



CENTRE FOR QUALITY ASSESSMENT IN HIGHER EDUCATION

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**EVALUATION REPORT**

**STUDY FIELD of Public Health**

at Lithuanian University of Health Sciences

**Expert panel:**

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

**Evaluation coordinator – Ms Austėja Pliupelytė**

Report language – English

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## Study Field Data

Title of the study programme	<b>Public Health</b>	<b>Veterinary Food Safety</b>
State code	6121GX010	6121GX011
Type of studies	University studies	University studies
Cycle of studies	First	First
Mode of study and duration (in years)	Full-time (4 years)	Full-time (4 years) Part-time (6 years)
Credit volume	240	240
Qualification degree and (or) professional qualification	Bachelor of Health Sciences	Bachelor of Health Sciences
Language of instruction	Lithuanian	Lithuanian
Minimum education required	Secondary education	Secondary education
Registration date of the study programme	19 May 1997	14 December 2004

Title of the study programme	<b>Management of Public Health</b>	<b>Applied Public Health</b>
State code	6211GX007	6211GX005
Type of studies	University studies	University studies
Cycle of studies	Second	Second
Mode of study and duration (in years)	Full-time (2 years) Part-time (3 years)	Full-time (2 years)
Credit volume	120	120
Qualification degree and (or) professional qualification	Master of Health Sciences	Master of Health Sciences
Language of instruction	Lithuanian & English	Lithuanian & English
Minimum education required	University Bachelor's degree or Professional Bachelor's degree with completed bridging studies	University Bachelor's degree or Professional Bachelor's degree with completed bridging studies
Registration date of the study programme	23 April 1999	27 February 1998

Title of the study programme	<i>Lifestyle Medicine</i>	<i>Veterinary Food Safety</i>
State code	6211GX006	6211GX011
Type of studies	University studies	University studies
Cycle of studies	Second	Second
Mode of study and duration (in years)	Full-time (1.5 years)	Full-time (2 years) Part-time (3 years)
Credit volume	90	120
Qualification degree and (or) professional qualification	Master of Health Sciences	Master of Health Sciences
Language of instruction	Lithuanian & English	Lithuanian & English
Minimum education required	University Bachelor's degree or Professional Bachelor's degree with completed bridging studies	University Bachelor's degree or Professional Bachelor's degree with completed bridging studies
Registration date of the study programme	22 January 2016	15 January 2008

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# I. INTRODUCTION

## 1.1. BACKGROUND OF THE EVALUATION PROCESS

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

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

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

On the basis of this external evaluation report of the study field, SKVC takes a decision to accredit the study field either for 7 years or for 3 years. If the field evaluation is negative then the study field is not accredited.

The study field and cycle are **accredited for 7 years** if all evaluation areas are evaluated as exceptional (5 points), very good (4 points) or good (3 points).

The study field and cycle are **accredited for 3 years** if one of the evaluation areas is evaluated as satisfactory (2 points).

The study field and cycle are **not accredited** if at least one of the evaluation areas is evaluated as unsatisfactory (1 point).

## 1.2. EXPERT PANEL

The expert panel was assigned according to the Experts Selection Procedure as approved by the Director of SKVC on 31 December 2019, [Order No. V-149](#). The expert panel conducted the site visit to the HEI on 25 October 2023.

1. Prof. Dr. Agneta Yngve (Sweden), panel chairperson - academic member, Professor Emeritus at the Department of Nutrition, dietetics and food studies, Uppsala University;
2. Prof. Dr. Róza Ádány (Hungary), panel member - academic member, Professor and founding Dean of the Faculty of Public Health of the University of Debrecen;
3. Dr. Eleanor J Hothersall (Scotland), panel member - academic member, Head of MBChB (Programme Director) at University of Dundee Medical School;
4. Ms Irena Taraškevičienė (Lithuania), panel member - representative of social partners, the Head of the Public Health Safety Department at the National Public Health Centre under the Ministry of Health;
5. Mr Ömer Faruk Sönmez (Turkey), panel member - student representative, first-year Master's student of Public Health at the University of Sheffield, School of Health and Related Research; member of ESU Quality Assurance Student Experts Pool.

