



***MYKOLO ROMERIO UNIVERSITETO
VEIKLOS VERTINIMO IŠVADOS***

***INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW REPORT OF
MYKOLAS ROMERIS UNIVERSITY***

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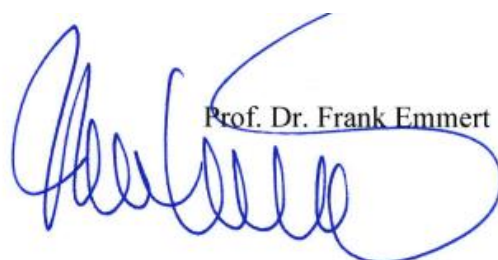
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I hereby certify that this is the final text of the institutional review report of Mykolas Romeris University.


Prof. Dr. Frank Emmert

I. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

1. The purpose of the external review is to determine the quality of the performance of a higher education institution based on the findings of an external review, to create pre-requisites for the improvement of the performance of the higher education institution, to promote a culture of quality, and to inform the founders, the academic community, and society at large about the quality of higher education institutions.
2. This review report is based on evidence given in the self-evaluation report, additional evidence requested by the Panel, information provided by the Centre for Quality Assessment in Higher Education (hereinafter – Centre, SKVC), and a site visit, where meetings with a wide range of audiences were held.
3. The Panel was composed of qualified reviewers, following the Experts Selection Procedure approved by the Director of Centre for Quality Assessment in Higher Education on 31 December 2019 [Order No. V-149](#) and included the following members:
 - Prof. Dr. Frank Emmert (panel chairperson)
 - Dr. Lina Zenkienė (review secretary)
 - Prof. Dr. Attila Pausits (academic)
 - Prof. Dr. Federico Casolari (academic)
 - Ms. Irina Urbonė (social partner)
 - Mr. Stanimir Boyadzhiev (student)
4. As a result of the external review **Mykolas Romeris University (Mykolo Romerio universitetas)** is given a **positive evaluation**.
5. Evaluation areas:

Area	Assessment with points*
MANAGEMENT	3
QUALITY ASSURANCE	3
STUDIES AND RESEARCH (ART)	3
IMPACT ON REGIONAL AND NATIONAL DEVELOPMENT	3

*5 points - **excellent**– the area is rated exceptionally well in the national context and internationally;

4 points – **very good** – the area is rated very well in the national context and internationally, without any drawbacks;

3 points – **good** – the area is being developed systematically, without any major drawbacks;

2 points – **satisfactory** – the area meets the minimum requirements, and there are drawbacks that must be addressed;

1 point - **unsatisfactory** – the area does not meet the minimum requirements, there are fundamental drawbacks.

6. **10** examples of good practices were found and **38** recommendations are made.

II. INTRODUCTION

2.1. Background of the Review Process

7. The external review of Mykolas Romeris University (hereafter referred to as ‘MRU’ or ‘the University’) was organised by the Centre for Quality Assessment in Higher Education and carried out in April 2023 by an Expert Panel of international experts (hereinafter – the Panel). It was conducted in accordance with the Procedure for the External Evaluation and Accreditation of Higher Education Institutions and Branches of Foreign Higher Education Institutions, Evaluation Areas and Indicators approved by the Minister of Education, Science and Sport of the Republic of Lithuania (hereinafter – the Procedure) on 19 December 2019 [Order No. V-1529](#), and the Methodology for Conducting an Institutional Review in Higher Education approved by of the Director of SKVC on 9 March 2020 [Order No V-32](#) (hereinafter – the Methodology).
8. According to the Procedure, the external review consists of the following stages: submission of a self-evaluation report prepared by a higher education institution to the Centre; formation of an Expert Panel and analysis of the self-evaluation report; Expert Panel visit to the higher education institution; preparation of the external review report, the external review decision as well as accreditation and publication thereof; as well as follow-up activities aimed at improving the performance of the higher education institution, taking into account the external review report.
9. At the preparatory stage of the external review, the Panel received the Self-Evaluation Report (hereinafter – SER) with 59 annexes. SKVC provided the Panel with additional information, including general data on higher education in Lithuania and its higher education institutions, academic recognition of qualifications, academic ethics, and the University under review, as set out in the Methodology (Chapter 26). MRU statistical data on students, their admission and funding, student and teacher ratio, study programs, the external accreditation results of study fields; the number of graduates and their employability; the composition of staff; findings from a previous external institutional quality review undertaken in 2013, an annual evaluation of research and experimental development (R&D) since 2019, as well as comparative expert assessment (CEA) of research and development activities; state budget allocations for research activities; as well as information on violations of academic ethics from the Office of the Ombudsperson for Academic Ethics and Procedures of the Republic of Lithuania. The Panel requested the following additional information that was supplemented either before or during the visit:
 - MRU plans for the future (outlook until 2030) – to prepare the document with bullet points;
 - Summary of primary and secondary priorities for 2023-2030 (also the priorities related to changes (where the resources are going to come from, e.g., for infrastructure upgrades, academic staff training));
 - Kaunas campus resources;
 - A list of all instructors and their academic degrees, employment type (full-time vs part-time etc.), hours of teaching per week, involvement in research, the subjects they are teaching; however, data on teaching staff academic degrees and areas of research was not provided;

- A summary of the budget for 2023 with % of income from state, international research projects, tuition fees, and other sources; as well as breakdown into main items of expenditure (personnel, facilities, international mobility, etc);
 - Budget expenditure 2018-2023;
 - Samples of Doctoral dissertations, Bachelor and Master theses (from the lowest grading to the highest);
 - The list of international collaborations;
 - Learning outcomes in English programs;
 - Study programs' list;
 - The average time of studies' completion;
 - Student rate who finish their studies within a year after completing the coursework (with full-time and part-time student breakdown);
 - Template of the annual appraisal meeting;
 - Information on the availability of a law clinic.
10. The site visit took place after a training session organised by SKVC staff and preparatory Panel meetings. The Panel visited the University from 25-27 April 2023. Meetings with around 130 internal and external stakeholders were held during the site visit. Subsequently, the Panel met both in-person and remotely to review and agree upon conclusions and recommendations. The review report was finalized and submitted to the SKVC.
11. In line with the Procedure, the external review focused on four areas covered by the evaluation indicators and related criteria: **Management, Quality Assurance, Studies and Research (Art)**, and **Impact on Regional and National Development**. In analyzing the evidence collected, the Panel also gave due consideration to the recommendations of the previous review of 2013.
12. The review of a higher education institution assesses each of the evaluation areas with one of five ratings: **excellent** – 5 points – the area is rated exceptionally well in the national context and internationally; **very good** – 4 points – the area is rated very well in the national context and internationally, without any drawbacks; **good** – 3 points – the area is being developed systematically, without any major drawbacks; **satisfactory** – 2 points – the area meets the minimum requirements, and there are drawbacks that must be addressed; **unsatisfactory** – 1 point – the area does not meet the minimum requirements, there are fundamental drawbacks.
13. A decision on **positive** evaluation is made when none of the evaluation areas is evaluated unsatisfactorily (1 point). A decision on **negative** evaluation is made when at least one of the evaluation areas is evaluated as unsatisfactory (1 point).
14. In line with the Methodology, the review report prepared by the Panel will undergo a review by SKVC and subsequently will be sent to the higher education institution to submit comments on factual errors and the evaluations based thereon. The Panel will revise the report in response to the comments from the higher education institution (if applicable) and will re-submit it to SKVC.

15. The Panel received MRU comments and considered them. As a result, some minor changes were made to the report.
16. After the Panel considers comments from the higher education institution (if applicable) and finalizes it, the report is considered by the external Commission of the Higher Education Institutions' Review (hereinafter – the Commission), set up by SKVC. On the basis of the proposal, made by the Commission, provisioned in the Commission's regulations, approved by the order of the Director of SKVC on 8 January 2020, order [No. V-5](#), SKVC takes one of these decisions:
- to evaluate the performance of the higher education institution positively;
 - to evaluate the performance of the higher education institution negatively.

The higher education institution shall be entitled to lodge a reasoned complaint to the Commission for Appeals formed by the Centre.

The decisions of the Centre and the Commission for Appeals may be appealed against in accordance with the procedure established by the Law on Administrative Proceedings of the Republic of Lithuania.

17. On the basis of the external review decision, SKVC takes one of the following decisions on the **accreditation** of the higher education institution:
- to **accredit for a period of seven years** if the performance of the higher education institution is evaluated positively;
 - to **accredit for a period of three years** if the performance of the higher education institution is evaluated negatively;
 - to **provide no accreditation** if repeated external review results of the higher education institution are still negative.
18. SKVC announces the decision on the external review together with the conclusions of the external review and the decision on the accreditation of the higher education institution on its website. The higher education institution respectively announces the decision on the review of the higher education institution together with the external review report on its website and maintains it until the next external review.
19. The Panel would like to stress that it interpreted its mandate primarily as a formative evaluation based on the principles of collegiality and respect for institutional autonomy and accordingly would like to offer its final report as a contribution, and hopefully stimulus for the MRU community to further reflect upon its University directions, the state-of-the-art at MRU and in the region, and further quality assurance and enhancement activities.

2.2. Background Information About the Institution

20. MRU is a state university established in 2004. Its history goes back to the 1990s with the establishment of the Lithuanian Police Academy. Since then, it has gone through several transformations as the Law Academy of Lithuania (1997–2000), and the Law University of Lithuania (2000–2004). MRU's mission is to strengthen the democratic state of Lithuania, to promote the harmonious progress of society based on innovative science, to develop free, creative, responsible, critically minded and lifelong-learning-oriented personalities, and to open the paths to personal and professional success for each member of the community. MRU carries

out its activities in Vilnius, Kaunas, Utena and Marijampolė (SER). The main governing bodies of MRU, the Council, the Senate and the Rector (SER), are appointed for a 5-year term. 18 administrative departments support the operation of the University. MRU is the largest university of social sciences in Lithuania with 95% of academic offers in the field of social sciences. MRU conducts three-cycle higher education studies. Out of 68 study programs in 19 fields of study, 24 are bachelor's, 43 are master's and 1 is professional. Doctoral studies are carried out in 6 science fields (SER). MRU offers over 20 study programs in English (joint Master's, double-diplomas, and doctoral studies). It has 9 cotutelle agreements (SER). At the University, there are currently 5,671 students, including 148 auditing, and 694 foreign degree-seeking students from more than 40 countries. 53% are bachelor level and 42% are master-level students. 172 doctoral students study at MRU (12% of whom are foreign citizens). In the last few years, the number of graduates increased by 1.5% (SER). 429 lecturers and researchers and 229 administrative and other staff members work for the University. In the last few years, research productivity as well as collaborative output with international researchers, increased substantially (e.g., total publications in the WoS and/or Scopus databases increased by 72.4%) (SER). MRU is active in various international, national, and regional projects. The University cooperates with more than 500 universities, state and business entities, secondary and vocational schools and other educational institutions, state and municipal institutions, associated structures, and non-governmental organizations (SER).

