



STUDIJŲ KOKYBĖS VERTINIMO CENTRAS
CENTRE FOR QUALITY ASSESSMENT IN HIGHER EDUCATION

COMMUNICATION FIELD OF STUDY

Mykolas Romeris University (MRU)

EXTERNAL EVALUATION REPORT

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Report prepared in 2024
Report language: English

CONTENTS

I. INTRODUCTION	3
1.1. OUTLINE OF THE EVALUATION PROCESS	3
1.2. REVIEW PANEL	4
1.3. SITE VISIT	4
1.4. BACKGROUND OF THE REVIEW	5
II. STUDY PROGRAMMES IN THE FIELD	6
III. ASSESSMENT IN POINTS BY CYCLE AND EVALUATION AREAS	7
III. STUDY FIELD ANALYSIS	8
AREA 1: STUDY AIMS, LEARNING OUTCOMES AND CURRICULUM	8
AREA 1: CONCLUSIONS.....	11
AREA 2: LINKS BETWEEN SCIENTIFIC (OR ARTISTIC) RESEARCH AND HIGHER EDUCATION	12
AREA 2: CONCLUSIONS.....	15
AREA 3: STUDENT ADMISSION AND SUPPORT	16
AREA 3: CONCLUSIONS.....	19
AREA 4: TEACHING AND LEARNING, STUDENT ASSESSMENT, AND GRADUATE EMPLOYMENT	20
AREA 4: CONCLUSIONS.....	22
AREA 5: TEACHING STAFF.....	23
AREA 5: CONCLUSIONS.....	27
AREA 6: LEARNING FACILITIES AND RESOURCES	27
AREA 6: CONCLUSIONS.....	29
AREA 7: QUALITY ASSURANCE AND PUBLIC INFORMATION	29
AREA 7: CONCLUSIONS.....	32
IV. SUMMARY	33
V. EXAMPLES OF EXCELLENCE	34

I. INTRODUCTION

1.1. OUTLINE OF THE EVALUATION PROCESS

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

1.2. REVIEW PANEL

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

The composition of the review panel was as follows:

1. Panel chair: Prof. dr. Ana Gaio
2. Academic member: Dr. Alberto Luis García García
3. Academic member: Prof. dr. Toni-Matti Karjalainen
4. Social partner: Artūras Olšauskas
5. Student representative: Adrian-Vasile Lăzărescu

1.3. SITE VISIT

The site visit was organized on 24 April 2024 onsite.

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

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

There was no need for translation.

1.4. BACKGROUND OF THE REVIEW

Overview of the HEI

Established in 2004, Mykolas Romeris University (MRU) is a state university, the largest university of social sciences in Lithuania with a main campus in Vilnius, and additional campuses in Kaunas, Utena and Marijampolė. MRU is organised into four schools: Law School, Public Security Academy, Faculty of Governance and Business and Faculty of Human and Social Studies, the latter including the Institute of Communication among its 4 institutes.

Overview of the study field

The BA Communication and Digital Marketing and MA Communication and Creative Technologies are based in the Faculty of Human and Social Studies' Institute of Communication. MRU offers three-cycle education studies across 19 major subjects (Accounting, Communication, Economics, Education, Finance, Informatics, Law, Management, Human Resource Management, Pedagogy, Philology (in English), Psychology, Political Science, Public Security, Social Work, Tourism and Leisure, Translation Studies, Public Administration and Business) and 24 Bachelor degrees, 43 Master's and one professional programme. Doctoral studies are also offered in the fields of Law, Education, Psychology, Economics, Management, and Philology.

Previous external evaluations

This is the first external evaluation for the BA Communication and Digital Marketing since the inception of the revised title and programme in the 2018-19 academic year (the previous BA Communication and Creative Industries programme was launched in 2013-14). The MA Communication and Creative Technologies last had an external evaluation in 2014 for a period of 6 years. The team explained how they addressed the previous expert evaluation recommendations on pp. 16-17 of the SER.

Documents and information used in the review

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

- *Self-evaluation report and its annexes*
- *Final theses*

Additional sources of information used by the review panel:

The following additional sources of information have been used by the review panel:

- *Sample Student Practical Training Agreement*

II. STUDY PROGRAMMES IN THE FIELD

First cycle/LTQF 6

Title of the study programme	Communication and Digital Marketing
State code	6121JX055
Type of study (college/university)	University studies
Mode of study (full time/part time) and nominal duration (in years)	Full-time, 3 years
Workload in ECTS	180
Award (degree and/or professional qualification)	Bachelor's of Social Sciences
Language of instruction	Lithuanian, English
Admission requirements	Secondary education
First registration date	2013-06-17
Comments (including remarks on joint or interdisciplinary nature of the programme, mode of provision)	

Second cycle/LTQF 7

Title of the study programme	Communication and Creative Technologies
State code	6211JX072
Type of study (college/university)	University studies
Mode of study (full time/part time) and nominal duration (in years)	Full-time, 1,5 years Part-time, 2 years
Workload in ECTS	90
Award (degree and/or professional qualification)	Master's of Social Sciences
Language of instruction	Lithuanian, English
Admission requirements	Higher education
First registration date	2012-12-05
Comments (including remarks on joint or interdisciplinary nature of the programme, mode of provision)	

III. ASSESSMENT IN POINTS BY CYCLE AND EVALUATION AREAS

The first cycle of Communication study field at Mykolas Romeris University is given a positive evaluation.

No.	Evaluation Area	Evaluation points ^{1*}
1.	Study aims, learning outcomes and curriculum	3
2.	Links between scientific (or artistic) research and higher education	4
3.	Student admission and support	3
4.	Teaching and learning, student assessment and graduate employment	4
5.	Teaching staff	5
6.	Learning facilities and resources	4
7.	Quality management and public information	4
Total:		27

The second cycle of Communication study field at Mykolas Romeris University is given a positive evaluation.

No.	Evaluation Area	Evaluation points ^{2*}
1.	Study aims, learning outcomes and curriculum	3
2.	Links between scientific (or artistic) research and higher education	4
3.	Student admission and support	3
4.	Teaching and learning, student assessment and graduate employment	4
5.	Teaching staff	5
6.	Learning facilities and resources	4
7.	Quality management and public information	4
Total:		27

1*

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

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

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

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

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

2

III. STUDY FIELD ANALYSIS

AREA 1: STUDY AIMS, LEARNING OUTCOMES AND CURRICULUM

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

FACTUAL SITUATION

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

The I cycle BSSc Communication and Digital Marketing (CDM) aims to equip graduates with a set of communication and digital marketing competencies in readiness for careers in content marketing, digital marketing, and public relations. The programme's competences and learning outcomes are delivered through a mix of subjects such as communication, digital marketing, management, design and creativity that is highly sought by employers from business, public institutions, NGOs and creative industries in what is a diverse and growing sector and labour market – the Digital Marketing market is set to grow at a rate of 32.1% by 2028 whilst the number of internet users is estimated to reach 6 billion by 2027.

The II cycle MSSc Communication and Creative Technologies (CCT) aims to train highly competent new media specialists who are able to deal with the challenges of modern interactive communication technologies and to operate strategically in any aspect of organisational communications. The programme's learning outcomes are delivered across an interdisciplinary mix of subjects that prepare students to undertake research activity relevant to the discipline, professional or academic, independently. Overall, there seems to be an emphasis on the theoretical dimension although this caters for a mature student cohort with significant work and industry experience who often remain in employment through their studies.