## 1.3. GENERAL INFORMATION

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

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

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

LSMU is the largest higher education institution for the education of health sciences specialists. LSMU was founded in 2010 by merging the Kaunas University of Medicine and the Lithuanian Veterinary Academy but its origins date back to 1920. The buildings of the University were renovated in 2016.

The University consists of two academies: Medical and Veterinary. Altogether there are 7 faculties. The detailed structure of LSMU is presented on the website of the University. Studies in the field of Public Health are conducted at the faculties of Public Health (FPH) and Veterinary Medicine (FVM). The Faculty of Public Health conducts the first cycle study programme Public Health and Health Psychology; second cycle study programmes Applied Public Health (in Lithuanian and English), Public Health Management, Clinical Health Psychology, Lifestyle Medicine as well as Doctoral Studies. Two first cycle studies, Public Health and Veterinary Food Safety and four second cycle studies, Management of Public Health, Applied Public Health, Lifestyle Medicine and Veterinary food safety are the topic of this evaluation.

Only this University carries out specialised study programmes in Lifestyle Medicine, Public Health Management and Veterinary Food Safety. The Veterinary Food Safety study programme is set for the preparation of highly qualified Public Health professionals on food safety and is carried out at the Faculty of Veterinary Medicine. The programme is comprised of a total of five years, giving 240 ECTS total. The Lifestyle Medicine programme was created to address the demand for lifestyle medicine specialists who are employed by family doctors' teams following the requirement of legal acts. The second cycle Applied Public Health study programme was updated to include more practice. The Management of Public Health programme was developed in collaboration with Maastricht University in connection with a double degree programme in the late 1990s.

Modern laboratories are operating at the University and are used for research as well as obligatory laboratory testing performed by the students of Public Health study programmes. Students are invited to participate in the research carried out at these laboratories.

As of December 2022, in total 338 students were studying in the study programmes of the field of Public Health, which is 4.62% out of 7322 LSMU students. A previous evaluation took place in 2014. The programmes were accredited for the maximum period.

## II. GENERAL ASSESSMENT

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

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

No.	Evaluation Area	Evaluation of an Area in points*
1.	Intended and achieved learning outcomes and curriculum	4
2.	Links between science (art) and studies	4
3.	Student admission and support	4
4.	Teaching and learning, student performance and graduate employment	4
5.	Teaching staff	5
6.	Learning facilities and resources	5
7.	Study quality management and public information	4
<b>Total:</b>		30

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

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

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

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

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



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

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

<b>No.</b>	<b>Evaluation Area</b>	<b>Evaluation of an Area in points*</b>
1.	Intended and achieved learning outcomes and curriculum	4
2.	Links between science (art) and studies	4
3.	Student admission and support	4
4.	Teaching and learning, student performance and graduate employment	4
5.	Teaching staff	5
6.	Learning facilities and resources	5
7.	Study quality management and public information	4
	<b>Total:</b>	30

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

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

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

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

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

### III. STUDY FIELD ANALYSIS

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

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

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

*(1) Factual situation*

The aims and learning outcomes as well as the curriculum of the study programmes in Public Health were developed considering the needs of the country and the labour market. The background documents that the studies build on are WHO publications such as the UN General Sustainable Development Goals and the EU programme EU4Health and guidelines from the ASPHER programme are taken into account when it comes to a competency framework and professionalising the Public Health workforce in the European region.

Furthermore, national regulation is providing the structure and quality assurance of the programmes, thus, the development of the programmes is very much related to the statement that there is a shortage of Public Health specialists in the labour market. There is also a Register of Public Health Care specialists which is taken into account in the development and updating of the programmes. This need is documented in Table 1.1 (SER) which shows the number of vacancies for Public Health workers, which seems more or less stable at 130-140 vacancies registered per year in the Employment Service Register in Lithuania. As already mentioned, it is widely acknowledged that there is a shortage of Public Health specialists in the labour market. LSMU seeks to satisfy this demand by collecting and evaluating information on the labour market for Public Health specialists, new legal requirements related to Public Health services, and national Public Health strategies. Based on this analysis the University builds a strategy for developing study programmes of the field as well as for the number of students to be enrolled for studies.