21. The University positions itself in the context of national, European Higher Education Area (EHEA), and global systems of studies. MRU members perceive the University as mobile, dynamic, flexible, and able to adapt to environmental changes. Internationalization and mobility are distinctive characteristics of MRU nationally. The University sees an opportunity to prepare graduates with the competences needed in the global labor market, as well as to attract international students.
22. The Panel wants to express gratitude to the members of the MRU community for their efforts in preparing the SER, compiling annexes, and providing all additional information requested before, during, and after the site visit. The Panel is also grateful for the openness and engagement of all MRU members who participated in the meetings with the Panel members and facilitated and supported the visit. The members of the Panel would like to especially thank the team that put together the SER.
23. During the visit, the Panel members experienced the willingness of all University members, from leaders and representatives in governance bodies to individual students and members of academic and administrative staff, to reflect on their experiences and on possible future developments of the University. The Panel found the visit to the institution very useful to better understand the activities and practices at MRU, and to prepare this follow-up evaluation report. The Panel believes in mutual trust and that the observations made and the advice and recommendations provided in the report will be taken into consideration by the members of the MRU community.

III. ANALYSIS BY EVALUATION AREAS

3.1. Management

Management area is analysed in accordance with the following indicators and criteria, set up in the Methodology.

1.1. Compliance of the higher education institution's strategic action plan with the mission, assurance of its implementation:

1.1.1. The strategic action plan is consistent with the mission of the higher education institution, legal acts regulating research and study activities and it takes into account the provisions of the national research and study policy, the European Higher Education Area and the European Research Area;

1.1.2. The parts of the strategic action plan (analysis of the current situation, priorities and aims, objectives of the activities, implementation means, resources, planned performance indicators) are appropriate and justified;

1.1.3. Regular monitoring of the implementation of the strategic action plan is carried out and the results are used to improve performance management.

24. MRU's SER covers the period of 2018-2023, which includes the implementation of 2016-2021 and 2021-2023 strategic plans. The current strategic plan, for the most part, is consistent with the mission of the University. MRU's Statute, the national legal acts regulating research and studies (e. g. the Law for Higher Education and Research), as well as national strategic documents such as the national strategy "Lithuania 2030", the "2021-2030 National Progress Plan", and "Learning Lithuania 2030". All of these serve as an overall framework that guides MRU's strategic actions.

25. The strategic plan of the University takes into account the provisions of the national research and study policy, the EHEA, and the European Research Area. There is sufficient evidence in the SER regarding MRU's commitment to contribute to national and regional progress, e.g., via advanced research and innovation, increased competitiveness of the country, and unique study program offers to prepare graduates for life and work in a globalized world. The Panel commends MRU for its commitment towards the achievement of objectives set in national development strategic documents as well as its active contribution to the EHEA as well as the European Research Area.

26. MRU's current activities are grounded in the MRU 2021-2023 Strategic Action Plan. The analysis of the current situation is based on a SWOT (strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats) analysis, which conforms to institutional best practice standards. Seven strategic directions are set with a total of 51 short to medium-term indicators to be reached for their implementation. It has to be noted that such a large number of indicators and their values influence progress. For instance, the value of the indicator "Change in the number of students and listeners (%)" for the year 2020 is set at 6291. Meanwhile, the 2021 MRU activity reports state that the number of MRU students in the respective year was 6332. While the success rate of reaching such incremental targets will be higher, it does not necessarily enable the University to strive for more ambitious targets or to see broader perspectives.

27. In regard the strategic planning, the Panel finds that:

- Unlike the above-mentioned national strategic documents which are oriented to long-term strategic objectives, MRU Strategic action plan 2021-2023 is intended for reaching short-term strategic goals of a more operational nature. This is confirmed by the quantity and detailed nature of goals and indicators. The indicators set were based on the analysis of MRU's potential and the environmental scan (SER), which in turn led the strategic planning process to be grounded on the incremental growth approach;
- The SWOTs are rather superficial and generic, not sufficiently specific to trigger action plans which in turn makes it difficult to develop a clear operational action plan, i.e. how the weaknesses and threats identified in the SWOT may be addressed;
- There is a lack of more detailed analysis and clarification of the strategic directions and their linkage with operational objectives and identifiable actions. The latter is not fully echoing institutional challenges, e.g. high dropout rates, the high number of study programs, and low admission numbers in some of the programs;
- There is a lack of links between indicators to be used and goals to be achieved and the necessary human and financial resources and how they will be acquired or re-allocated; unless the HEI finds ways and means outside of the current strategic plans to obtain these resources, it will be more than challenging, if not impossible, to achieve the implementation of the strategic objectives.

28. Compared to the Strategic action plan 2010 – 2020, the vision of MRU has an important new element which is to be a leader in social sciences in the European Higher Education area. This is articulated in the MRU vision: “An open, progressive, vibrant and cohesive academic community, a leader in social sciences in the European Higher Education Area.” This is an ambitious goal. However, the Panel did not find sufficient evidence for benchmarks on the way to achieving that goal. MRU identifies ways in which it will increase its presence in the region and the global market, for instance, the number of exchange students, international partnership programs, international research projects, and international accreditation. The view of the Panel is that a more strategic approach coupled with more resources and measurable results is needed to meet the internationalization goal laid down in the vision of MRU rather than just an unqualified or undifferentiated “more is better”.

29. The University has regular monitoring in place at the institutional and unit level, e.g., via annual reports approved by the Council, discussions at the rectorate, and a dashboard of indicators (SER). The University takes measures to achieve its key performance indicators (KPIs). KPIs such as Change in the number of students and listeners (%), Change in the number of lifelong learners (certificates issued) (%), and Change in the share of study programs with blended learning demonstrate that MRU carries out analysis and monitoring of the needs of the country (regions) and sets measures for satisfying those needs. It is less clear, however, to what extent and by which measures MRU evaluates the quality rather than the quantity of its offerings and services.

30. Overall, the Panel finds that a more reflective and analytical MRU community approach to self-analysis regarding not just the progress but also problematic and/or challenging areas would be beneficial. For instance, according to the SER, two years of strategic plan implementation (2021-2022) *did not reveal any shortcomings* in the analysis. This would suggest an insufficiently (self-)critical approach. During the site visit, the Panel received some examples of how the strategic plans are used to improve performance management, e.g., in the area of marketing.

However, the Panel is not convinced that this is being done system-wide. A more systematic approach is necessary.

31. Although MRU did not find any shortcomings in the relevant period, some indicators are negative, in particular the student attrition rate and the percentage of graduates employed in positions requiring HE qualification. The student drop-out rate, which often approaches or even exceeds 33% in the first year, seems to be at least partially related to the marketing and pre-enrolment information. As indicated by students during the site visit, a mismatch between the marketing and the actual program content creates high student expectations. Once enrolled, students have to be regularly advised on course selection, performance improvement options, and potential options for better aligning their expectations and needs with the program, for example by switching the specialization or a program of study.

32. The University is in the process of developing a new strategic plan. The Panel was acquainted with the initial planning for the University Vision 2030. The Panel commends MRU's ambition to develop a longer-term strategy. As it was shared by the University leadership during the visit, it will mainly follow the current strategic directions. The University wants to mainstream sustainability principles across all its functions, although the concept of "sustainability" and how it would be assessed is not specified. In addition, there is a vision to strengthen and expand research and studies into other fields of study, e.g., cyber security, environment and climate change, computer science and informatics. The Panel is concerned, however, that branching out into some of these non-social science areas is not aligned with MRU's identity and its ambition to become a leading social science institution in the EHEA. Such new developments will demand the re-direction of focus and re-distribution of resources and may put the University at risk of not sustaining the quality of current core areas.

1.2. Effectiveness of process management of the higher education institution:

1.2.1. A clear structure for governance, decision making and distribution of responsibilities is defined;

1.2.2. Regular process management analysis is performed, preconditions for process improvement and risk management are planned;

1.2.3. Stakeholders are involved in the management process at an adequate level.

33. During the site visit, the Panel has experienced an agile MRU community that is supported by a dedicated leadership and management team which is driving internal developments and restructuring for a better alignment with the vision, mission, and strategic directions of the University. The Panel was impressed with the dynamic, flexible, forward-looking approach adopted by the leadership team to steer the institution through difficult times and different phases of transformation. The Panel had an opportunity to first-hand experience MRU staff competence and commitment, as well as their supportive and responsive attitude. The Panel found MRU staff to be responsive to the students and their needs, and the Panel found that the students are, for the most part, satisfied with the studies and services provided by the University. Students are generally well represented by a strong Student Union which is ready to engage in various committees and task forces, although it has been struggling to recruit students willing and able to commit the time necessary for meaningful participation in the many committees. Overall, the Panel got the impression that the University flexibly responds to the needs of the market, the regions, and the country. The Panel noted MRU's transition from a teaching to a research

university to become an internationally respected institution in the field of social sciences. This is commendable but it must not come at the expense of quality assurance in teaching, and proper avenues for students to be heard.

34. Overall, there is a clear governance structure, units and responsibilities are clearly identified, with suitable decision-making procedures in place. The main governing bodies of MRU are the Council, the Senate and the Rector, each appointed for a 5-year term. The Council is in charge of approving amendments to the MRU Statute, re-organization and restructuring, strategic plans, and annual budget. The Senate is the governing body of MRU's academic affairs, whereas the Rector, among other tasks, ensures the implementation of the strategic plan, staff appointments and student admission, financial activities, and proper management. The deans are heavily involved in management and decision-making. While a number of external members are part of the governing structure, in particular in the Council, the Panel did not receive answers on how much impact they have in practice. By contrast, the Senate seemed to be well-organized and collegiate, willing and able to listen to diverse opinions, and an effective governing body.