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

Insofar as it prepares graduates with the skills to meet the needs of the growing (global) digital marketing, the Bachelor's Communication and Digital Marketing supports MRU's strategic goal to develop studies that are responsive to the needs of the global market. The Master's Communication and Creative Technologies prepares graduates who are creative, able to operate independently and to apply technologies to create new ideas, products and services and in this sense supports MRU's mission namely to develop independent, creative, responsible individuals committed to critical thinking and the strategic goal to build social innovation. Students on both programmes develop lifelong learning competences which aligns with MRU's strategic goal to integrate lifelong learning skills with its educational provision.

ANALYSIS AND CONCLUSION (regarding 1.1.)

The CDM programme's performance in terms of graduate employment in 2020-22 was of 68-72% (respectively) of graduates finding employment within 12 months of graduation (SER, p. 37) which suggests that MRU's CDM graduates' competencies and skills are aligned with the needs of the market. This is a good performance, especially considering the 67% growth in student numbers experienced by the programme in the three years between 2020 and 2023. On the CCT, 87.5% of 2022 graduates, 82% in 2021, found employment within 12 months of graduating (SER, p. 37), a performance that was accompanied by the higher (in relation to CDM) and rising average salary levels in the same period (cf. SER p. 37). This indicates that,

despite the theoretical outlook of the programme, it is in line with the industry and the needs of the job market for specialised graduates with a (high) level (Master of Social Sciences) qualification. Students were also happy with their experience at MRU. MRU’s mission and strategic directions are embedded in both programmes’ aims and learning outcomes.

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

FACTUAL SITUATION

1.2.1. Programmes comply with legal requirements

The programmes are compliant with the relevant study regulations as shown on Tables 1 and 2 below.

Table 1. Bachelor’s Communication and Digital Marketing compliance with legal requirements for first cycle study programmes

Criteria	Legal requirements (ECTS)	Programme compliance (ECTS)
Total programme workload	180–240 ECTS	180 ECTS
Study field	No less than 120 ECTS	138 ECTS
Studies specified by the University (including optional study)	Remaining ECTS	42 ECTS
- Final thesis	No less than 15 ECTS	18 ECTS
- Internship	No less than 15 ECTS	18 ECTS
Contact hours	No less than 20% of learning	27.7%
Individual student learning	No less than 30% of learning	72.3%

Table 2. Master’s Communication and Creative Technologies compliance with legal requirements for second cycle study programmes

Criteria	Legal requirements (ECTS)	Programme compliance (ECTS)	
		Full time	Part time
Total programme workload	90 or 120 ECTS	90 ECTS	90 ECTS
Study field	No less than 60 ECTS	84 ECTS	84 ECTS
Studies specified by the University (including optional study)	Remaining ECTS	6 ECTS	6 ECTS
- Final thesis	A minimum of 15 ECTS	30 ECTS	30 ECTS
Contact hours	No less than 10% of learning	19.3%	20.6%
Individual student learning	No less than 50% of learning	80.7%	79.4%

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

The CDM programme aims to equip graduates with a set of communication and digital marketing competencies for careers in content marketing, digital marketing, and public relations. The relationship between the programme’s aims, general and subject specific competences and respective learning outcomes are articulated with the range of subject units that students need to take to complete the programme successfully (cf. SER Annex 1.3). Teaching and learning on the programme is delivered through various

methods appropriate to the range and types of subjects studied and their learning outcomes. Assessment involves formative/cumulative and summative elements worth respectively 60% and 40% of a final unit mark, reflecting the emphasis on student participation and progression through theoretical and practical courses. The programme offers a wide range of assessment types, individual and in groups, along with conventional exam types and the final thesis defence.

The CCT Master's aim to train highly competent new media specialists is reflected in the theoretical orientation of its learning outcomes, teaching and learning and assessment methods; the latter of which are reflected in the complexity of some of the assessment types including problem analysis, case studies, research work, projects, essays among other, and ultimately the master's thesis defence.

1.2.3. Curriculum ensures consistent development of student competences

The CDM Bachelor's programme is delivered over 3 years, a more intensive study structure than most competitor programmes. The programme structure allows students to progress from foundational theoretical and practical subject knowledge, general skills and foreign languages in their first-year to in-depth knowledge in new media communication, ethics and law, alongside more practical and creative work e.g. digital content creation in their second year. By their final/third year more emphasis is placed on practical/professional and applied knowledge for example to organisational settings, choice of optional subjects of interest; and thesis development.

The Master's CCT is delivered over 1.5 years (2 years part time), a more compact version than other 2 year master's programmes. Subjects connecting the application of theory to practice in the first semester are followed in the second by in-depth studies and content including the creation of work/texts relating to different contexts, along with research methods that support students in developing their master's thesis. Third semester learning evolves primarily around student choice and the subjects that are most relevant to them.

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

Students on both programmes have the opportunity to select alternative units/subject of study enabling them to further explore subjects of interest to them and their career. They may not only choose alternative subject units but can study a foreign language of choice, can choose their own internship project and decide on their thesis topic – the Master's syllabus does not include an internship but students can do one for which they obtain recognition in a diploma supplement. The Erasmus+ programme further provides opportunity for students to study up to 2 semesters (one for master's students) in other universities abroad. Students are also eligible to take micro-credential courses offered by MRU. Students can also benefit from MRU's various entrepreneurship initiatives/opportunities – these competences and skills are increasingly relevant to the industry and specifically CDM and CCT.

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

Students start developing their thesis respectively in semester 4 (CDM) and semester 1 (CCT) from either an existing list of topics from supervisors and consultants or their own topic. Research Methodology modules (respectively for cycle 1 and 2) enable students on both levels to develop their research skills and to further their project in which they are supported by supervisors and/or field based social partners. The latter also propose research topics. This system helps to ensure that the final projects/theses are in line with the subject,

theoretically and empirically, and with sector trends. The research process culminates in the thesis defence, the requirements for which are developed by the FHSS' Institute of Communication.

ANALYSIS AND CONCLUSION (regarding 1.2.)

Tables 1 and 2 show that both CDM and CCT programmes comply with the Lithuanian legal regulation of cycle I and II study programmes and, on the whole, aims, learning outcomes, teaching and assessments are constructively aligned. This is evident also in the final thesis projects which reflect the syllabi and level of study (and depth) of both CDM and CCT programmes. In terms of the syllabi and subjects covered they compare to similar programmes elsewhere. Both curricula are clearly and progressively structured and enable the consistent development of the relevant competences and skills. In this regard, however, the panel noted the comment at the stakeholder student meeting that students found it difficult to make out the relevance of the 'Asian Community: Culture and new Media' module (in its current format) to the programme. Also, whilst it is clear that MRU graduates often go on to develop their own companies, and that there are opportunities to participate in relevant MRU initiatives, there is little evidence of (formal) entrepreneurial skills (including digital entrepreneurship) provision - this is both a key subject in the sector and key (self) employability skill. The panel also felt that although the topic of Artificial Intelligence (AI) is listed twice as a subject-specific learning outcome of the CCT programme this did not come through as embedded in this specialist programme or as systematically as it might. AI is now a key skill much sought-after by employers globally, it is likely to significantly impact (especially) the media and communications industries, and for these reasons warrants more and explicit attention from the programme (or even both programmes).