The focus of the University is within the field of food safety, community-level disease prevention of both communicable and non-communicable diseases. The University acknowledges the emerging importance of teaching environmental health to satisfy the need of emergency preparedness specialists. The study programme of Public Health Management was initiated in response to the market research that showed that there was a need for it. Apparently, at the moment the demand exceeds the supply due to the increasing number of municipal Public Health Bureaus and the increasing demand for lifestyle medicine specialists which by the end of the year 2030 will have to complement each team of family doctors by 0,2 staff following the Order of the Minister of Health Protection of the Republic of Lithuania of February 2, 2018 No. V-943. A rough estimation is that the demand is at least 400 of these specialists by the year 2030.

Employers who participated in the review group meeting with alumni and stakeholders emphasised that the quality of education is very good although did not elaborate on how long it takes to prepare graduates for independent work without the support of senior staff of the institution they are employed at.

LSMU has a good reputation for good career development among students: 94.73 % of employers stated that they are satisfied with the graduates of the field prepared by LSMU.

### *(2) Expert panel judgement*

The use of the mentioned guidelines is shown to be followed up regularly and other types of regulations and developments are taken into account when updating the programmes. A collaboration with WHO as well as with ASPHER was demonstrated, as well as with National bodies of importance.

It is worth mentioning that in a situation of high demand for specialists, employers may be reluctant to complain about the quality of study programmes in the Public Health field. Acting as an important stakeholder of the Ministry of Health, LSMU has an influence on the development of the labour market for the Public Health sector by proposing new fields of study, graduates from which would be empowered to implement Public Health programmes dedicated to reducing mortality and morbidity among the ageing Lithuanian population.

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

#### *(1) Factual situation*

The directions of the scientific activities of LSMU departments conducting field studies are defined by LSMU strategic development guidelines, FPH strategy and FVM strategy. The LSMU is well grounded in Lithuania and cooperates actively with WHO and uses ASPHER guidelines. They also point to STRATA's (The Government Strategic Analysis Centre) comparative expert R&D assessment. LSMU is also actively involved in the HBSC network and demonstrates strength in epidemiological research, in particular with the use of large-scale databases. Research within the Public Health area is mostly carried out at FPH which is an important Public Health science and education centre. Also important is the Department of Food Safety and Quality of LSMU as FVM conducts the Veterinary Food Safety study programme.

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

The LSMU chosen field development seems to be very supportive of the development within these programmes. The support of WHO as a collaborating centre in regard to non-communicable diseases provides some international structure and support. The collaboration with Maastricht University is another international structure element that provides a backbone in the area of governance, which is harmonised with the LSMU strategy.

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

#### (1) Factual situation

The structure of the programmes meets the requirements of legal acts, the Lithuanian Qualifications Framework and the European Lifelong Learning Qualifications, and the WHO-ASPHER Competency Framework for the Public Health Workforce in the European region. All programmes are also reported to meet the specific requirement defined by the Law on Science and Studies of the Republic of Lithuania and the Public Health Study field description from 2022. LSMU statutes regulate the organisation of the study process through the LSMU strategic development guidelines. At the faculty level the programmes are approved through the LSMU Senate. The execution and evaluation of these are assessed by the Study Programme Committees for each programme.

#### (2) Expert panel judgement

The regulations on the national level are well known and worked into the programmes and further support is given by the ASPHER guidelines. The compliance with the general requirements is illustrated below in Tables 1 and 2.

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

Criteria	General legal requirements	In the Programmes
Scope of the programme in ECTS	180, 210 or 240 ECTS	240
ECTS for the study field	No less than 120 ECTS	222
ECTS for studies specified by University or optional studies	No more than 120 ECTS	18
ECTS for internship	No less than 15 ECTS	18
ECTS for final thesis (project)	No less than 15 ECTS	15-17
Contact hours	No less than 20 % of learning	40-60%
Individual learning	No less than 30 % of learning	40-60%

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

Criteria	General legal requirements	In the Programmes
Scope of the programme in ECTS	90 or 120 ECTS	90-120
ECTS for the study field Information Services	No less than 60 ECTS	69
ECTS for studies specified by University or optional studies	No more than 30 ECTS	0-12
ECTS for final thesis (project)	No less than 30 ECTS	30-42
Contact hours	No less than 10 % of learning	23-36%
Individual learning	No less than 50 % of learning	>50%

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

#### *(1) Factual situation*

There are 2 first cycle and 4 second cycle programmes, all mapped to the documents outlined above. There is explicit mapping for each programme to ensure it is unique compared to the others at the University. There is a dual degree programme with Maastricht University.