35. The risk management structures and procedures at the University were established in 2021. The risk management plan is presented in the SER annexes. During the site visit, the Panel learned about MRU's crisis management capacity and how competently difficult situations such as declining demographics, a pandemic, and the war in Ukraine have been handled. Moreover, the University demonstrated the capacity of building up its scientific infrastructure and collaboration pathways not only across faculties and different internal research groups but also via external partnerships. The University also developed strong and mutual partnerships with social partners. However, the Panel also found the process management to be somewhat *ad hoc* and demand-driven. The examples are managing student retention as illustrated above in the par. 31, and substantial changes in the number of study program offers (in 2023 in AIKOS (Open Vocational Information, Counselling, and Guidance System) register (smm.lt) there were 56 study programs registered; in the annual report in 2021 MRU there were 78 programs indicated, whereas currently, according to the data of 1 January 2023, 68 study programs are carried out at MRU), see also par. 32. Such a flexible approach may provide some good temporary solutions. Nonetheless, the University would benefit in the longer term from a more proactive and not mainly reactive approach.

36. Involvement of stakeholders in the management of MRU is ensured by the Law on Higher Education and Research and MRU Statute. The Panel finds MRU stakeholders represented both in governance and in the management process. Student representation in governance is nominally sufficient. However, students are increasingly working alongside their studies to make ends meet and find it hard to make time for meaningful engagement in University's governance. The Student Union suggested that students participating actively in governance activities should receive tuition fee reductions or scholarships for their investment of time and energy. The Student Union also informed the Panel that student representatives were not always invited or invited too late to certain study program committee meetings and that not all faculty and staff valued student input sufficiently. This seemed to be a particular concern in the meetings dedicated to quality assurance. MRU should investigate this matter and ensure consistent and systematic opportunities for students to contribute to the development of all programs, courses, and procedures. Representatives of Lithuanian society are also members of various governing bodies of MRU, like the Council, study program committees (alumni, employers), and faculty councils. They participate

in academic staff recruitment, representing a third of recruitment certification commission members. Employers are actively involved in monitoring and updating studies as members of the study program committees and final theses defence committees.

37. According to the MRU Statute, there are 9 members in the MRU Council, 4 of whom are external members (3 are selected by the Senate in a public competition and one is selected by the MRU Student representation in a public competition). However, during the site visit, active engagement by external members of the Council was decidedly limited. Regarding student engagement, conversations with a student group indicate that while there are possibilities to participate in the management of MRU, their participation is ensured more at an operational level, and there is a lack of possibility to influence strategic decisions in their initial stage, e.g., when they are formulated. Middle management expressed the idea that a more de-centralized decision-making and a higher level of trust in middle managers from central leadership would enhance the effectiveness of the planning and decision-making process.

1.3. Publicity of information on the performance of the higher education institution and its management effectiveness:

1.3.1. Systematic collection and analysis of the performance data, results (including student employment and graduate career monitoring) is in place, data is used for the improvement of performance of the higher education institution;

1.3.2. Information on the performance of the higher education institution is clear, accurate and accessible to the academic community and the public, and is provided regularly to the founders and members of the legal entity.

38. The University has sufficient information systems administered internally and externally for the purposes of collection, systematization, analysis, and publication of data, as well as monitoring University activities and outputs that can be used by various stakeholder groups. MRU keeps and updates the KPI dashboard. The Panel noted, however, that the SER does not sufficiently address the effectiveness of information management on the performance of some of its activities, and the University management under-utilizes the value of benchmarks and/or targets for various outputs. For instance, MRU tracks graduate careers. One of the indicators is the percentage of graduates employed in positions requiring HE qualification. There has been a negative trend observed for some years. In fact, the latest data has not reached the level that had been achieved in 2017. MRU did not identify how it is responding to trends such as this one.

39. According to the SER, information on the performance of MRU is accessible to the academic community and the public via various channels; intranet and public website being the main modes. It is regularly provided to the founders (the state), for the review by the Seimas of the Lithuanian Republic and other stakeholders of the University in the form of annual reports. It should be noted that these reports are more of a retrospective than operational nature, whereas the Intranet column on the MRU website merely reflects information that is already publicly available. The Panel concludes that MRU could improve the ways it is making current operational information available to the MRU community and the public.

40. In general, an impressive amount of information is accessible via MRU's website in Lithuanian and English. The website is convenient, two selected upper menus contain all the most important information and themes. However, a general overview and some content is missing.

Many elements in the text are not connected to other topics by active links, which could lead straight to the respective information. There are no short introductive summarising sentences before long and complex themes. The search does not work purposefully, as it mostly shows dates of the announcements, and not of the specific topics. The website lacks a welcoming vibe for potential students and caters more to those who are already in the educational programs. There is no map in the contact information, a description of getting to the site with public transport, or parking places. The news filter does not function, and the column of activities does not present all activities that are carried out; e.g., a consultation column is hidden under several menu points.

41. Despite a lot of publicly available information, the key documents and performance indicators are not easy to find or are missing altogether (for example data on key research international prizes and success, the number of academic staff, etc.). Moreover, the website is not friendly to people with disabilities.

1.4. Effectiveness of human resource management:

1.4.1. Clear and transparent principles and procedures for the formation, management, evaluation of academic and non-academic staff are established and applied;

1.4.2. The higher education institution has sufficient academic (in-house academic staff) and non-academic staff to meet its operational objectives;

1.4.3. The qualifications of the academic and non-academic staff are appropriate for the purposes of the higher education institution;

1.4.4. Conditions are created for the academic staff to improve the knowledge and skills required for teaching and research activities;

1.4.5. Conditions are created for non-academic staff to develop competencies.

42. The SER provides sufficient information regarding principles and procedures for the formation, management and evaluation of academic and non-academic staff. MRU is taking steps to further develop and enhance human resource management via restructuring, review and upgrade of policies. For instance, at the end of 2020, the Senate approved the procedure for the selection and evaluation of the performance of academic staff. There are Equal Opportunities and Diversity Policies in place. In the SER it is also stated that the University has sufficient academic and non-academic staff and a balanced composition of academic staff regarding the positions, age, and gender to achieve its operational objectives. However, it is not clear what internal benchmarks are applied and what measures are taken for the implementation of diversity and a more balanced gender distribution, especially in light of the identified tendency of an increasing number of females and decreasing number of males among the staff (SER). Furthermore, the Panel could not find a systematic approach to the development of the didactic competencies of the teaching staff, and the Student Union suggested that the recent focus on research results has exacerbated deficiencies in teaching quality. This seems particularly noticeable in courses taught in the English language. Course evaluations have been highlighting these issues for a while, but institutional responses have been slow or non-existent.

43. Whereas the staff composition meets national regulatory requirements in terms of minimum qualifications, the number of professors, as well as academic staff holding PhDs, the Panel could not assess the alignment of academic staff qualifications with their teaching responsibilities because the information about the areas in which academic staff hold their degrees was not supplied by the University.

44. Staff qualification improvement, according to the SER, is based on the decentralized or liberal model. The assessment and enhancement of competences are at the discretion of an individual staff member. This, to some extent, explains why allocations for the development of competences of non-academic staff varies substantially from year to year. During the visit, the administration explained that the University is taking steps towards a more centralized approach in the area of HR assessment and development. An annual performance appraisal instrument is being introduced and a more systematic approach is being developed for training and professional development needs. Professional development needs will be linked with the achievement of certain objectives and targets. Managers are entitled to indicate what kind of training an employee might need, but at present, academic staff is free to take up the suggestions or not. The Panel agrees that a cautious shift to a more organized approach is appropriate and suggests that it could be combined with the introduction of annual allocations for professional staff development that remain at the discretion of the individual staff member.

45. There are many professional development training options provided internally, either in person, online, or in a hybrid mode. Many training sessions are also recorded. Due to much emphasis on promoting international scientific activities and publishing, there is training for developing research competence, knowledge transfer, and service. These have clearly been successful, as is demonstrated by the very impressive research labs and their research output. Other training provided covers teaching competence and English language skills but - based on feedback from the Student Union - these have either not been taken up sufficiently or have not been as successful because both teaching competence and English language skills remain quite varied among faculty members. MRU has successfully launched peer learning models, specifically to address the needs of students with special needs. As outlined in the preceding paragraph, external training is another option, although the Panel could not find sufficiently clear rules and plans for who was eligible or how resources were made available for external training. The need for externally provided training has to be approved by the respective unit manager, and it needs to be aligned with employee functions in order to be funded by the University. The overall annual budget of seven thousand euros for external training for over 400 teaching staff is insufficient.

46. International mobility is treated as part of staff (especially academic) competence development. The University set various criteria that staff members need to fulfil in order to be able to participate in mobility programs. Since not all staff members fulfil the set criteria and may use mobility opportunities for the enhancement of their professional competencies, the divide and gap of competence levels among staff members seem to be increasing. For instance, in 2022, 33.51% of academic staff and 20.96% of non-academic staff participated in international mobility activities. At least some of the faculty and staff members who were not eligible expressed resentment about this to the Panel during the visit. The HEI did not provide sufficient information in the SER or during the site visit about training opportunities for non-academic staff - especially in the area of managerial and other higher education-specific service-oriented competencies, and how they are allocated and funded. The Panel encourages the University to ensure adequate training opportunities for non-academic staff and present them appropriately in future evaluations.

1.5. Efficiency of financial and learning resource management:

1.5.1. Financial resources are planned, allocated and used rationally;

1.5.2. Various financial resources for the implementation of higher education activities are attracted;

1.5.3. Learning resources for provision of studies and research (art) activities are planned and used rationally;

1.5.4. Learning resources for conducting studies and research (art) activities are appropriate, sufficient and available.