The support provided for CCT students who do not come from a communications academic background to level them up to those who do is commendable. Both CDM and CCT offer assessments frameworks that are appropriate for the two levels of study. The cumulative and summative elements embedded in the CDM assessment process, the emphasis on student participation and progression in assessment and the opportunities these provide to students to play to their (individual) strengths are noteworthy. The programme provides several opportunities for students to develop their own plan of studies according to their needs; an opportunity that extends to the thesis.

AREA 1: CONCLUSIONS

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

COMMENDATIONS

1. The support provided for CCT students who do not come from a communications academic background to level them up to those who do is commendable.
2. The supportive academic culture at MRU and as students described their studies as highly useful and meaningful.

RECOMMENDATIONS

To address shortcomings

1. To clarify the relevance of the 'Asian Community: Culture and New Media' module to the programme and learning outcomes in the framework of the CDM programme's aims and outcomes.
2. To consider incorporating entrepreneurship (including digital) and relevant competences and skills into the programmes.

For further improvement

1. To embed the topic of Artificial Intelligence in both curricula more explicitly.

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

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

FACTUAL SITUATION

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

There are new science programmes developed for 2021-2025 in the MRU with the vision to create social innovation that serves the sustainability, progress and well-being of society. In the IC (mainly concerning the field of Communication and Information and partially Management), research combines curiosity-driven research and practice-driven research with regards to well-being, social technologies, environment and sustainability. In Communication and Information research, emphasis is mainly on the impact of information digitalization and manipulation to media channels, content creators, and their audiences, as well as on the patterns of the communicative impact on environmental awareness and sustainability.

The results of the annual evaluation show that there has been a clear increase in the number of internationally recognised research papers, both in Communication and Information and in Management. The growing quantity of high-quality scientific publications is a key success factor that indicates the high academic quality of the staff and guarantees also a stability in the number of state-funded places in the study programmes. The number of publications with foreign researchers has also increased. Academic staff is also more engaged in practice-driven project activities. In a 2023 comparative expert assessment, Communication and Information research area received good evaluations. The experts noted, for example, that they got a positive impression of the dynamic and dedicated staff who engage creatively and actively in interdisciplinary research. Moreover, it was stated that the leadership has a strong and clear vision, and staff seems to respond well to the provided instruments of support and reward for research.

The Institute of Communication is discussing possibilities and looking for potential partners to initiate a specific PhD programme in Communication in the future. Even though the MRU does not currently have doctoral studies in the field of communication, many members of the IC academic staff have pursued doctoral studies in other areas at MRU or in other Lithuanian or international universities. These experiences and knowledge are being used also in the teachers' work with communication students, making the studies more diverse and interdisciplinary. In addition, the involvement of academic personnel in project activities

generates evidence-based material and real-life cases that are beneficial for students in both bachelor and master studies.

There are active cooperation arrangements with various domestic, regional, and international partners. For example, major cooperation is conducted with Poland and Latvia to strengthen regional cooperation. MRU is also supportive of the Lublin triangle initiative that involves Lithuania, Poland, and Ukraine. MRU has also joined various academic networks, such as the European Reform University Alliance.

The Communication field currently has eight projects, focused for example on research in education, intercultural communication, new media, media literacy, disinformation, inclusiveness, sustainable development, citizen science, online social networks. The Management has fifteen ongoing projects focusing on research for example in optimisation of forest management, designing of health services, evidence-based sustainable development, digital innovation, sustainable tourism, and ecosystem services. New project ideas, international cooperation, and scientific events are being constantly planned in both areas. The project activities are mostly funded from the state budget and Erasmus+. There are also some cases of funding with the Eurasia Foundation, IREX's Media Literacy in the Baltics Programme, and European Union's Horizon Europe Framework Programme for Research and Innovation.

Overall, research funding is primarily based on project funds and employment of the academic staff in the projects as researchers. Moreover, a professor or associate professor working full-time at MRU can use up to 400 hours per year for scientific activities. MRU also established an internal Research Promotion Fund in 2020 to promote research and experimental development, internationality and interdisciplinarity, as well as to implement the institution's strategic goals. The Fund support can be used for various research activities such as publications, organisation of events, participation in events, expert organizations and networks, international scientific exchanges, and involvement of foreign researchers. The funding is allocated in accordance with the set criteria. The Fund ranged up to 50 000 euros annually in 2020 and 2021, 250 000 euros in 2022, and 350 000 euros (planned) in 2023. The increase signals the growing support for research activities. Additions to salaries are also paid for the staff publishing in high-ranked outlets.

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

In general, the research publications, projects, and partnerships carried out in the communication and management field directly respond to the content of the subjects taught both on the 1st and 2nd cycles of the communication study field.

For example, in the 1st cycle CDM SP, a special emphasis is on introduction of latest developments in the science of marketing, social networks, digital communication, gamification and storytelling. Examples of such practice- and research-based course units are Introduction to Digital Marketing, Basics of Marketing and Social Networks, Digital Content and Computer Graphics, Creative Writing and Advertising Texts, Gamification Methods and Technologies, Digital Advertising Design, Ethics and Law Communication, and Information Crisis Management. A new unit New Media Communication and Journalism in the Era of Disinformation was also started. The 2nd cycle stresses the latest developments in science of innovation management, marketing, intercultural communication, gamification, visual communication, and storytelling. These are actively applied in course units such as Research methodology, Gamification Technologies and Design, Creative Industries, and Creative Management and Leadership.

In 2020-2023, special emphasis has also been put on the efforts of presenting relevant topics in social reality and science to students and the community in the context of the pandemic and the Russian-Ukrainian war. Numerous important public events were organized with the help of remote broadcasting technologies.

Furthermore, since the launch of ChatGPT in 2022, series of AI trainings and discussions were organized, methodological guidelines and instructions for teachers were presented, and master students were encouraged to explore the AI generated text/image possibilities and ethics

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

A similar mechanism has been applied in both study cycles to promote students' involvement in scientific research. This comprises, first, the emphasis on development of general science related competences in the first two years of bachelor studies and the first year of master studies. There, systematic popularization of science and its attractiveness, development of academic writing and presentation competences, as well as methodical and practical scientific research competences are included in the study contents. Students are also encouraged to participate in an essay writing contest. Second, students acquire and share information through active use of different channels and tools such as newsletters, information letters, and social media messages. They are also provided with direct communication contacts with the faculty and thesis supervisors.

Third, regarding the national level, students have also possibilities to retrieve information from certain national HEI conferences and science funding bodies such as the Lithuanian Research Council. Notable scientific conferences, in which participation is encouraged, include the SOCIN conference at MRU, The Information and Communication Theory and Practice Definitions Conference at Vilnius University, The EU Economics, Finance and Business Processes and Trends Conference at Vytautas Magnus University. Moreover, in the field of applied science students can choose The Theory and Practice Conference at Alytus College). The last study year students are also being motivated to participate in scientific events in order to increase the quality of their final thesis content and presentation. The highest ranked thesis authors of both bachelor and master studies are invited to take part in scientific conferences, publish articles in magazines and journals, or present at the young researcher events.

As an example, in 2022 there were altogether seven students participating in scientific research, whereas in both 2020 and 2021 there was only one student.

ANALYSIS AND CONCLUSION (regarding 2.1.)

Evaluation shows that within the field of study higher education is strongly integrated with the latest developments in scientific and practice-based research and technology, enabling students to develop their research skills.