The first cycle degree programmes are titled Public Health (PH) and Veterinary Food Safety (VFS). The PH degree is designed as a generic Public Health degree covering all key competencies, while the VFS degree is more specialised, developing key skills in both public health and food safety, with an emphasis on One Health, linking animal and human health.

There are 4 second cycle programmes titled Applied Public Health (APH), Veterinary Food Safety (VFSMA), Management of Public Health (MPH), and Lifestyle Medicine (LM). The Master's degrees are all designed to be different: APH is aimed to develop leaders in Public Health with expertise in community development; MPH is explicitly designed for Public Health Managers, while VFSMA is intended to train Public Health veterinary food safety specialists. The LM is described by the SER as being designed to “train Public Health specialists to assess the risk factors of lifestyle and chronic diseases on community and individual levels, to create a plan for lifestyle correction, health promotion and disease prevention, to motivate and enable a person for changes and then assess the effectiveness of all measures.” This last degree is also described as being unique, developed in harmony with several highly respected US institutions and designed to meet the needs of the Lithuanian population.

Part time options are described for VFS, MPH and VFSMA. It is noted that the part time option for VFS has been discontinued. The SER states that the total number of contact hours is the same for full time or part time study, only the duration of the enrolment is different. The quality assurance processes for part time study are mentioned in the SER.

All second cycle programmes are listed as being taught in Lithuanian and English, while the first cycle programmes are listed as taught only in Lithuanian.

## *(2) Expert panel judgement*

The 6 programmes outlined in the SER manage to be distinct from each other, and each conveys specific attributes which make them valuable to the Public Health community, particularly in Lithuania. The Veterinary Food Safety programmes seem to have very similar purposes. The learning outcomes document shows that there is a clear focus on basic scientific skills and communication skills in the first cycle programme, while the second cycle programme of the same name has much more focus on independent practice, both in terms of research, but also in terms of analysis and management.

The Lifestyle Medicine programme was developed in collaboration and under discussions with several international universities, including Cornell and Harvard, which is good practice. Study methods described depend on the purpose of the subject (general or specialised), as well as on the cycle (in second cycle studies there is more independent individual work and less contact hours). Student achievement assessment methods correspond to the expected study outcomes. The professional competencies described develop across the programmes of study, and detailed learning outcomes of the modules demonstrate this. However, the content of the Management of Public Health dual degree programme was not completely obvious, and similarly, it was not clear what principles were used in the design.

There was an overall feeling that the teaching, and content, may focus a little heavily on biomedical learning rather than population health.

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

#### *(1) Factual situation*

The field of study and competencies developed are outlined in the SER for each of the 6 programmes.

The first cycle PH programme contains 240 credits over 8 semesters, of which over 100 are specific to Public Health topics. Over 40 credits are for elective topics. Internship and thesis are 15 credits each. The first cycle VFS programme contains 240 credits over 8 semesters. Of these, over 110 are specific to Public Health or food safety topics. Over 20 credits are for elective topics, and the thesis is 17 credits. Internships/placements are 30 credits in total.

The second cycle APH programme consists of 120 credits. This includes a 5-credit module for internship, 20 credits for elective topics and 37 credits for the thesis. There is a range of topics, across Public Health (for example, Public Health and Health Care, and Psychology of Communication and Human Relations). The MPH programme consists of 120 credits, of which 12 are for elective topics and 41 are for the thesis. There is no internship. There are a range of modules, such as Management and Organizational Governance. The VFSMA programme is also 120 credits. 9 credits are for elective topics, and 42 for the thesis, with 10 credits for internship. Modules are on topics such as Food Safety and Risk Analysis, and as mentioned in 3.1.4 the learning outcomes for the second cycle programme focus on developing independent practice compared to the first cycle programme with the same name. Finally, the LM programme is also a second cycle programme and the total credits are 90. This programme includes 12 credits for internship and 30 credits in total for thesis. Modules cover a range of relevant topics such as public health, physical activity, and mental health.