47. MRU's financial management is carried out based on the principles enshrined in the legal acts regulating HE and public sector activities, e.g., public benefit, efficiency, rationality, accountability to society and autonomy (SER). The annual budget is discussed by the Rectorate and the Senate, and is approved by the Council. A three-level internal control is implemented (SER). It is supplemented with the Chief Internal Auditor's, independent and State auditing functions. Whereas in the SER it is noted that strategic actions are taken into account in the process of distributing financial flows (SER), the financial management in relation to strategic objectives is not sufficiently formalized, e.g., how financial and other resources are being deployed for the achievement of the strategic goals. Financial management effectiveness could be enhanced, especially with regard to the financial robustness and sustainability of individual study programs, some of which are continued in spite of extremely low enrolment, as well as research grant income distribution. For the latter, see the Panel's recommendations on "taxing" grant-funded research more effectively for the benefit of the entire institution, not just the unit carrying out the research (see also par. 104 and 108).
48. According to the SER, MRU set the goal to diversify its income. MRU's budget consists of three main funding sources: state funding, university-generated income, and targeted funding. The latter primarily includes project and grant-generated funding. State financing has been stable with increased allocations for specific aims (e.g., increase of salaries). There has also been a substantial increase in targeted funds, namely third-party funding for research and development projects. Due to this, the overall MRU budget in recent years has substantially increased. Nonetheless, the Panel notes that such a financial model, especially over-reliance on external third-party funding, is not viable and sustainable in the longer term because research grants will be acquired in some years but not in others. Moreover, the restrictions coming with targeted funding do not allow for the balanced development of the entire institution. The University, therefore, needs to enhance the effectiveness of its financial planning.
49. The Panel finds current MRU facilities and learning resources adequate. The university is paying attention to the needs and well-being of students and teachers. The Library is well organized and the level of services offered to the users is pretty high. There are some good developments underway regarding the upgrade and modernization of infrastructure, a new library service platform, Moodle upgrades, etc. The library has nearly 60 thousand titles of printed publications, over 233 thousand electronic books, and more than 35 thousand e-journals. The library has subscriptions for 37 international and national licensed databases such as Academic Search Ultimate (EBSCOhost), Science Direct, Taylor&Francis Online, Emerald Management Journals Collection, PsycARTICLES (EBSCOhost), JSTOR Collections, Sage Journals Online, eBooks Academic Collection (EBSCOhost), and Education Source (EBSCOhost). The learning resources for conducting studies and research activities are described in detail in the SER. However, there is a lack of reflexive observations on whether these are appropriate and sufficient, for example, whether the subscribed licensed databases are sufficient for highly specialized

graduate programs and doctoral studies. This said, the number of volumes and journals available could be improved in some areas, e.g., in the area of international law. This issue has been brought to the Panel by students. Another issue noted by the Panel is to what extent hybrid studies should be and will be offered and whether the current IT and other infrastructure is sufficient for this type of delivery. 2022 allocations for IT and technological equipment do not seem to correspond to the implementation of plans indicated in the SER. A modern Research and Innovation Hive infrastructure, a holistic approach to IT services, and the development of an environment to foster engagement and interdisciplinarity are good practice examples, but current and planned resources for these activities may be insufficient. In addition, considering the use and impact of AI and digitally enhanced teaching and learning, policies should be defined and institutional approaches developed.

50. **In summary**, overall, MRU's strategic planning is consistent with the mission of the University. Seven strategic directions are monitored based on a set of short to medium-term indicators. The Panel, nonetheless, observed the absence of a proactive longer-term vision and explicit benchmarks. The strategic action plans are intended for reaching short-term strategic goals of a more operational nature. There is regular monitoring in place at the institutional and unit level. More focus is given to measuring the quantitative side of operations rather than the quality of services provided. Current strategic planning processes allow for incremental developments. While short-term planning may provide more certainty and flexibility, and is easier to be managed, longer-term, future-driven indicators based on national and international HE practice and organizational aspirations would be more invigorating and would better address an ambitious University mission. The Panel suggests MRU's further development of strategic planning and a more suitable balance between centralized and decentralized decision-making.

MRU has a dedicated leadership and management team which espouses a dynamic, flexible, and forward-looking approach. The organizational restructuring is responsive to the developmental and strategic needs of the University. The agile nature of decision-making and process management serves the institution well in crisis situations. However, in the longer term, the University would benefit more from a more proactive than reactive approach. The Panel finds the involvement of stakeholders, especially in process management, at an adequate level, whereas in governance and strategic planning, it could be strengthened.

The University has sufficient information systems administered internally and externally for the purposes of collection, systematization, analysis, and publication of data. The Panel concludes that MRU could improve the effectiveness or impact of information management on the performance of some of its activities and the ways it is making current operational information available to the MRU community and the public. Moreover, the website could be more friendly for disabled people.

MRU is taking steps to further develop and enhance human resource management via restructuring, review, and upgrade of policies. At present, staff qualification improvement is based on the decentralized or liberal model. However, the University is transitioning towards a more centralized approach in the area of HR assessment and development. An annual performance appraisal instrument is being introduced and a more systematic approach is being developed for training and professional development needs. Despite many internal trainings provided by the University, competence gaps remain among the staff and, therefore, need to be addressed in the future.

The University aims at diversifying its income. Currently, it relies on state funding, university-generated income and targeted third-party funding. The financial management in relation to strategic objectives is not sufficiently formalized, e.g., how financial and other resources are being deployed for the achievement of the strategic goals. To ensure financial sustainability and more balanced developments, e.g., professional development, specialized library and IT resources, financial planning and management effectiveness could be enhanced, especially with regard to the over-reliance on third-party funding and financial robustness of academic offers.

The Panel have concluded that MRU is developing its management structures and competencies gradually and systematically. However, there are various areas that still can be improved.

51. **Judgment:** the area is being developed systematically, without any major drawbacks, and is given 3 points.

52. **Recommendations:**

- The longer-term vision should be more clearly and specifically articulated and linked to targets. In the development of a longer-term university strategy, the Panel recommends outlining the key directions and aspirations of where the University sees itself *in relation to its vision, mission, and identity*, and prioritizing its key strategic objectives. For instance, in the area of internationalization and mobility, the University could reflect not only on current institutional capacity but also the aspirational longer-term targets, and how this heightened focus on internationalization might affect the fulfilment of the public mission of the University regionally and nationally.
- Strengthening the strategic planning process: environmental scan, SWOT, longer-term strategy, targets, milestones, and implementation deadlines; specific actions linked with specified financial and human resources, units, and/or employees responsible combined with reporting requirements; where appropriate, the use of selected national and/or international benchmarks.
- Adopting a less reactive and more strategic, systemic, and proactive approach to strategic planning and process management. Clear benchmarks and/or milestones along the processes of performance management coupled with structural and procedural changes could enable the institution to better assess progress towards the achievement of strategic objectives and to take necessary action to improve its performance.
- Enhancing the financial management effectiveness, especially with regard to the rentability of individual study programs as well as research grant income distribution.
- Striking a better balance between centralized and de-centralized decision-making, especially in the areas of budget planning, staff professional development, internationalization, and student retention management, by including stake-holders earlier, when plans are formulated, rather than later, when they are merely voted on.
- Ensuring the participation of some internal and external stakeholders. For instance, active participation of external Council members in quality enhancement activities like the Panel meeting, student representation in committees and task force working groups, especially those related to new strategic initiatives, e. g. program development.
- Enhancing publicly available information, in particular for people with disabilities.

- Linking staff training with organizational development: some of the training could be introduced as mandatory (e.g., English, didactic training including digitally enhanced teaching) in order to ensure that the staff has the right competence to implement organizational change and programmatic development.
- Good practices related to peer learning could be encouraged and promoted across various activities including academic staff peer reviews and mentoring (to enhance excellence in teaching, best teaching methodologies and practices, etc.).
- In light of recent developments in the use of AI (ChatGPT etc.), considering the adoption of AI and digitally enhanced teaching and learning policies.
- Increasing the social scholarship fund, in particular during times of need, like the aftermath of the Covid pandemic, and the influx of students from Ukraine.

53. **Good practice examples:**

- Flexibility, commitment and involvement in the decision-making process by the leadership team, in particular the Senate and the Rectorate.
- MRU's overall effort to promote the well-being of employees, creation of an adaptive work environment that leads to positive developments of work-life balance.
- Practices related to peer learning, the dissemination and multiplication of knowledge, e. g. how to address the needs of students with special needs.

3.2. Quality Assurance

Quality Assurance area is analysed in accordance with the following indicators and criteria, set up in the Methodology.

2.1. Implementation and effectiveness of the internal quality assurance system:

- 2.1.1. The higher education institution has approved and made publicly available internal quality assurance documents that are consistent with the Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area;*
- 2.1.2. Internal quality assurance measures of planning, implementation and improvement are appropriate, applied periodically and ensure the involvement of the whole institution and stakeholders;*
- 2.1.3. Processes for planning, implementation, monitoring, periodic evaluation and development of activities are specified;*
- 2.1.4. Students and academic and non-academic staff of the institution receive effective support;*
- 2.1.5. Provisions and procedures for academic integrity, tolerance and non-discrimination, appeal and ethics are specified and applied;*
- 2.1.6. The results of the external review are used to improve the performance of the higher education institution.*

54. MRU has approved its quality policy and system-related documents as well as laid down quality management and implementation regulations including major principles, distribution of responsibilities, etc. Quality assurance (QA) documents are based on the Statute of the University and are aligned with national laws and bylaws regulating studies and research activities. They also follow the Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area (ESG). While most of these documents are publicly available on MRU's website, succinct

information and a statement about the quality assurance system and its overarching principles (as defined in Chapter 3 of the Provisions) could be beneficial for University stakeholders. Likewise, in the self-evaluation exercise and SWOT analysis, MRU community members should reflect upon how the University is doing in promoting its internal QA principles. More clarity on the key principles and the standards would enhance the effectiveness of QA processes and enable the institution not only to internalize and promote a quality culture but also to strive for evidence-based performance. For instance, with regard to the internationality principle - what is meant by the highest quality standards of research and studies?

55. Internal quality assurance measures of planning and implementation of studies and research are based on set strategic and operational level indicators, intended to be applied periodically, and ensure the involvement of the whole institution and stakeholders. A division of internal QA responsibilities among administrative and academic units and general processes are in place to ensure quality improvement orientation. In the area of studies and teaching, MRU claims to give a prime focus on student feedback. However, feedback from the Student Union suggests that this is at least not always the case, e.g., that unfavorable teaching evaluations did not always lead to changes and improvements. The assurance of teaching quality could also be strengthened by employing other methods and processes, e.g., academic staff peer review and mentoring, team teaching, an increase in double assessments, etc.

56. The SER specifies processes for planning, implementation, monitoring, periodic evaluation, and development of activities. Internal quality indicators for studies and research are outlined in the SER. However, the SER does not provide more details regarding the value of specified indicators, nor does it link the indicators with benchmarks (either national and/or international), which in some instances makes it difficult to judge their appropriateness. The introduction of a new quality enhancement approach, such as the evaluation of the research labs, needs a clear and transparent presentation of the effects of such instruments.

