19.3 Where required, the institution has access to suitable external premises for academic or non-academic purposes of a temporary or occasional nature.  Yes  No  NA

**This standard is judged to be:**  Met  Partially Met  Not Met  NA

#### Comments

The Dobrich and Varna campuses are owned by VUM. The Sofia campus is leased until July 2020, with an option for extension.

### 20. The premises provide a safe, secure and clean environment for students and staff

20.1 Access to the premises is appropriately restricted and secured.  Yes  No

20.2 The premises are maintained in an adequate state of repair, decoration and cleanliness.  Yes  No

20.3 There are specific safety rules in areas of particular hazard (e.g. science laboratories) which are brought to the attention of students, staff and visitors.  Yes  No  NA

20.4 General guidance on health and safety is made available to students, staff and visitors.  Yes  No

20.5 There is adequate signage inside and outside the premises and notice boards for the display of general information.  Yes  No

20.6 There is adequate circulation space for the number of students and staff accommodated, and a suitable area in which to receive visitors.  Yes  No

20.7 There are toilet and hand-washing facilities of an appropriate number and acceptable level of cleanliness.  Yes  No

20.8 There is adequate air conditioning, heating and ventilation in all rooms.  Yes  No

**This standard is judged to be:**  Met  Partially Met  Not Met

#### Comments

There are no current issues but there is scope for ensuring greater awareness of health and safety issues and more explicit provision of guidance.

21. **Classroom and other learning areas are appropriate for the programmes offered**

- 21.1 Classrooms and other learning areas provide adequate accommodation in size and number for the classes (e.g. lectures, seminars, tutorials) allocated to them.  Yes  No
- 21.2 Classrooms and any specialised learning areas (e.g. laboratories, clinics, workshops, studios) are equipped to a level which allows for the effective delivery of each programme.  Yes  No
- 21.3 There are facilities suitable for conducting assessments such as examinations.  Yes  No

**This standard is judged to be:**  Met  Partially Met  Not Met  NA

**Comments**

The University has access to a large number of appropriately-sized and equipped rooms.

22. **There are appropriate additional facilities for students and staff**

- 22.1 Students have access to sufficient space and suitable facilities for private individual study and group work.  Yes  No
- 22.2 Academic staff have access to sufficient personal space for preparing lessons, marking work and consultations with students.  Yes  No
- 22.3 Students and staff have access to space and facilities suitable for relaxation and the consumption of food and drink where appropriate.  Yes  No
- 22.4 Students and staff have access to secure storage for personal possessions where appropriate.  Yes  No
- 22.5 There are individual offices or rooms in which academic staff and senior management can hold private meetings and a room of sufficient size to hold staff meetings.  Yes  No
- 22.5 Administrative offices are adequate in size and suitably resourced for the effective administration of the institution.  Yes  No

**This standard is judged to be:**  Met  Partially Met  Not Met  NA

**Comments**

Students in Dobrich have access to a good restaurant and study space in the residential accommodation. The Culinary Institute on the Varna campus has a restaurant.

In general, social space is limited, although students are happy with the provision.

23. **The library is appropriately stocked and provides a fit-for-purpose learning resource for the student body**

- 23.1 The library is adequately staffed with appropriately qualified and experienced staff.  Yes  No
- 23.2 The library has sufficient space for student independent study and group working.  Yes  No
- 23.3 There is sufficient provision of learning materials including books, journals and periodicals and online materials.  Yes  No
- 23.4 There is a well-organised lending policy.  Yes  No
- 23.5 There are clear, systematic and effective means of ensuring the adequacy and currency of library stock to reflect staff and student needs.  Yes  No
- 23.6 Library opening times are sufficient to encourage and support student independent learning.  Yes  No

**This standard is judged to be:**  Met  Partially Met  Not Met  NA

**Comments**

Library staff are well-qualified and committed to supporting students' learning. Students are appreciative of their services.

Libraries are small and provide limited study space, although students are reasonably happy with the provision. This is due to the scheduling of the teaching timetable, the availability of classrooms for private study and group work, and students' remote access to online materials. However, consideration should be given to increasing library space and extending opening times as international students, in particular, are likely to expect greater access to library facilities.

24. **The information technology resources are well managed and provide a fit-for-purpose learning resource for the student body**

- 24.1 There are sufficient computers of the necessary specification to meet student and staff needs.  Yes  No
- 24.2 There is provision of appropriate, up-to-date, software which reflects the needs of the programmes.  Yes  No
- 24.3 There is an effective means of ensuring the renewal of hardware and software to ensure efficiency and currency.  Yes  No

**This standard is judged to be:**  Met  Partially Met  Not Met

**Comments**

Staff are provided with laptops for teaching.

24.2 However, Information Technology (IT) laboratories are small and equipped with basic computing equipment. Students commented that download times were slow and that there were sometimes not enough working computers for classes. There is a limited range of industry-standard software packages, although Opera has recently been acquired for the Hospitality Management programmes.