Research within the field of study is generally on a good level. There has been a clear increase in research outputs during the evaluation period. In particular, international higher prestige research journals have been targeted. Stronger internationalisation of journal publications, with co-authors from foreign universities, visits by foreign professors, increase in the volume of international projects and project proposals with international consortia are also successfully showcased. The incentive system and funding mechanisms are effective. The internal Research Promotion Fund is particularly well-received by the staff and also seems to be an effective way to support research activities. The faculty also finds the collegial support strong at the Department.

The curriculum of both study cycles is also organically linked to the latest developments in science, art, and technology. Finally, there are varied opportunities for students to engage in research during the cycles. There is overall a good and well-justified balance between research and practice in the Program's study contents.

There has been a notable improvement in the research environment and output since the previous evaluation. There, the expert team noted that research parts were not clearly visible in the course descriptions and recommended a better balance of practical and research parts. Effective measures are clearly implemented to improve both issues. For instance, new training courses are organized to increase the research competence of teachers and additional methodological lectures are arranged for the staff and the students.

AREA 2: CONCLUSIONS

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

COMMENDATIONS

1. Effective actions undertaken to increase publication quality and quantity.
2. High involvement of practice-based and research-driven contents in the curricula.

RECOMMENDATIONS

To address shortcomings

1. Not identified.

For further improvement

1. Further improving the academic publishing quality even further by targeting higher impact research journals.
2. Further improving the possibilities of students to join research activities and disseminate their theses in public domains.

AREA 3: STUDENT ADMISSION AND SUPPORT

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

FACTUAL SITUATION

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

Application and admission to the first cycle of Communication study field programmes is centralized and is administered by LAMA BPO (Lithuanian Centralised Admissions Information System).

The competitive score for the second cycle of studies in the Communication field is a sum of two parts. First part is represented by the arithmetic means of the marks (grades) for the final examinations and/or the final work of the first cycle studies, multiplied by a weighting factor of 0.8. The second parts consists in the arithmetic means of the remaining grades (marks) in the diploma supplement or appendix.

Also, additional points can be awarded applicants for significant achievements in international and national science olympiads and academic competitions, participation in military service and volunteering, or for involvement in university-sponsored academic schools, including those run by MRU,

For MA studies, applicants who are college graduates should pass a motivation interview in accordance with the procedure approved by MRU.

Information on the admission procedure, and the minimum requirements for state-funded and non-state funded places is available on the MRU website for BA and MA studies. Applicants to the programmes delivered in English are also required to have command of English at B1 level.

At Bachelor studies, in 2020-2021, MRU received 386 applications (65 as first priority). They admitted 15 candidates on state funded places and 58 candidates on non-funded places. Next academic year, the university had 457 applications (75 as first priority). They admitted 54 candidates on state funded places and 74 candidates on non-funded places. In 2022-2023, MRU received 624 applications (90 as first priority). They admitted 46 candidates on state funded places and 104 candidates on non-funded places.

At MA programme studies, in 2020-2021, MRU had 22 candidates (and 9 as first priority). There was registered a significant increase of candidates in the next two academic years. The numbers were very similar for academic years 2021-2022 and 2022-2023. Around 75-80 candidates decided to introduce an option for MRU, and 25-30 considered MRU as a first option.

Each year in the evaluated period, MRU admitted 10-12 students in state funded places at MA studies and other 6, 11 and 3 students were admitted on non-funded state places.

Each year, the maximum possible admission score at BA was 10.00, or 12.00 including additional points which suggests that very good student(s) were admitted at Communication Studies at MRU.

For all academic years in the evaluated period, the minimum competitive score for all entrants was around 5.4 - 5.45. The average score was 6.65 (2020-2021), 7.04 (2021-2022), 6.85 (2022-2023)

At MA, each year the highest score was bigger than 17 and increased with approximately 0.2 every year from 17.4 to 17.87. The lowest and the average score were decreasing in 2021-2022 but they increased again in 2022-2023.

According to the SER, dropout rates within the first year of studies in the first cycle of the Communication study field is quite stable: 15,69% dropouts in 2020/2021; 14,66% dropouts in 2021/2022, and 16,80% dropouts in 2022/2023. The data indicates that dropout rates within the first year of studies in the second cycle of the Communication study field decreased: 13,33% dropouts in 2020/2021; 9,09% dropouts in 2021/2022, and 0,00% dropouts in 2022/2023.

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

According to the SER, if the students previous education took place abroad, the candidate should apply for academic recognition of the foreign qualification as an integral part of the admission process. The service of assessment and academic recognition of foreign qualifications is provided free of charge as part of the procedure for admission to MRU. The decision shall be made within one month from the receipt of all required documents. The applicant has the right to appeal to MRU.

There are internal procedures adopted by the Senate University, which regulates the context of recognition of foreign qualification and prior learning.

In all three years mentioned above, foreign qualifications of 35 applicants from all around the world were not recognized. MRU motivated that decisions based on failure at the entry examinations, to inadequate qualifications for bachelor studies or to insufficient competitive grade.

Also, the Procedure for the Recognition of Study Credits is publicly available and establishes the principles and procedure for the recognition of learning outcomes achieved by a person in other Lithuanian or foreign HEI. Learning outcomes shall be credited without restrictions if they are compatible with the studies conducted at MRU. In total, 1271 ECTS were recognized for 42 students that went in Lithuania or abroad for studies or for practice/internship. In addition, MRU recognizes learning achievements acquired in the non-formal adult education system, but for the evaluated period there were no applications submitted with this type of request.

ANALYSIS AND CONCLUSION (regarding 3.1.)

There is a significant increase of admitted students in the evaluated period. In the SER, the university assumed that is not a good option to inflate admission numbers beyond 4 groups in bachelor studies, but in MA studies, they would aim to increase the number of admitted students on non-funded state places.

The University attract performants students with high admission scores, which can be a hint for the university's continuous improvement and effort.

There is a need for a comprehensive review of the recognition process and for communication with the future international students regarding the challenges faced through this process. It is desirable a better understand of academic requirements for admission to the CDM bachelor program.

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

FACTUAL SITUATION

3.2.1. Opportunities for student academic mobility are ensured

MRU students are encouraged to participate in student academic mobilities. Information about Erasmus+ opportunities and exchange possibilities under the bilateral agreements is published in numerous ways: posters and leaflets are displayed at the university, information is displayed on screens, and also there are events organized in campus or online.

In the last three academic years, were 19, 13 and 14 students from abroad that decided to study at MRU for full-time English first cycle studies in the Communication study field.

In 2020-2021, MRU had 5 BA and 1 MA outgoing students. In the next academic year, the numbers slightly decrease, being only 4 BA outgoing students. The numbers increased consistently in 2022-2023, when MRU had 16 BA and 3 MA students.

Regarding the incoming students, were 20 BA students and 4 MA that decided to have a mobility in the evaluated period coming at MRU.

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

MRU offers various forms of academic, financial, social, psychological, personal support for students and provides them with the necessary counselling and recommendations.

Regarding financial support, students are entitled to apply for several scholarships. Incentive scholarships are awarded to the best-performing students, both state-funded and non-funded. Single-time incentive scholarship may be awarded to an MRU student for active scientific, social, cultural, or sports activities, or for high achievements in scientific, cultural, or sports activities. The university offered 25 scholarships in 2020; 21 scholarships in 2021; and 98 scholarships in 2022 in the bachelor's programme; and 11 scholarships in 2020; 3 scholarships in 2021; and 15 scholarships in 2022 in the master's programme.

Social scholarships can be awarded for students in a difficult financial situation, suffering the death of a parent, sickness, natural disasters, or in other exceptional cases. In certain situations clearly specified the tuition fee may be reduced by up to 50% or the student may be fully exempted from paying the tuition fee.