57. The support structures for academic and non-academic staff include training and necessary competence development, well-being and psychological services. Staff professional development, nonetheless, needs to be more targeted, systemic, and better funded. Overall, MRU's responsiveness to student needs, e. g. in expanding counseling services to reduce wait times, is a strength of MRU. Nevertheless, some of the student support structures could be expanded. One area to strengthen would be student academic advising and predictive analytical approaches regarding student progression towards completion, in particular, to address significant dropout rates in some of the study programs. Overall, a more concerted effort is needed regarding students' academic success. Providing student advising and counseling services with regards to academic progress or a lack of it, i.e. under-performance, as well as realistic career aspirations and how to pursue them, could address multiple issues, including overall student well-being, the high dropout rate in some programs, completion rates, and mobility planning.

58. Examples of good practice are social scholarships for students with special needs and disabilities, also exemptions from the student housing fee for certain low-income students. Perhaps full-time student status should not be the only criterion for eligibility, however. Ideally, all students should be allowed to show their need for assistance, specifically in case of exemption or reduction of housing fees. Other good examples are student mentorship programs for integration in the professional field, and the Community Welfare Centre. For instance, psychological counselling got integrated with other support services of the Centre and was

expanded to meet increased needs during the pandemic and as a consequence of the war in Ukraine.

59. At the University there are sufficient provisions and streamlined procedures for addressing academic ethics and other cases of violation of MRU's code of conduct. MRU's Code of Academic Ethics guides academic processes and procedures and is applied in everyday situations including academic integrity, appeal procedures and so on. Nonetheless, a rather relevant number, including a high number of severe cases of academic dishonesty, especially in students' final years (e.g., 49 thesis plagiarism cases during the reporting period, 59 students expelled out of 75 students who were subject to disciplinary punishment), indicate that during the educational process, there needs to be much more emphasis on the assurance of academic integrity, including training on how to avoid plagiarism. This need will only increase with the increasing availability of predictive AI tools.

60. The University took some steps to improve its performance in light of the 2013 external review and the recommendations in the Panel report of 2013. For instance, the University worked on the clarification of its vision and mission, and strategic directions. However, overall, the implementation of measures and achievement of improvements was presented to the present Panel in an overly generic way without offering precise descriptions of changes and improvements based on the previous Expert Report. For instance, the Panel notes that the strategic planning processes and the balance of centralized and de-centralized decision-making still need attention. The Panel specifically encourages future review teams and Expert Panels to inquire about measures taken and improvements achieved in response to the present report.

61. **In summary**, MRU has an institutionalized quality assurance system with formal provisions, processes, and procedures. MRU quality policy, regulations and principles follow the internal University documents (the Statute), as well as national laws and European guidelines (the ESG). The QA process is based on the PDCA (Plan, Do, Check, Act) cycle. There is a set of internal performance indicators. However, the absence of external benchmarks makes it difficult for the University to make more appropriate quality judgments.

While quality in higher education is a multifaceted concept, it would nonetheless be important to work towards a more explicit, common understanding and conceptualization of MRU quality principles and ownership of quality-driven efforts. For instance, teaching quality could be further enhanced by more targeted and systematic teaching staff professional development (as indicated in para. 41 and 44, 46) and by implementing other QA methods, e.g., peer review and mentoring.

The Panel have concluded that MRU is developing its quality assurance system and necessary competences gradually and systematically. However, there are various areas that still can be improved.

62. **Judgment:** the area is being developed systematically, without any major drawbacks and is given 3 points.

63. **Recommendations:**

- Adapting quality assurance approaches and instruments towards institutional research practices. Besides the monitoring approaches MRU is currently undertaking, the University should use available data to be more proactive in dealing with certain issues, e. g. responsiveness to student course evaluations, academic integrity, and current difficulties with study and course

completion. Predictive analytics could help to identify challenges before they impact the study success. This could include learning analytics as well.

- Implementing institution-wide policies and practices regarding academic guidance and counseling to enhance students' academic success and well-being, and to minimize student dropout.
- Strengthening the assurance of teaching quality by employing other methods and processes, e.g., academic peer review and mentoring, team teaching, and increased number of double assessments.
- Ensuring pay equity between faculty doing more teaching and faculty doing more research. Possibly evaluate teaching, research, and service and expect excellence in one area and good performance in others.
- Before implementing new quality enhancement approaches and practices, link them with clear and transparent presentation of the effects and follow-up decisions of such instruments (e. g. in case of the evaluation of research labs or regarding the continuity of study programs with low student numbers).
- Analyzing the available data and its importance for informed decision-making processes.
- Enhancing market research for informed decision-making regarding new study programs.
- The University is strongly advised to develop and communicate a clear strategy on how the expert recommendations will be addressed and which benchmarks will be achieved within the coming months and years; this was not sufficiently done after the last evaluation.

64. **Good practice examples:**

- Creation of social scholarships for students with special needs and disabilities, also an exemption for low-income students from housing fees.
- Student mentorship program for integration in the professional field (see also below, par. 86-89).
- Community Welfare Centre (see par. 58).

3.3. Studies and Research (Art)

Studies and Research (Art) area is analysed in accordance with the following indicators and criteria, set up in the Methodology.

3.1. The level of research (art), compatibility of studies and research (art) and its compliance with the strategic aims of activities:

3.1.1. The study and research (art) activities carried out and their results are consistent with the mission and strategic aims of the higher education institution;

3.1.2. The level of research (art) activities is sufficient for the ongoing studies of the higher education institution;

3.1.3. Studies are based on research (art);

3.1.4. Consistent recognition of foreign qualifications, partial studies and prior non-formal and informal learning is performed.

65. Overall, the study and research activities carried out at MRU are consistent with the mission and strategic aims of the higher education institution. More to the point, the University aims at becoming a leading higher education institution in strengthening the democratic State of Lithuania. No doubt, MRU has a well-established position at the national level as far as legal and security studies are concerned. In particular, MRU is the only institution of higher education in the area of public security in the country, having thus an influential role in Lithuanian society. It is more difficult to say the same for other study fields and to assess their position at the regional, e.g., the Baltic level. First of all, the University benchmarks are not always clear. Secondly, and even more importantly, the compartmentalized approach to study programs at MRU is likely to undermine its capacity to act as a leader in Social Sciences and Humanities. Another source of concern is the fact that, as stated in the SER and confirmed during the field assessment, MRU's course offerings are 'continuously reviewed based on the demand on the market.' Such a never-ending market-oriented trajectory contradicts proactive and strategic planning strategies. An example is the near-term goal of developing new study programs on the digital and environmental transitions, which are not traditional strengths of the HEI and for which new resources have yet to be acquired. This presents risks to the quantity and quality of existing programs in core areas of MRU's mission and vision, potentially undermining the positive results so far reached, also in terms of impact on Lithuanian society.

66. This said, it has to be stressed that MRU has clearly made significant progress to achieve the goals laid down in its vision and mission statement with its renewed study portfolio, and its approach to internationalization through joint degrees, mobility programs, partnerships, and its close relationship with its social partners. Particularly relevant in this respect is the intention of MRU to take part in a European University Alliance funded under the Erasmus+ Program. This initiative could substantially improve the international stance of the University. At the same time, the need to interact with a good number of universities in other European countries will require significant political and administrative efforts to ensure viable cooperation in research and teaching activities. MRU's staff seems to be aware of that, and activities have been planned to re-organize some administrative units to be ready to deal with the academic burden flowing from this new challenge. In this respect, it would be desirable to have mutual and loyal cooperation between the University and national authorities so as to facilitate the achievement of the objective of entering into the European alliance and to render it a factor of change and strengthening of higher education and research in the country.

67. The University is performing well as far as research activities are concerned. MRU put much effort in the last years to become not only an important higher education institution but also a leading research institution at the national and international levels. It can be said that this goal has been achieved with a constant increase in the number of national (17 in 2018, 22 in 2019, 45 in 2020, 62 in 2021 and 85 in 2022) and international (30 in 2018, 30 in 2019, 38 in 2020, 38 in 2021 and 45 in 2022) projects during the reporting period (SER), a constant increase of MRU academic staff articles in peer-reviewed journals (by 15.6%, from 37.8% to 53.4%) and steady improvements to MRU's position in the annual evaluation of scientific (and artistic) activities carried out by the Research Council of Lithuania (the results of the formal evaluation of MRU's research papers in the social sciences increased by more than 3 times, from 1,322.34 to 4,113.66 points; and, in the humanities, by more than 3.5 times - SER). Particularly impressive is also the establishment of the Innovation Lab Centre, a hub of 15 research laboratories with some 130

annual project applications, where MRU researchers and visiting researchers work in a cooperative way with research assistants, PhD candidates, and post-docs. The research conducted at MRU undergoes external assessment by the Research Council of Lithuania. The labs are not only conducive to high-quality research but have also become the backbone of an impressive output of papers that are frequently published in prestigious and peer-reviewed international journals. MRU is further strengthening this area by providing training and incentives for post-doc and teachers, also in terms of teaching exemptions. Overall, the Panel was impressed with the research at MRU. The Innovation Labs have played a central role in strengthening the research activities and represent a best practice to be emphasized and recognized. The work of the Labs, in particular when seeking international research grants, could not have been done without a very efficient support structure in the administration with regard to grant writing and budget planning. Whether the Projects Office will be able to effectively and sustainably support and manage 80 projects and some 130 project applications per year with just three staff members seems questionable, however. While the Panel was genuinely impressed, going forward, MRU needs to monitor equity issues between different academic staff members and resource allocation between teaching and research, in particular in light of the sustainability of study programs offered by MRU. Other HEIs have seen good results from taxing research projects a percentage for the benefit of the institution at large. At MRU this does not always seem to be the case; and in some cases, the percentage (5 - 20%) may be too low.

68. Relevant international connections with many highly respected universities and research centers are now in place, even though it is not always clear if such connections are the result of a strategic vision of the University or more opportunistic in nature. An assessment of the existing international relations is now ongoing in the context of the efforts put into the European University Alliance bid. The Panel trusts that MRU will be able to emphasize quality and alignment with strategic goals in future institutional partnerships.