24.3 There is a need for further investment in up-to-date, reliable hardware and appropriate software.

## INSPECTION AREA - QUALITY MANAGEMENT, ASSURANCE AND ENHANCEMENT

### 25. The institution has effective systems to review its own standards and assess its own performance

- 25.1 The institution undertakes regular and systematic monitoring of its operations.  Yes  No
- 25.2 The institution conducts periodic reviews of all aspects of its performance against clearly specified and appropriate performance indicators.  Yes  No
- 25.3 The nominated leader for each course produces an end of-session (semester or year) report which includes measures of student satisfaction, completion rates and achievement levels.  Yes  No
- 25.4 The nominated programme leader, drawing upon reports from its constituent courses, produces an annual programme report which includes analysis of year-on-year results on student satisfaction, achievement levels, completion rates and progression to further study or employment.  Yes  No
- 25.5 Reports, which present the results of the institution's reviews, evaluate its performance and incorporate action plans, are compiled at least annually. These are considered by senior management and the board of trustees and, where appropriate, shared with all stakeholders.  Yes  No
- 25.6 All programmes are subject to annual review and to full revalidation every five years.  Yes  No
- 25.7 Annual review and revalidation of programmes involve external assessors.  Yes  No
- 25.8 All quality management policies and procedures are clearly documented, for example in a quality manual or similar, and brought to the attention of staff and, where appropriate, students and other stakeholders.  Yes  No
- 25.9 Particular attention is paid to the quality of the student learning experience and to ensuring there is fair treatment of all students.  Yes  No

**This standard is judged to be:**  Met  Partially Met  Not Met

#### Comments

The University engages extensively with CMU to review and assess its performance, seeking to ensure compliance with QAA expectations. In addition, it fulfills the relevant requirements of Bulgarian higher education and produces its own annual self-evaluation.

It would, however, benefit from clearer documentation relating to its internal processes and procedures.

**26. The institution regularly obtains and records feedback from students and other stakeholders and takes appropriate action where necessary**

- 26.1 Views of all stakeholders, including academic staff and students, partner institutions and employers, are canvassed and recorded regularly through various means, including face-to-face meetings, feedback questionnaires and, where appropriate, formal student representation.  Yes  No
- 26.2 The views of stakeholders are considered objectively, evaluated thoroughly and, where necessary, appropriate action is taken.  Yes  No
- 26.3 There are effective means of responding to stakeholders' opinions and keeping them informed of any actions taken and reasons for no action being taken, through formal feedback mechanisms.  Yes  No
- 26.4 Key performance indicators will include analysis of student outcomes in terms of the current year and year-on-year performance and any significant variations in student achievement between different programme components.  Yes  No
- 26.5 The institution engages with the wider community, such as employers and its alumni, in a formal and systematic manner in order to obtain feedback on the relevance of its provision and to identify areas for development.  Yes  No

**This standard is judged to be:**  Met  Partially Met  Not Met

**Comments**

VUM canvasses opinion widely and is responsive to it. However, in the absence of a clear reporting structure it is not clear where, and how, feedback is communicated across VUM and consequent follow-up actions identified and monitored.

**27. The institution has a strong commitment to, and procedures that facilitate, continuing enhancement of its provision**

- 27.1 All stakeholders are invited and encouraged to make suggestions for enhancement.  Yes  No
- 27.2 In their annual appraisal, all staff are required to identify where they have facilitated enhancement and to identify further areas requiring enhancement.  Yes  No
- 27.3 End-of session course and annual programme reports should include enhancements made and identify further areas requiring enhancement.  Yes  No
- 27.4 Action plans are implemented and reviewed regularly within the institution's committee structure.  Yes  No
- 27.5 Staff professional development needs are identified through appraisal and other means, and measures taken to support staff to address these.  Yes  No
- 27.6 The institution has formal mechanisms to monitor the information it provides internally and externally and to make any enhancements deemed necessary.  Yes  No

**This standard is judged to be:**  Met  Partially Met  Not Met

**Comments**

There is scope for greater transparency in how action plans are reviewed and communicated through the organisation. The absence of a clear reporting structure, with explicit reporting lines, renders the process more opaque than is necessary.

The University does have the means of monitoring the information it provides. However, as reported elsewhere, it is over one-and-a-half years since the formation of VUM, and presenting an image of a consistent, three-campus University to the public is still a work in progress. If the University wishes to have a greater international profile, projecting a corporate identity is very important in establishing the public image of VUM, not only in Bulgaria but beyond.

**COMPLIANCE WITH STATUTORY REQUIREMENTS**

Declaration of compliance has been signed and dated.  Yes  No

## PART C - SUMMARY OF STRENGTHS AND ACTION POINTS

Numbering of action points aligns with that of the minimum standards

### GOVERNANCE, STRATEGY AND FINANCIAL MANAGEMENT

#### Institution's strengths

VUM has a committed, supportive Board of Trustees and a very well qualified and experienced senior management team.