The Community Welfare Centre was established at MRU to coordinate the provision of support services, to increase their relevance, and to ensure the well-being of members of the MRU community. Also every year, the Career Centre organizes events, training, and consultations on career development issues and provides updates on the internships, job places and volunteering opportunities within public institutions, NGOs and businesses.

Psychological student support is provided by the Psychological Service, which gives to students and staff with one free consultation. Spiritual guidance is also available at St. Augustine's chapel.

As revealed in the site visited, foreign students have some problems with integration in Student Union Body. They can join the students groups, but the majority of students association activity is in Lithuanian, so it is a bit difficult to integrate non-Lithuanian speakers.

3.2.3. Higher education information and student counselling are sufficient

New students receive „Freshman's study guide" that includes basics of academic ethics, information about MRU's library, available international study mobility, mechanisms to accommodate the special needs of students. Also, there are some important guidelines about financing studies. Students representative

organize meetings where topics like engaging in academic life, or different requirements and study methods university are discussed

All relevant information is also available on the MRU website. As revealed at the evaluation visit, students seem to know which staff person to contact for different issues at the university

ANALYSIS AND CONCLUSION (regarding 3.2.)

Even though students are not so interested in participating in Erasmus mobilities, in the study visit it was revealed that a major motivation for that kind of mobilities is the possibility of travelling to far-away countries outside the EU, such as the USA, Japan, Kazakhstan or Brazil. It seems that the university makes efforts to have international partnership with other universities outside the EU-zone

The academic, social, financial, and personal support seems sufficient, and meets the needs of students, as it was revealed at the visit.

One free psychological consultation seems to be insufficient, due to high demand for personal psychological support in the evaluated period

AREA 3: CONCLUSIONS

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

COMMENDATIONS

1. Not identified.

RECOMMENDATIONS

To address shortcomings

1. Extend the number of free psychological consultations for students.
2. The recognition process should be more intuitive (extend the information available to students, procedures to be faster and easy to understand and to find on site, provide consultations in advance for candidates before applying to prevent a high rate of non recognition).
3. Create procedures and context to integrate foreign students in all aspects of academic life, including Student Union Body.

For further improvement

1. Having more mobility agreements with universities outside the EU-zone.

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

4.1. Students are prepared for independent professional activity

FACTUAL SITUATION

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

Based on the information from the SER and additional details from the site visit, MRU seems strong and well-organized in many areas.

Both programs emphasise preparing students for the workplace through a combination of theoretical knowledge and practical skills. For instance, the CDM program includes specific training on digital marketing platforms and public relations campaigns, while the CCT program focuses on new media and the technical and creative handling of modern communication technologies.

It is worth mentioning MRU's efforts to strengthen digital competencies of the academic staff and to increase access to studies. 5 members of academic staff from the Institute of Communication participated in the training “Digital transformation of education (EdTech)”, and prepared fully digitized versions of their courses.

Feedback from students, alumni, and industry partners plays a crucial role in continuously updating the curriculum and teaching methods to keep pace with changes in the professional landscape.

In summary, MRU's method of getting students ready for their careers is thorough and includes practical experiences. This not only helps graduates start their careers but also to do well in their chosen fields.

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

SER and site visit showed that MRU has taken significant steps to ensure access to higher education for socially vulnerable groups and students with individual needs. That includes modifications to physical and digital infrastructure to accommodate students with disabilities. In addition, MRU provides flexible study arrangements and personalised support systems for students requiring special accommodations. Besides that, University offers scholarships and financial aids to reduce economic barriers for vulnerable groups. These steps are encouraging full participation in all university activities to foster a sense of belonging and community among all students.

ANALYSIS AND CONCLUSION (regarding 4.1.)

MRU's approach to both teaching and learning and access to education is comprehensive and well-aligned with contemporary educational standards. The university's methods ensure that students are not only able to achieve their academic potential but are also supported through various means to overcome personal and social challenges.

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

FACTUAL SITUATION

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

MRU provides detailed insights on how learning progress is monitored and feedback is provided to students, aiding their learning progress and performance.

Monitoring Learning Progress involves regular tests during and after courses to check students' skills and knowledge. Oral presentations are graded in class, and assignments uploaded on Moodle get personal feedback right there. This provides continuous feedback and helps students see their progress instantly.

MRU teachers actively provide feedback to help students evaluate their progress and plan their studies. This includes opportunities to resubmit assignments with detailed guidance and post-internship discussions that provide comprehensive feedback.

Formative feedback involves teachers encouraging ongoing reflection on learning methods, helping students effectively assess and adjust their approach. This feedback is regularly provided in class, either written or spoken.

4.2.2. Graduate employability and career are monitored

SER and site visit proves that the monitoring of graduate employability and career paths at MRU is implemented through several active mechanisms – Data Collection System, Career Centre Activities, Feedback from Employers, Regular Surveys and Reports and Public Availability of Data.

MRU uses multiple systems to track and analyze the career trajectories of its graduates. This includes the Career Management Information System (KVIS) and the Education Management Information System (ŠVIS), along with other databases like Reitingai magazine and STRATA. These systems provide quantitative data on graduate employment rates and other relevant metrics up to three years post-graduation.

The MRU Career Centre plays a significant role in collecting subjective career data through direct interactions with graduates via email, social media, telephone, and alumni events. This qualitative approach helps gather detailed insights into the graduates' career progress and satisfaction levels.

Employers' opinions are also considered in monitoring graduate outcomes. This feedback is collected during the defense of bachelor's and master's theses, as well as through internships where employers provide evaluations of students' performance and necessary competences. Such direct feedback from the workplace is crucial for adjusting educational programs to better meet market needs.

Surveys are regularly conducted among graduates to assess their satisfaction with the education received and its relevance to their current jobs. This feedback is used to continually improve study programs and ensure they align with professional standards and market demands.

Information regarding graduate employment rates and their satisfaction with the curriculum is regularly updated on the MRU website, making it accessible not only to current and prospective students but also to the general public. This transparency helps prospective students make informed decisions about their education paths.

These structured approaches enable MRU to maintain a comprehensive overview of graduate outcomes.

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

The enforcement of policies for academic integrity, tolerance, and non-discrimination is thorough and strong, involving a detailed set of rules, infrastructure, and community involvement. It is well defined in all main fields: Code of Academic Ethics; Ethics Infrastructure; Academic Centre of Ethics and International Collaboration; Educational Programs and Training; Monitoring and Feedback Mechanisms and Non-Discrimination Policies.

It is worth mentioning, that Since 2012, MRU has implemented a mandatory check for plagiarism of bachelor and master’s theses in order to ensure academic integrity of written works. All final theses are accumulated on the MRU electronic studies platform and are checked using the national text matching check system – ESAS (formerly known as EPAS).

During the COVID-19 pandemic, the transition to online lectures and exercises ensured uninterrupted learning and maintained academic continuity. Students moved their completed assignments and final theses to the Moodle environment, where the new OXSICO antiplagiarism verification system was introduced.

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

The 6 procedures for submitting and processing appeals and complaints at MRU are designed to be clear, accessible, and effective: 1) Appeal Submission Process; 2) Appeal Processing; 3) Further Recourse; 4) Documentation and Transparency; 5) Education on Appeal Rights; 6) Record of Effectiveness

ANALYSIS AND CONCLUSION (regarding 4.2.)