69. Some further elements related to the general approach so far adopted by MRU deserve to be mentioned. According to the SER, as already mentioned, the offer of study programs is continuously monitored based on the demand of the market. The site visit has confirmed a strong commitment of MRU to expanding into new study fields in response to contemporary challenges, in particular cybersecurity and environmental sustainability. Even though such an approach is understandable and aligns well with current needs in the national job market, which is characterised by strong demand for IT and cyber security specialists, there are pros and cons. The market itself and its needs change very rapidly. Yesterday it required more specialists of narrow specialisation, today it increasingly requires specialists having knowledge not only in one area but several disciplines. Globalization and digitalization are driving this increasing focus on interdisciplinary qualifications and putting the long-term value of highly specialized programs in doubt. A narrow specialization of study programs, although it may seem more market-oriented at the present moment, may bear negative consequences in the longer term to the career of students who choose such studies, as well as to their capacity to compete in the job market. MRU should always remember that its mission and vision is to look further ahead than recent high school graduates and provide them with the qualifications they will need five and ten years down the line and for a lifetime of success and satisfaction in the labor market.

70. Another concern is the very low enrolment in some of MRU's programs and study fields. This situation raises questions regarding the actual implementation of thresholds, and the general

sustainability of some of MRU's study offers. For instance, from 2019 to 2022 a total of 33 study programs were deregistered. Several more should probably have been discontinued due to their unsustainably low enrolment. Since this affects a large part of MRU's study programs, the University should pay particular attention to this issue in defining its future teaching strategy.

71. There is evidence that studies at MRU are increasingly based on and benefitting from ongoing research. For instance, 7 research programs (SER) are linked with current fields of study programs (SER). However, efforts put by MRU in making the research more competitive seem to have led to a situation of imbalance between research and teaching. The most productive researchers regularly have their teaching loads reduced and some don't teach much anymore at all. This not only reduces fruitful exchange between research and teaching. Given that the researchers also control the use of the majority of external funds, it creates a caste system at the university. The Expert Panel recommend that MRU should carefully monitor questions of workload and pay equity as well as ensure that research grants and projects benefit the entire academic community and not only those who acquire them. The improvement of the salary for researchers is also something that may influence their active contribution to the teaching offer. Due to the rather low level of salaries for teaching staff, academics could be more and more inclined to focus on research activities while reducing their contribution to the study programs. MRU should take care of this possible imbalance by elaborating more specific positive actions. A possible strategy could be represented by further strengthening the involvement of students in research projects, something which does not seem to be particularly developed at the moment.
72. Significant are also the efforts put in place to strengthen the PhD programs at MRU, even though it seems that PhD studies in the legal field still play a central role in the offer (the number of PhD theses discussed in other fields, such as Pedagogy, Psychology and Philology is rather low). The involvement of PhD candidates in research activities is good but it seems that their support for teaching activities is still underdeveloped.
73. Discussion during the site visit revealed that student-centeredness is a goal in terms of student engagement in the course design and teaching methods. Student and alumni feedback is taken into account and addressed in the process of curriculum development, although the Student Union noted that the involvement of students is not always consistent and system-wide and sometimes comes late, after important decisions have already been made. Flexibility and individual study plans can add value to the development of transferable and problem-solving competencies of students and, in this way, contribute to the implementation of the strategic goal of developing an integrated life-long learning system.
74. This said, it seems that curricular offers of learning-by-doing activities, sometimes also referred to as experiential learning opportunities, need to be strengthened. In particular, it is important to reintroduce the legal clinic where students can work with actual clients under the supervision of practicing attorneys. MRU has elaborated in recent years a different model, which is less formalized. Even though less formalization could have some advantages in terms of flexibility and adaptation, quality needs to be assured both for the students and for the clients. In this regard, the legal clinic model is well-established internationally and generally accepted as the gold standard for the practical involvement of students. The re-establishment of formal clinical legal education at MRU could also allow possible interactions with other law clinics at national and regional levels. By contrast to clinical legal education, MRU seems to have done a good job with the encouragement of and support for students participating in national and international

moot court competitions. This should be continued and, if necessary, made more widely accessible. Besides learning-by-doing activities, it is important that MRU promotes a strategic reflection on educational innovation and technology, taking stock of the lessons learned during the COVID-19 pandemic.

75. MRU has developed procedures and processes for the recognition of foreign qualifications and partial studies, including the assessment of informal learning. The recognition of foreign qualifications is aligned with recommendations by SKVC. The University receives reports on the evaluation of foreign qualifications assessment at MRU from SKVC and will be working on an action plan to improve the process of foreign qualification recognition. It is true that, according to the SER, the number of rejections of foreign applicants is particularly high. However, this is mainly due to the difficulties in dealing with visa formalities, something which has a general nature and is also present in other EU countries.

76. The last point which deserves to be mentioned is related to the SWOT analysis of study and research activities carried out at MRU. Even though it seems that the University bodies and actors are aware of the relevant issues related to those activities, the SER contains a SWOT analysis that does not identify current weaknesses and future threats in this regard. The time and effort going into a proper SWOT analysis are only justifiable if the institution is willing to reflect honestly on its current and future situation. Without self-critical analysis, the necessary measures, which may include the closing of study programs and termination of academic and administrative staff, are hard to communicate and justify.

3.2. Internationality of studies, research (art):

3.2.1. The higher education institution has a strategy for internationalization of research (art) and study activities (including indicators of internationalization), means for its implementation, and measurements of the effectiveness of these activities are performed (not applicable to colleges unless provided for in its strategic documents);

3.2.2. The higher education institution integrates aspects of internationalization into the content of studies and research (art) activities.

77. One of the strategic MRU objectives is the internationalization of research and study activities. The University developed indicators of internationalization and is working on the implementation of set objectives and measurements of the effectiveness of these activities. As the data provided in SER shows, there is variation in the effectiveness of different activities. For instance, there has been an uptake of international research: significantly, during the reporting period, the increase in the number of international projects has been constant and rather impressive (30 in 2018, 30 in 2019, 38 in 2020, 38 in 2021 and 45 in 2022: SER).

However, some mobility figures stagnate. This being said, the action put in place by MRU to support and integrate Ukrainian students into University activities is commendable. During the site visit, several examples were provided of the assistance offered to those students.

78. MRU offers a good number of study programs - more than 20 - in English, including joint Master's, double-diplomas, and doctoral studies in international partnership. Although it was not possible for the Panel to review in detail the substance and quality of the exchange programs - not least because many are still suffering from aftereffects of the Covid19 pandemic - it would seem that MRU has done an excellent job in building a large network of partnerships, attracting a

respectable number of foreign students via Erasmus and other programs (over 5% of all students come for partial studies) and generally internationalizing its programmatic and research activities.

79. **In summary**, MRU has made significant progress in achieving the goals laid down in its vision and mission statement with its transition from a predominantly teaching-oriented institution to a research-intensive one, offering high-quality, international research output. MRU has renewed and expanded its study portfolio, especially via enhanced internationalization, the offer of joint cross-border programs, mobility programs, partnerships, and its close relationship with its social partners. However, the Panel observed that some teaching offers and the scope of research projects still present some problems when it comes to their sustainability. Such problems are particularly relevant in the context of study programs with chronically low enrolment.

The Panel have concluded that MRU is developing studies gradually and research systematically. However, there are various areas that still can be improved, in particular in teaching.

80. **Judgment:** the area is being developed systematically, without any major drawbacks and is given 3 points.

81. **Recommendations:**

- Reviewing the content of study programs to avoid the possibility of duplication and too narrow specialization; focus on quality rather than quantity of study programs.
- Taking a more long-term and strategic approach, rather than the current market-driven approach, when it comes to the development of study programs.
- Ensuring access to learning resource needs, especially in more specialized study areas. For instance, there need to be more resources for research and teaching in international law; more structured information regarding international conferences and events would be desirable.
- Reviewing and adjusting study program marketing approaches to better reflect the content of study programs and the career opportunities.
- Consider requiring post-docs to engage in teaching to enhance early career researchers' competencies and to strengthen the linkages between research and teaching.
- Strengthening the involvement of students in research projects.
- Re-establishing clinical education in law (legal clinics working with live clients) and generally improving and expanding experiential teaching activities.
- Strengthening future capabilities of MRU's research management support unit in terms of assigned staff to assist the research teams across the University.
- Paying more attention to elaborating a sound SWOT analysis of study and research activities with more self-awareness regarding current weaknesses and future threats.

82. **Good practice examples:**

- MRU has developed a modern Research and Innovation Hub infrastructure, a holistic approach to research and consulting services, and an environment fostering engagement and interdisciplinarity.
- Capacity to reach in a rather short period of time a well-recognized place among the main research-led universities in the country and at the regional level.

- Timely support for Ukrainian students in need.

3.4. Impact on Regional and National Development

Impact on Regional and National Development area is analysed in accordance with the following indicators and criteria, set up in the Methodology.

4.1. Effectiveness of the impact on regional and national development:

4.1.1. *The higher education institution carries out an analysis of national and (or) regional demands, identifies the needs to be met and foresees the potential impact on national and (or) regional development;*

4.1.2. *The monitoring, analysis and evaluation of the effectiveness of the measures on national and (or) regional development are performed.*

83. MRU is a state university dedicated to the public good. Its mission is “to promote socially balanced progress of society based on innovative science”, and to “strengthen the democratic State of Lithuania”, “to open ways for each community member to personal and professional success”. MRU’s Strategic Plan 2021-2023 is aligned with the Lithuanian national strategy and with United Nations Sustainable Development Goals. The University was actively involved in the development of several national strategic documents, including “Lithuania 2030”. Within this process, national and regional demands have been thoroughly analyzed.

84. MRU aims to contribute to regional economic growth by preventing potentially uneven economic development, reducing poverty and social exclusion by improving educational outcomes, and promoting sustainability. To implement these tasks, MRU and its academic departments signed over 300 cooperation agreements with various public and private sector partners to initiate and organize joint scientific and practical events, improve students’ practical abilities during traineeships, mentoring and experiential learning, and execute joint projects, among other things. The Panel would like to complement the University for this broad and deep engagement and encourage its further and systematic development in the coming years.

85. MRU has multiple ties to the business sector, which allow the University to better understand and forecast the needs of the national economy and labor market. Social partners and Council members who met with the Panel gave affirmative evidence of the University's support to the Lithuanian innovation and entrepreneurship ecosystem through curricular renewal and education initiatives, as well as contribution to the growth of the business through knowledge transfer to the business community.