Actions required	Priority H/M/L
None.	<input type="radio"/> High <input type="radio"/> Medium <input type="radio"/> Low

### ACADEMIC MANAGEMENT AND ADMINISTRATION

#### Institution's strengths

The University has a strong managerial and administrative team who work together effectively, albeit through largely informal systems.

Actions required	Priority H/M/L
4.4 4.5 4.6 VUM must formalise the reporting structure including purpose, terms of reference, membership, process and reporting lines for each committee or meeting.	<input type="radio"/> High <input checked="" type="radio"/> Medium <input type="radio"/> Low
4.7 6.4 There must be publication of policies covering, for example, health and safety, and diversity and discrimination and VUM must ensure that all policies are supplemented by clear, precise procedures for their enforcement.	<input type="radio"/> High <input checked="" type="radio"/> Medium <input type="radio"/> Low
4.8 The University must ensure that all information, internal and external, is up-to-date and accurate.	<input type="radio"/> High <input checked="" type="radio"/> Medium <input type="radio"/> Low
5.4 VUM must strengthen procedures for the acquisition of academic resources to support programmes.	<input type="radio"/> High <input type="radio"/> Medium <input checked="" type="radio"/> Low
5.5 VUM must ensure greater consistency across the University, for example in staff appraisal practice including the conduct of teaching observations.	<input type="radio"/> High <input checked="" type="radio"/> Medium <input type="radio"/> Low

### TEACHING, LEARNING AND ASSESSMENT

#### Institution's strengths

There is a well-qualified, dedicated teaching team who collaborate effectively and have a strong research record.

Students receive considerable work experience, which is built in to their programmes and contributes to high graduate employment rates.

Students are articulate, have good English language skills and engage effectively in their learning.

Actions required	Priority H/M/L
8.8 VUM must implement the sharing of good practice in devising lesson plans to ensure that they are fit-for-purpose and that they are easily accessed by administration when required.	<input type="radio"/> High <input type="radio"/> Medium <input checked="" type="radio"/> Low

## STUDENT RECRUITMENT, SUPPORT, GUIDANCE AND PROGRESSION

### Institution's strengths

The caring staff have a strong commitment to student welfare.

There is provision of well-organised work placements in Bulgaria and abroad.

VUM provides good preparation for employment.

There is a very high employment rate for graduates.

Actions required	Priority H/M/L
13.4 VUM must publish formal policies to avoid discrimination and abusive behaviour and provide detailed procedures for dealing with them.	<input type="radio"/> High <input checked="" type="radio"/> Medium <input type="radio"/> Low
15.2 15.3 15.4 15.5 The University must adopt a more systematic and prompt means of identifying and addressing poor student attendance and monitoring student progress.	<input type="radio"/> High <input checked="" type="radio"/> Medium <input type="radio"/> Low

## PREMISES, FACILITIES AND LEARNING RESOURCES

### Institution's strengths

There is an excellent student refectory on the Dobrich campus.

VUM provides a wide range of student residential accommodation.

Actions required	Priority H/M/L
24.2 24.3 The University must review and enhance the standard of IT provision, including reliability, internet access and the application software available to support programmes.	<input type="radio"/> High <input checked="" type="radio"/> Medium <input type="radio"/> Low

## QUALITY MANAGEMENT, ASSURANCE AND ENHANCEMENT

### Institution's strengths

There is a clear, comprehensive framework for quality management, overseen by able and experienced staff.

VUM have a close working relationship with Cardiff Metropolitan University.

Actions required	Priority H/M/L
None.	<input type="radio"/> High <input type="radio"/> Medium <input type="radio"/> Low

## RECOMMENDED AREAS FOR IMPROVEMENT

It is recommended that VUM publishes key documents in English to aid transparency.

The University is advised to make the risk assessment process more explicit.

The introduction of a personal tutor, or similar system, is advised to enable an overview of each student's progress and facilitate early remedial intervention.

VUM is recommended to produce a comprehensive student guide and staff handbook to accommodate the whole range of relevant policies and procedures referred to in this report.

The University is advised to increase staff and student awareness of the complaints procedure.

It is recommended that VUM provides more detailed photographs of residential accommodation.

It is recommended that VUM provides a University out-of-hours emergency number.

It is suggested that the University makes opportunities for accreditation of students' prior learning and prior experiential learning more explicit.

The University is recommended to provide more guidance on opportunities for progression to further study outside VUM.

VUM is advised to ensure greater staff and student awareness of health and safety issues and to provide more explicit provision of guidance on these issues.

Consideration should be given to increasing library space and extending opening times.

It is recommended that the University introduces a student portal to facilitate and expand students' easy access to internal information and external learning resources.

### **COMPLIANCE WITH STATUTORY REQUIREMENTS**

VUM confirms that it complies with all statutory requirements.