MRU has established a comprehensive system for student assessment, progress monitoring, and assuring academic integrity that emphasises transparency, effectiveness, and fairness.

Overall, MRU's approach not only supports the academic development of its students but also prepares them for professional environments where integrity and ethical behaviour are valued. This system thus plays a critical role in upholding the quality and reputation of MRU's academic programs.

AREA 4: CONCLUSIONS

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

COMMENDATIONS

1. MRU is recognized for its academic integrity efforts, including compulsory plagiarism checks using the national ESAS system for all bachelor's and master's theses since 2012.
2. The university actively involves students and faculty in ethical academic practices through training sessions and public lectures.
3. MRU adapted its assessment and integrity systems for remote learning during COVID-19, incorporating tools like OXSICO for anti-plagiarism checks and establishing procedures for remote assessments to uphold integrity standards.
4. MRU regularly updates its academic integrity policies based on feedback from its academic community. This includes surveys on teaching quality and ethics, ensuring the university's approach remains effective and relevant.

RECOMMENDATIONS

To address shortcomings

1. Not identified.

For further improvement

1. There should be an emphasis on further strengthening the digital competencies of the academic staff, which includes increasing access to studies through digital transformation projects.
2. The university should consider involving social partners and alumni more actively in curriculum development and improvement.

AREA 5: TEACHING STAFF

5.1. Teaching staff is adequate to achieve learning outcomes

FACTUAL SITUATION

The data on the number of teachers indicate that there has been a gradual increase in the last academic years, from 24 to 27 teachers in the first cycle and from 9 to 13 in the second cycle.

The student/teacher ratio has varied due to the increase in the number of students, going from 235 students in the academic year 2020-21 to 380 in the academic year 2022-23 in the first cycle. In the second cycle, the number of students rose from 29 to 37 in the same academic year. The student/teacher ratio has increased in the first cycle by almost 70% in the same academic years, while in the second cycle, it has decreased by almost 9%.

On the other hand, the number of permanent teaching staff is higher than the number of part-time teaching staff in both cycles. All these figures consolidate a project focused on the stabilization of the teaching staff and the search for quality and excellence in the second cycle, thanks to the reduction of the student/teacher ratio.

The majority of lecturers, including associate lecturers, hold a PhD and have considerable experience in the professional sector, both of which benefit the specialization required in the syllabuses evaluated. Regarding research, they have an adequate number of research projects with national and European funding.

Given the significant number of professors with PhDs, we believe that establishing a Doctoral School would be a valuable initiative for transferring knowledge from the university to society. The objective of this school is to train teachers and professionals with PhDs, preparing them for integration into companies as well as public and private universities.

Regarding the curricula, they have the Study Field Committee in Communication which allows the integration of the contents of the subjects.

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

The Communication and Digital Marketing (first cycle) as well as Communication and Creative Technologies (second cycle) curricula are highly specialized, and this is the program's strength. Each year, there are three to four groups with a maximum of 30 students per group. First cycle students have several compulsory subjects, and others are free choices. However, in both options, the specialization and focus on the professional sector are maintained. All courses are in English, which allows international students to integrate and recruit foreign teachers.

All these factors put high demands on the teaching staff as they must be fluent in English, have professional experience, and carry out research work focused on projects and article publication. The university has an exciting experience in doctoral and post-doctoral activities, which puts it in a privileged position for good professional development.

The teacher's choice to teach a specific subject, as well as the right choice of a social partner who collaborates with the program, accompanies the specialization in the program. The teacher engages the social partner in the classroom to ensure the quality assurance of topics. They explain practical things, and the lecturer teaches the theoretical part of the subject. Thus, the choice of a social partner is critical to the program's success. They can be in contact with colleagues from other disciplines. They can discuss collaborations and ways of carrying out projects, and they have laboratories with established topics to focus the basic parameters of application of the different topics of the final theses on the requirements indicated by the social partners.

In this perspective, they cover the collaboration between teachers both in the conceptual part of the content and in the practical part with the social partners.

In addition, the lecturers explained in the meeting that they collaborate with specific institutions to ask for information on certain aspects of the final theses or even to cover the specific needs of these institutions.

The students evaluate the lecturers through meetings. They have to do a summary of the consideration of each teacher. It is a personal decision of the teacher, but there is no statistic global evaluation of the University.

ANALYSIS AND CONCLUSION (regarding 5.1.)

The fundamental aspects of being on the road to university excellence (research and teaching) are perfectly defined on the part of the teaching staff. The profile is adjusted to the specific needs of a syllabus with very high specialization objectives.

There is a very high percentage of teaching staff with a high level of research (PhD) and, in recent years, there has been a tendency to increase the number of lecturers, including those from other countries, which has a positive impact on the diversity and quality of the teaching staff. At the same time, the professional experience of the teaching staff is specific to the area of knowledge on which the curricula are focused. It is important to appreciate that the subject matter of the first-cycle Bachelor's and second-cycle Master's degrees is so specific that it requires a high level of professional knowledge of the subjects, at the same time as a demanding theoretical level. The research projects presented, the doctoral theses, and the publications of the teaching staff meet these requirements.

On the other hand, coordination between subjects to achieve a high degree of specialization is essential for the success and approval of the students. The Study Field Committee In Communication seems to cover this requirement and allows us to think that the contents are adapted to the training needs. It is also very interesting that there is coordination with the institutions and social partners to cover specific topics that are applied in the content of the subjects and the final theses. With this, and as a result of the experience indicated by the professors interviewed, there is a constant exchange of ideas and knowledge between the academic and professional worlds.

Another interesting and different aspect is the fact that the students evaluate the teaching staff through specific meetings each semester, forgetting the overall statistical evaluations. This factor makes it possible to know more directly the students' appreciation of each lecturer, which can help them to improve the quality of individual teaching.

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

FACTUAL SITUATION

5.2.1. Opportunities for academic mobility of teaching staff are ensured

The MRU seems to have a successful line of work focused on internationalization. This involves students and teachers through the teaching of classes in English, the recruitment of international teaching staff, and specific mobility support programs for both teaching staff and students.

The number of programs and grants that combine to assist mobility is very relevant and is based on international agreements that allow for the development of concrete and articulated exchanges around issues of bilateral interest.

Mobility based on the ERASMUS+ program is very relevant and helps, without a doubt, to integrate MRU teaching staff into the European university community. At the same time, the diversity of countries in which research takes place is remarkable. The number of stays has been increasing over the different academic years, which implies that the teaching staff is motivated to carry them out.

The only point that could be improved is the length of the stays. All of them are short stays which, we are convinced, have more to do with academic experiences than with research projects where the time spent in foreign centers is longer.

It would be interesting to generate exchange projects with a longer duration to help consolidate relations between professors from different international centers and MRU faculty. The diversity of countries of visiting professors to MRU from other international institutions does not correspond to the diversity of countries to which MRU professors go. This factor is indicative of the fact that such short stays do not consolidate strong enough links between professors to generate a constant exchange between professors with common academic and research interests from different international centers.

The creation of closer ties allows for a stronger exchange of knowledge and greater visibility in the university community.

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

MRU offers specialized training programs for teachers to acquire skills and academic qualifications based on their interests. According to the teachers, they seek specialized courses to update their knowledge on specific topics, depending on the program. For example, they acquire certificates offered by Google to update their knowledge of digital marketing content. In recent times, MRU has developed specialized training related to new teaching experiences, such as virtual teaching techniques. Due to COVID-19, it became necessary to virtualize teaching and establish new teaching techniques that allow content to be taught both face-to-face and virtually. MRU offers courses to help teachers acquire these competencies. Teachers find these courses valuable in acquiring new professional competencies related to EdTech. Moreover, the university's researchers offer lectures on their lines of research, which are open to both teachers and students. Teachers confirmed that these lectures are useful.