86. MRU provides contracted services for businesses, most often for law firms and small- and medium-sized businesses. For example, expert activities were carried out under the measure “Inočekiai”, which encourages business and scientific representatives to establish initial contacts and continue R&D activities already started through cooperation. MRU scientists developed simulation methods for the business and conducted research on creative personality, professional development, and operational efficiency.

87. The University carries out a range of social and market-driven activities related to knowledge transfer, including consultancy for local and governmental authorities, contracted research, and expert services. MRU researchers and experts constantly submit applications and receive funding to conduct research on topics relevant to the region and the state. The academic and administrative

staff are actively involved in various professional activities of public importance, providing expert opinions and participating in various expert groups.

88. MRU also contributes to the improvement of educational outcomes in secondary education and increased inclusion and accessibility of education. In close cooperation with Lithuanian educational institutions and municipal administrations, MRU implements formal post-bachelor professional studies of pedagogy. MRU has closely cooperated with Vilnius City Municipality to solve the problem of school teacher shortage in Vilnius. The university needs to be commended for these efforts.

89. MRU cooperative structures play a vital role also in the implementation of MRU's strategic goals. Social partners participate in the improvement processes of MRU activities. For example, MRU collaborated with public sector entities such as the Ministry of National Defence, social service centers, as well as private sector partners, such as UAB Pigu and UAB Paysera, in the development of innovative study programs, such as Law and Fintech and Finance and Tax Law. The training provided by MRU to address the needs of social partners synergizes research outputs and practice.

90. Besides strategic analyses and forecasts, MRU is committed to acting fast in situations of social or ecological crises. This was evidenced throughout the COVID-19 pandemic when MRU's intellectual and material resources were placed at the disposal of society (during the COVID-19 pandemic, MRU scientists implemented several projects connected with the elimination of effects of the pandemic, and evaluation of the current situation during the migrant crisis – evaluation analysis of the system for asylum).

91. The anticipated merger with Marijampolė College may further contribute to unfolding the potential of regional development. As the Expert Panel has been informed, this merger might be funded by the ministry and could provide additional regional training offers.

92. MRU offers practical training to its students, for example, in the form of internships, which help them to increase their employability opportunities, link their master thesis to external needs, and contribute to the study of regional issues. MRU also offers professional studies, e. g. in pedagogy, to increase the accessibility of education, and its Vilnius King Sejong Institute coordinates Korean teacher training courses. Additionally, MRU conducts study programs in various regions to increase the availability of studies for working families and individuals. MRU has implemented three academies to provide career counseling services for senior schoolchildren, and its Law School has organized a national initiative for legal education for schoolchildren. MRU also conducts free Japanese and Korean language classes.

93. MRU has been working towards reducing poverty and social exclusion in society through various social activities and social responsibility initiatives. The MRU community actively participates in voluntary initiatives such as the Christmas kindness campaign "I'm growing up with a book" and contributes to Food Bank campaigns. MRU supports the Nobody's Children initiative, socially disadvantaged families in the regions, and Ukrainian war refugees. MRU also supports students from Ukraine and Belarus, by accommodating refugees from the war in the Student House (dormitory), providing premises for the Gravitas Schola school for over 130 schoolchildren, and teaching staff members from Ukraine.

94. In addition to its social responsibility, MRU encourages participation in cultural and sports activities and contributes to the development of culture and communication within its community

and with other Lithuanian schools and international organizations. The art collectives of MRU, with their high-quality performances, have won awards and represented MRU at various cultural festivals and competitions in Lithuania and abroad. MRU also has a theatre studio that regularly organizes performances both inside and outside the University.

95. In the SER, MRU refers to the National Progress Plan for 2021–2030 and the National regional development program of 2022–2030, which prioritize the national and specific regional needs of the country. MRU identifies to which tasks the institution contributes in fulfilling its mission. However, in the analysis of the impact on national and regional development, how precisely the University contributes to the identified “tasks” mentioned in the SER is not convincingly justified as the presented tasks are not linked to dedicated KPIs or suitably presented in the report towards dedicated activities. MRU relies, for example, on governmental intentions to ensure high-quality education towards upgrading college programs to university programs. Even though MRU is highly engaged with the region and has a large network of partner institutions, individuals, and alumni, analysis is mainly provided through national plans and programs and is not suitably institutionalized through systemic and continuous processes to measure the impact and effectiveness of various University initiatives related to regional and national development.

4.2. Assurance of conditions for lifelong learning:

4.2.1. The higher education institution monitors and analyses the need for lifelong learning;

4.2.2. The higher education institution anticipates the diversity of forms and conditions of lifelong learning and ensures their implementation;

4.2.3. The higher education institution performs the evaluation of assurance of conditions for lifelong learning.

96. The provisions of the Grand Charter of Universities and the European Charter for Lifelong Learning of Universities focus on the possibilities of lifelong learning (LLL). Non-formal adult education and non-formal continuing education are emphasized in Lithuania's development program and education strategy. According to the information provided in the SER, MRU is constantly monitoring and analyzing LLL needs; it also enumerates objects of such monitoring. It is obvious that MRU is developing its capacity for and contribution to lifelong learning activities. The range of training topics and their offer to the market is based on a scenario-based method of insights. The disadvantages of this method are subjective collegial opinions and MRU's focus on entities with more guaranteed annual or programmatic/project training funding. The need for MRU's lifelong learning is usually generated by mandatory qualification upgrades for certain positions at work.

97. MRU aims to increase the supply and sale of contracted services for lifelong learning and to motivate academic staff to participate in these activities. However, information on the platform used for planning the demand of learning topics and putting them on the market shows that, although MRU wants to enhance options for all stakeholders, institutions, organizations, businesses, and individual persons to participate in the LLL, current activities are focused almost exclusively on the public sector that finances its training from the state budget, for example in law enforcement and criminal justice, i.e., a relatively small part of the society. By contrast, MRU has been largely ignoring LLL needs and opportunities in the private sector. This situation does not comply with the mission of the MRU strategic plan 2021-2023 – to develop personalities that are

free, creative, responsible, have critical thinking and learn their whole lives, *and to open gates for every member of society to personal and professional success.*

98. According to the SER, the respective sectoral orientation will continue to exist until a national training system is created. However, it must be noted that the creation of such a system will not necessarily solve problems of financing for the private sector. The problem has to be solved also by other means, e.g., education. The Report on Life-Long Learning, published by the National Audit Office in 2023, states that the Lithuanian population lacks information on the importance, benefits, and possibilities of life-long learning. Therefore, MRU should take the initiative through more dedicated monitoring and assessment of LLL needs to contribute to the LLL concept, which would include adult education and understanding of science, actively practiced by MRU, also via continuing education, requalification, and continuous professional development.
99. MRU conducts study programs in Vilnius, Kaunas, Utena, and Marijampolė, which directly contribute to opportunities for LLL for working families and individuals by increasing the availability of study programs in the regions. Based on the SWOT analysis provided, MRU, among other strengths, indicates the increasing interest of academic staff to participate in the LLL activities. The significant increase in the value of contracts for the provision of training and other knowledge transfer services - in 2022, there were approximately 120 training sessions with a growing number of participants - is another strength. However, there are weaknesses, such as the insufficient supply of training for individual trainers and the poor marketing of current offerings. Despite MRU attempts, e.g., to engage the Innovation Centre with external stakeholders to identify the needs and provide training to meet these needs, overall, the process of assessing LLL needs is mainly reactive rather than proactive. MRU monitors and analyzes the needs for LLL mainly on demand when approached by its traditional partners in the public sector (law enforcement, criminal justice, etc.). The monitoring is neither systematically conducted nor convincingly linked to the overall institutional strategy. MRU, as a public university, is expected to fulfill the social contract of supporting society as a whole instead of only those groups which are able to pay participation or study fees or come within the range of government-funded training activities. So far, MRU's LLL mission has not been comprehensively developed.
100. MRU provides lifelong learning also through non-formal education. Over the last five years, there has been an increase in the sales of training services. To increase the availability of LLL through non-formal education, MRU has implemented the training and outsourcing research sales platform MokymųLAB, which contains the catalog of training topics offered by MRU. The University has integrated modern teaching methods, increased the use of challenge-based learning methodologies, digitized the content of the training, and used information technology in the training process over time. MRU has offered not only contact but also distance learning and counseling during the pandemic. The University has been flexible in offering contact and distance learning and combining these forms with each other. MRU currently focuses on training sales to groups to achieve efficiency and reduce the administrative burden of training organization.
101. The MRU strategic action plan sets an indicator for a strategic direction – “Development of integrated lifelong learning system”, which is the “Change of the number of lifelong learners (issued certificates) (%) and its target values: current situation – 1600, 2021 – 40%, 2022 – 30% and 2023 – 20%”. According to data from the National Audit Office of Lithuania, progress in the area of lifelong learning is slow but positive; starting from 2014, the level of lifelong learning has grown in Lithuania – up until 2021, it increased by 3,4% to 8,5% among residents having 25-64

years of age, but still has not reached the EU average, which is 10,8%. Therefore, in this situation and having regard to all the main Lithuanian and European strategies on lifelong learning, which also form the basis of MRU strategic action plan 2021-2023, decreasing the target indicator would be unambitious. MRU needs to distinguish between participation in LLL activities - where the goals should be aligned with national targets and aim for EU averages - and certificates issued to participants, versus participants that do not complete or otherwise do not receive certificates. For the latter, the medium- to long-term target should be 100%.

102. There are multiple opportunities for MRU to foster innovation in higher education and non-formal education, e.g. by developing micro-credentials, and to contribute to the culture of lifelong learning in Lithuania, promoted by the State. The MRU initiative to expand LLL offers by introducing micro-credentials started in 2022, and this is a plausible development. Interviewed students and alumni also expressed the expectation that the University could provide more flexible and interdisciplinary continuous learning opportunities. However, there are also several threats, such as the highly competitive environment for the offer of in-service training and the lack of common standards of quality, transparency, cross-border comparability, recognition, and portability, making it difficult to exploit the full potential of micro-credentials.
103. Assurance approaches such as feedback questionnaires, and meetings with lecturers, as well as a demand-oriented approach (like in other educational programs) with a focus on provision and financial aspects. MRU's LLL follows mainly a business opportunity approach and does not fully align with public needs as LLL activities are based only on third-party funding. However, the overall budget share is increasing over the course of the last few years at a generally low level. This is rooted in the financial model of LLL activities. MRU keeps only between 5 and 20% of income while the remaining part is used to pay the lecturer, other involved staff members, and directly incurred costs.
104. MRU annually evaluates the quality and effectiveness of its training services by analyzing and comparing data on the number of clients, trends in new customers, volume of participants, and certificates issued, as well as participant satisfaction. It uses survey questionnaires and evaluations to improve the quality of training services. MRU has made progress in expanding LLL opportunities, increasing the variety of teaching topics and forms, and improving listener satisfaction. The Panel observes that funding for non-formal adult education in Lithuania is still fragmented, there is a lack of motivation for adult learning, and MRU's internal resources are limiting the ability to respond to societal LLL needs. Nonetheless, other conditions to ensure lifelong learning, e.g., access and accessibility, as well as clarity of provided information, should also be evaluated.
105. **In summary**, the effectiveness of MRU's impact is demonstrated through dedicated national indicators and extends to LLL activities. For LLL, MRU defines its region as Lithuania and provides different regional educational offers and flexible learning possibilities and studies in Vilnius, Kaunas, Utena and Marijampolė, making these offers more accessible for working individuals as well as those with families. MRU's impact on regional development, organizations, and individuals was confirmed by social partners. MRU has made progress in expanding the possibilities of LLL, but there are still limitations due to the fragmented funding of non-formal adult education in Lithuania and limited financial resources. The institution needs to focus on addressing weaknesses and threats while leveraging opportunities and strengths to enhance its LLL service quality and effectiveness.

The Panel have concluded that MRU's impact on regional and national development is increasing. However, there are various areas that still can be improved.

106. **Judgment:** the area is being developed systematically, without any major drawbacks and is given 3 points.

107. **Recommendations:**

- Developing the third mission as one of the core missions of the University, to enlarge the impact of the University via LLL activities and use institutional data to support the improvement of MRU's third mission strategy (continuing education);
- Establishing a systemic analysis approach to identify LLL needs instead of a mainly program-driven focus;
- Considering cooperation with other LLL providers nationally and regionally;
- Developing an LLL strategy, including the definition of LLL formats, approaches, and procedures for validation of formal, non-formal, and informal learning based on an internal evaluation of MRU's LLL. This evaluation should cover content, formats, financial approaches, and frameworks, competencies of teaching staff (adult education), services offered to adult learners, and organization of LLL, including marketing, training development, and implementation;
- Revising the financial model of external projects and LLL activities, e.g. gradually increasing the contribution of external projects and LLLs to general overheads and institutional development to 20% and beyond in the medium to longer-term;
- Improving existing services and training programs linked to an overall institutional strategy;
- Defining and describing micro-credentials (size and nature) at the institutional level (see par. 103);
- Paying attention to LLL as a life-wide and life-long partnership between MRU and lifelong learners: for example, introducing stackable degree programs as continuing education programs;
- Reviewing the existing learning outcomes for possible evaluation of competencies in validation processes of non-formal and informal education;
- Increasing publicity and public knowledge about LLL in general and the MRU LLL offers specifically; the current platform www.mokymulab.eu could clearly identify the forms of LLL, providing active links to the respective MRU website locations.

108. **Good practice example:**

- The platform for the provision of training and research on-demand www.mokymulab.eu. The platform contains a catalog of themes and programs of informal training, thus trying to expand the possibilities of LLL. Some enhancement recommendations are made above.

IV. EXAMPLES OF GOOD PRACTICE

In its overall assessment of MRU, the Panel identifies the following examples of good practice in:

Management:

- Flexibility, commitment, and involvement in the decision-making process by the leadership team, in particular, the Senate and the Rectorate.
- MRU's overall effort to promote the well-being of employees, creation of an adaptive work environment that leads to positive developments of work-life balance.
- Practices related to peer learning, the dissemination, and multiplication of knowledge, e. g. how to address the needs of students with special needs.

Quality Assurance:

- Creation of social scholarships for students with special needs and disabilities, also an exemption from student housing fees for students;
- Student mentorship program for integration in the professional field;
- Community Welfare Centre.

Studies and Research (art):

- MRU has developed a modern Research and Innovation Hub infrastructure, a holistic approach to research and consulting services, and an environment fostering engagement and interdisciplinarity.
- Capacity to reach in a rather short period of time a well-recognized place among the main research-led universities in the country and at the regional level.
- Timely support for Ukrainian students in need.

Impact on Regional and National Development:

- The platform for the provision of training and research on-demand www.mokymulab.eu. The platform contains a catalog of themes and programs of informal training, thus trying to expand the possibilities of LLL. Some enhancement recommendations are made above.

V. RECOMMENDATIONS FOR ENHANCEMENT

The Panel's recommendations for further enhancement are:

Management:

- MRU's longer-term vision should be more clearly and specifically articulated and linked to targets. In the development of a longer-term University strategy, the Panel recommends outlining the key directions and aspirations of where the University sees itself *in relation to its vision, mission, and identity* and prioritizing its key strategic objectives. For instance, in the area of internationalization and mobility, the University could reflect not only on current institutional capacity but also the aspirational longer-term targets and how this heightened focus on internationalization might affect the fulfillment of the public mission of the University regionally and nationally.
- Strengthening the strategic planning process: environmental scan, SWOT, longer-term strategy, targets, milestones, and implementation deadlines; specific actions linked with specified financial and human resources, units, and/or employees responsible combined with reporting requirements; where appropriate, the use of selected national and/or international benchmarks.

- Adopting a less reactive and more strategic, systemic, and proactive approach to strategic planning and process management. Clear benchmarks and/or milestones along the processes of performance management coupled with structural and procedural changes could enable the institution to better assess progress towards the achievement of strategic objectives and to take necessary action to improve performance.
- Enhancing the financial management effectiveness, especially with regard to the rentability of individual study programs as well as research grant income distribution.
- Striking a better balance between centralized and de-centralized decision-making, especially in the areas of budget planning, staff professional development, internationalization and student retention management.
- Ensuring the participation of some internal and external stakeholders. For instance, active participation of external Council members in quality enhancement activities like the Panel meeting, student representation in committees, and task force working groups, especially those related to new strategic initiatives, e.g. program development.
- Enhancing publicly available information, in particular for people with disabilities.
- Linking staff training with organizational development: some of the training could be introduced as mandatory (e.g., English, didactic training, including digitally enhanced teaching) in order to ensure that the staff has the right competence to implement organizational change and programmatic development.
- A good practice related to peer learning could be encouraged and promoted across various activities, including academic staff peer reviews and mentoring (to enhance excellent teaching, best teaching methodologies and practices, etc.).
- In light of recent developments in the use of AI (ChatGPT etc.), considering the adoption of AI and digitally enhanced teaching and learning policies.
- Increasing the social scholarship fund, in particular during times of need, like the aftermath of the Covid pandemic and the influx of students from Ukraine.

Quality Assurance:

- Adapting quality assurance approaches and instruments towards institutional research practices. Besides the monitoring approaches MRU is currently undertaking, the University should use available data to be more proactive in dealing with certain issues, e.g. academic integrity, and difficulties with study and course completion. For instance, predictive analytics would help to identify challenges before they impact the study success. This could include learning analytics as well.
- Implementing institution-wide policies and practices regarding academic guidance and counseling to enhance students' academic success and well-being and to minimize student dropout.
- Strengthening the assurance of teaching quality by employing other methods and processes, e.g., academic peer review and mentoring, team teaching, and increased number of double assessments.

- Ensuring pay equity between faculty doing more teaching and faculty doing more research. Possibly evaluate teaching, research, and service and expect excellence in one area and good performance in others.
- Before implementing new quality enhancement approaches and practices, link them with a clear and transparent presentation of the effects and follow-up decisions of such instruments (e. g. in case of the evaluation of research labs or regarding the continuity of study programs with low student numbers).
- Analyzing the available data and its importance for informed decision-making processes.
- Enhancing market research for informed decision-making regarding new study programs.
- The University is strongly advised to develop and communicate a clear strategy on how the expert recommendations will be addressed and which benchmarks will be achieved within the coming months and years; this was not sufficiently done after the last evaluation.

Studies and Research (art):

- Reviewing the content of study programs to avoid the possibility of duplication and too narrow specialization; focus on quality rather than quantity of study programs.
- Taking a more long-term and strategic approach, rather than the current market-driven approach, when it comes to the development of study programs.
- Ensuring access to learning resource needs, especially in more specialized study areas. For instance, there need to be more resources for research and teaching in international law; more structured information regarding international conferences and events would be desirable.
- Reviewing and adjusting study program marketing approaches to better reflect the content of study programs and the career opportunities.
- Consider requiring post-docs to engage in teaching to enhance early career researchers' competencies and to strengthen the linkages between research and teaching.
- Strengthening the involvement of students in research projects.
- Re-establishing clinical education in law (legal clinics working with live clients) and generally improving and expanding experiential teaching activities.
- Strengthening the future capabilities of MRU's research management support unit in terms of assigned staff to assist the research teams across the University.
- Paying more attention to elaborating a sound SWOT analysis of study and research activities with more self-awareness regarding current weaknesses and future threats.

Impact on Regional and National Development:

- Developing the third mission as one of the core missions of the University, to enlarge the impact of the University via LLL activities and use institutional data to support the improvement of MRU's third mission strategy (continuing education);
- Establishing a systemic analysis approach to identify LLL needs instead of a mainly program-driven focus.

- Considering cooperation with other LLL providers nationally and regionally.
- Developing an LLL strategy, including a definition of LLL formats, approaches, and procedures for validation of formal, non-formal and informal learning based on an internal evaluation of MRU's LLL. This evaluation should cover content, formats, financial approaches and frameworks, competencies of teaching staff (adult education), services offered to adult learners, and organization of LLL, including marketing, training development, and implementation.
- Revising the financial model of external projects and LLL activities, e.g., gradually increasing the contribution of external projects and LLLs to general overheads and institutional development from 20% and beyond in the medium to longer term.
- Improving existing services and training programs linked to an overall institutional strategy;
- Defining and describing micro-credentials (size and nature) at the institutional level.
- Paying attention to LLL as a life-wide and life-long partnership between MRU and lifelong learners: for example, introducing stackable degree programs as continuing education programs.
- Reviewing the existing learning outcomes for possible evaluation of competencies in validation processes of non-formal and informal education.
- Increasing publicity and public knowledge about LLL in general, and the MRU LLL offers specifically; the current platform www.mokymulab.eu could clearly identify the forms of LLL, providing active links to the respective MRU website locations.

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