ANALYSIS AND CONCLUSION (regarding 5.2.)

The MRU faculty has the optimal academic, research, and professional competencies to deliver the assessed syllabus program. The collaboration with social partners is interesting and is reflected in the content of the subjects and the final theses.

The ratio of professors with PhD and MA is relevant, which places the institution at a high level about the possibility of integrating teaching and research in the contents of the subjects. However, according to the lecturers themselves, it would be important to encourage a greater research culture with a view to a higher rate of publications and research projects.

Regarding research, the projects they are developing or have developed have national and European funding. This is interesting because it is a way of demonstrating the European vocation of the institution. Here too, it would be very prudent to encourage longer research stays among the teaching staff.

The internationalization of the University is evident, the strong points being the incorporation of many foreign students and the recruitment of professors of different nationalities. Continuing along these lines guarantees future success.

On the other hand, it would be important to have a strategic plan for the training of teaching staff to cover the most relevant needs for the integration of AI in teaching and research. Self-training of teaching staff is a good way of encouraging personal initiative, but it covers specific interests and does not cover the global objectives that the institution will need in the short and long term.

AREA 5: CONCLUSIONS

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

COMMENDATIONS

1. High level of teaching specialization and research level of the teaching staff.
2. Teamwork among teachers and with social partners seems very consolidated and fruitful.

RECOMMENDATIONS

To address shortcomings

1. Not identified.

For further improvement

1. Implement a Doctoral School to train researchers to integrate them into companies and other national and foreign universities.
2. Create plans to encourage teaching staff to undertake research stays of longer duration, to consolidate closer ties with other professors in the European university community.
3. Establish a strategic plan for teacher training about AI.

AREA 6: LEARNING FACILITIES AND RESOURCES

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

FACTUAL SITUATION

The university's facilities meet the necessary expectations required for the delivery of the programs evaluated. The classrooms are furnished in such a way as to make teaching techniques more dynamic, facilitating teamwork and debate, crucial aspects for the creation of critical thinking.

There are sufficient architectural elements to make the building accessible to anyone with mobility issues. At the same time, there is specific software in the library to help visually impaired people consult the library.

The technical means serve to ensure that students acquire sufficient skills in their training. The amount of bibliographic funds is sufficient in the fields related to the main areas of knowledge: communication, marketing and creative industries (Annex 6.1).

Internships are part of the teaching and learning dynamics and are carried out in private companies and public institutions, both national and international.

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

Architectural adaptation systems for people with mobility issues are perfectly adapted to the needs of these people. At the same time, there is a support system for the consultation of bibliographic resources for the visually impaired.

The classrooms have sufficient technical resources for teaching with multimedia systems. The bibliographic collection and journal subscriptions are interesting but not outstanding. For example, there are only 38 data bases in Digital Marketing compared to 224 in Marketing and 775 in Communication. An institution with such a large number of research-oriented lecturers should have a more complete and diversified bibliographic collection. Given that the curriculum contains subjects such as psychology, philosophy, e-business, public relations, ethics and other, it would be convenient to have identified the volumes and subscriptions that the University has regarding these subjects.

External internships are an interesting point for MRU as they have national (public and private) and international partners. This factor is interesting as it helps the internationalization of the institution and the transfer to society, fundamental issues in today's university system.

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

MRU has programs to help disabled students. University strategy for disability students is one of the strengths. Therefore, continuing on this path is the best way to reinforce this strength of the institution. There are technical means that make it possible to teach practical subjects. They have plans to update ICT equipment and software for five years. We believe that it would be interesting to shorten the duration of the renewal plans for this type of equipment since the integration of AI will mean a drastic change in technical needs.

Regarding the updating of bibliographic holdings, the objective should focus more on acquiring more diverse holdings focused on the topics of the curricula. For example, we believe that there is a shortage of funds in a subject as important for the curricula as Digital Marketing.

ANALYSIS AND CONCLUSION (regarding 6.1.)

People with mobility or visual disabilities have all the means to lead a normal academic life at the MRU. The technical means are sufficient. However, the five-year ICT renewal plans should be shortened and adapted to the urgent needs demanded by the audiovisual labour market which, on the other hand, is in continuous change and more so with the introduction of AI in the workflow. It would be interesting to foresee what the integration of AI in curricula related to Digital Marketing and Creative Industries will entail. Defining a plan to incorporate these tools in the curricula and the necessary teacher training would be very beneficial for teachers and students.

We believe that investment in bibliographic resources should be defined more precisely, adapting them to the specific needs of the syllabuses.

The dynamics of external internships are interesting, although collaboration with the public sector should be further developed. The examples of social partners listed in the SER are mainly non-governmental institutions and private companies. In addition, in the meeting with Alumni and Social Partners they indicated that: “The collaboration between public sector and MRU University is increasing in the future, but nowadays there is no concrete project”.

AREA 6: CONCLUSIONS

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

COMMENDATIONS

1. To have a strategic plan to address the problems of people with mobility impairment is very interesting.

RECOMMENDATIONS

To address shortcomings

1. Not identified

For further improvement

1. To increase the bibliographic collection in line with the study programmes.
2. Incorporate bibliographic funds to more specific areas such as Digital Marketing.
3. Introduce a strategic plan to renew ICT in a shorter amount of time.

AREA 7: QUALITY ASSURANCE AND PUBLIC INFORMATION

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

FACTUAL SITUATION

7.1.1. Internal quality assurance system for the programmes is effective

At the strategic level, MRU management is driven by the quality assurance policy and values embedded in a number of documents framing the internal quality assurance system. The documentation has undergone many recent updates. In earlier documents, more attention was paid to the provisions of the quality of studies, while now the provisions of the quality of both studies and research are more balanced. Moreover,

provisions on the preparation of a new generation of researchers are additionally integrated in the new documentation. MRU's quality assurance policy is taken into practice through a variety of processes and regulations. Through them, internal and external stakeholders assume responsibility and engage in quality assurance at all levels. Until 2023, there were three separate documents to regulate the quality assurance processes, but currently they are combined into one document called the Regulations of Internal Study Quality Management at MRU. Upgrading was needed, while the national system of external evaluation and accreditation of studies had changed in 2019, and there appeared a demand for clearer definition of the functions and responsibilities of different stakeholders across the full life-cycle of each study programme.

The Senate and Rectorate are responsible for the formulation and implementation of the quality policy for studies and research. The academic units and study field committees are responsible for the quality of study programmes. The Academic Affairs Centre is responsible for the initiation and preparation of the MRU legal acts and for the quality of support to the academic community. Lecturers are responsible for the quality of the teaching and students are responsible for their personal achievements.

The most important quality assurance activities are concentrated in the Study Field Committee. It is responsible for the supervision of the quality of curriculum, the compliance of the programmes with the needs of stakeholders, the supervision of teaching staff members' competencies, the adequacy of material resources, the supervision of the various study tools, and the publicity of the programmes. SFC also maintains a feedback system with students, graduates, and other stakeholders of the programmes in the study field. The contents of the study field programmes are reviewed, evaluated, and updated annually. Modifications are made either on the bases of changes in legal acts of Lithuania and MRU regulations or feedback gathered from the students, teaching staff members, and other stakeholders. The changes are approved by the Senate for each academic year. The study plans and descriptions of study programmes and course units are the only internal legitimate document that determines the study content of programmes and subjects. They are available to the MRU community on the intranet.

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

The Study Field Committee consists of the supervisors of study field programmes, at least two students (representing different study cycles), at least two lecturers (teaching at different study cycles), at least one representative of external social stakeholders, and at least one graduate student. Student representatives are approved by MRU Student Representation. The Study Field Committee serves as the main platform of engagement of all stakeholders and regularly discusses the learning outcomes, study plans, and feedback, as well as monitors the achievements of students, graduate employment, and alumni feedback.

Teaching staff is involved in assessment and improvement of the quality of the study programmes, developing new subjects, enhancing their own research potential, and developing professionally in seminars or scientific training programmes. The results of the student feedback survey are also discussed individually with every lecturer during the annual interview. MRU does not renew contracts with teachers who have recurring negative evaluations.

The quality of study programmes is constantly received through monitoring students' feedback. This concerns their reactions on assignments, individual questions and requests, answers submitted via centralised MRU online surveys (students fill in a questionnaire after each semester about each subject, describing various aspects of the subjects and the work of the lecturer), as well as their academic progress and achievements. Student representatives also submit proposals for the improvement of the study process in the Study Field Committee. At the beginning and at the end of each semester, students also meet with the staff of the dean's office to share their opinion about the study programmes and to share suggestions on

how to improve the study process. The summaries of students' opinions on the quality of subjects and study programmes are publicly available on the MRU website.

Social partners are involved in the quality assurance activities through the participation in the bachelor's and master's theses defence committees, involvement in internships and participation in the Study Field Committee. The staff also maintains regular contacts with partners to discuss the topics of bachelor or master theses, the student learning process, the evaluation of results, and various other cooperation issues. Partners' opinions and development ideas are also collected through feedback in student internships. The alumni of the study programmes are also members of the Study Field Committee and represent the opinions of graduates within development discussions. Furthermore, there are surveys for graduates, consisting of a questionnaire on the completed programme and acquired competencies, and for social partners, including a questionnaire sent for the members of the Qualification Commissions about the student final theses and their demonstrated knowledge and competences. Social partners can also be interviewed orally concerning various relevant issues related to the quality of studies.

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

Surveys are voluntary, anonymous and are organized electronically. Information on each study programme and indicators of the quality of studies are publicly available. The MRU website offers a strong body of information on study programmes, admission requirements, learning objectives, acquired qualification, and other issues. External assessment and accreditation conclusions are also published on the MRU website. Study process activities with students are made public on different social media outlets.

7.1.4. Student feedback is collected and analysed

Student surveys include questionnaires of various types and for various purposes. There are surveys on the quality of course unit, on the quality of teaching the course unit for incoming Erasmus+ and other mobility programmes students, on the quality of internship, on the chosen study programme for the final year students, on the quality of organization of study process for incoming Erasmus+ and other mobility programmes students, on the reasons for suspending studies, on the reasons for terminating studies, and on the quality of the thesis preparation process.

The recent student feedback survey results show that student satisfaction in the study programmes is quite high and has increased compared to previous years. There are some areas needing improvement, such as the usage of library resources, hardware, software and other resources. Students' participation in activities such as events, study visits, and projects, as well as the usage of consultations and closer involvement with social partners could be further improved.

ANALYSIS AND CONCLUSION (regarding 7.1.)

The development of the Communication Studies study programmes at MRU is based on a detailed and clear internal quality assurance system, from the University's strategic level to implementation. The system involves all stakeholders and applies continuous and effective monitoring, transparency and public information. There is a clear division of responsibilities between various administrative and academic levels. The Study Field Committee and other bodies, practices and procedures ensure a continuous and quality monitoring and improvement of the study programmes. Faculty members and stakeholders of the university are involved in the feedback cycles, which allows for quality support, assurance, and rapid identification of quality issues. Information and data on the implementation of the Communication study programmes is

regularly collected and analysed and is publicly available to students and other stakeholders. In particular, student feedback is constantly and extensively collected and analysed. Based on the documentation and site visit, students feel they can easily voice feedback and that it has an impact on their studies.

Overall, the implemented feedback system allows for regular and systematic collection and accumulation of information on the implementation of studies, monitoring of trends and reaction to them. As a minor point of development, closer communication between the field of practice and particularly the first cycle studies may be sought after in order to provide students with better view on different career opportunities within the field.

AREA 7: CONCLUSIONS

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

COMMENDATIONS

1. Strong involvement of all the stakeholders in the evaluation and improvement of the study programme.
2. Students are highly satisfied and motivated with the Communication study programmes.

RECOMMENDATIONS

To address shortcomings

1. Not identified.

For further improvement

1. Closer communication between the field of practice and the first cycle studies to ensure involvement of more practical knowledge and more focused understanding of different career opportunities within the communication field.

IV. SUMMARY

This External Evaluation Report (EER) was compiled by the expert panel and is based on the detailed Self-Evaluation Report and supporting documentation submitted by MRU as well as the information gathered from the various stakeholder meetings and campus tour during the site-visit. The panel wishes to thank MRU and all the stakeholders involved in this process for their efforts in the preparation of the SER and the evidence provided and for their engagement with this panel.

These activities enabled the panel to appraise the different aspects of curriculum design, delivery and quality assurance and to identify some of the key strengths of MRU's provision, in particular, the support provided for students entering the CCT programme who do not have a communications first degree to help them catch up with subject area students; the mix of theory and practice of both first and second cycle curricula; the collaborative culture between academics and social partners; the high level of teaching specialisation and the initiatives to increase staff publications both in terms of quality and quantity; the academic integrity framework involving not only training but also dealing with academic misconduct; the plan to make the buildings accessible to disabled people; the involvement of all stakeholders in the evaluation and development of the study programme; and, crucially, the happiness of the students with both programmes when they met this panel.

The panel, however, also noted areas needing review and improvement, namely, including entrepreneurship (not least digital) in programme content; developing the quality of research outputs and target high impact factor academic journals; enhancing opportunity for students to participate in research activity or to disseminate their theses where relevant; expanding the number of free psychological consultations available to students; speeding-up the processing of degree recognition for international students as well as promoting their integration into academic life more effectively; keeping up the disability-friendly building improvements; supporting staff to engage in European mobility programmes; increasing the library provision in line with the study programmes' fast-growing subjects and specific areas such as Digital Marketing; enabling especially first cycle CDM students to understand and explore the range of career opportunities available across the communication sector.

This expert panel's final recommendation acknowledges the impact of Artificial Intelligence (AI) and the cruciality of AI skills for every sector and occupation, specifically, Higher Education and the communication industry. It therefore urges MRU to embrace the topic of AI across its programmes more explicitly: both as a tool for teaching and learning and as a Communication subject-specific area of competency and skill whilst promoting its responsible use by students.

Overall, the panel is satisfied that MRU delivers two strong first and second cycle study programmes and prepares graduates that are suitably qualified to engage with the industry and job market at their respective levels.

V. EXAMPLES OF EXCELLENCE

Examples of excellence should include examples exhibiting exceptional characteristics that are, implicitly, not achievable by all.

- High level of teaching specialisation and research level of the teaching staff.
- Teamwork among teachers and with social partners seems very consolidated and fruitful.
- Strong involvement of all the stakeholders in the evaluation and improvement of the study programme.