Detailed information about learning outcomes and assessment was provided for each module, in addition to overall documents outlining the programme.

### *(2) Expert panel judgement*

Competency based education is being phased in across the programmes, over time. The presence of 6 programmes means that the change in the curriculum to shift to competency based education is significant, and the workload may mean this is a very protracted process. There is a lack of clarity about what competencies might be needed for some roles, and the table provided in Table 1.2 of the SER suggests that many roles need additional training before the graduate is fully competent in that area of work. The presence of such a large number of programmes may also mean that there is competition or conflict over resources, risking a slower response to change, or confusion about priorities.

The lack of an internship for the Management of Public Health programme may be a disincentive for students and may limit the utility of the degree for students, as well as for recruitment.

It was noted that the LM degree is shorter than the other Master's, and is only 90 credits - it may be beneficial to increase the content and credits (e.g., by offering optional modules).

### *3.1.6. Evaluation of opportunities for students to personalise the structure of field study programmes according to their personal learning objectives and intended learning outcomes*

#### *(1) Factual situation*

The optional modules for students were outlined in Annex 1.4. The first cycle programmes have between 20 and 40 credits for elective topics, while the second cycle programmes range from 0 (LM) to 20 (APH). There are internships in all programmes except MPH.

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

Each year of study has a range of options detailed in Annexe 1.4, but each time the options listed are rather small in number, which may limit student opportunities.

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

#### *(1) Factual situation*

Thesis topics were provided in Annex 1.3 with the SER. Full theses were available online.

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

Thesis topics were appropriate. As all theses viewed were written in Lithuanian, only the abstracts could be reviewed. These seemed to be written to a good standard.

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

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

1. Wide range of specialist study programmes addressing several needs.
2. Dual degree programme with another institution within the EU (though note governance information not available).
3. International collaboration which led to the development of the LM second cycle.

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

1. Wide range of programmes may create confusion or conflict if resources are limited.
2. Lack of internship in MPH degree.
3. No elective modules, short internship in LM degree.
4. Development of competency based education across the programmes is hampered by the large number of programmes and the need for tailored competencies for each.

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

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

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

#### *(1) Factual situation*

During the evaluation period, the FPH has carried out or is carrying out 26 projects, 15 doctoral theses have been defended and another 10 are in preparation. In the Department of Food Safety and Quality, 16 national or international scientific projects have been carried out or are in progress. In addition, 6 doctoral theses have been defended and 4 more are in preparation. Staff



works in a number of governmental groups and receive feedback and policy information from stakeholders. FPH and the Department of Food Safety and Quality have published a large number of papers, including 84 in Q1 journals (55 of them in collaboration with foreign authors). As documented in the SER, Public Health scientists were first authors in 7 articles in 2020 and 2021.

### *(2) Expert panel judgement*

The expert panel recognises that the staff has a long history of extensive interfaculty, national and international collaborations in research activities. Research is wide-ranging and covers a number of important Public Health issues (risk factors for chronic diseases, monitoring of their changes in society, evaluation of tobacco and alcohol control policies from a health perspective, effectiveness of prevention programmes, etc.). In addition, the FVM conducts research in the areas of food safety, functional foods and food biotechnology. It is important not only from a scientific point of view but also for the socialisation and internationalisation of its scientific results, as well as for the adoption of international best practices regarding the translation of research results, that the Health Research Institute has been an accredited WHO Collaborating Centre in the field of NCD prevention and control since 1983 and actively participates in international networks (e.g., WHO, HBSC, COSI, HSPM), and that many of the faculty members are involved in national and international projects. During the evaluation period, not only the number of publications increased, but also the number of publications in scientific journals with a higher citation index (Q1).

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

#### *(1) Factual situation*

The content of the Bachelor's and Master's programmes and their topics are constantly updated to reflect the latest and most relevant issues in Public Health. An elective on "Biomedical Innovation and Entrepreneurship" was introduced and a new course on "Lifestyle Medicine" was developed and launched. COVID-19 infection topics were also included in three taught subjects. VFS and VFSMA students are involved in scientific activities through compulsory and elective courses on research-related topics. The results of studies conducted and published by academic staff are presented in lectures and seminars and used in the preparation of practical assignments. As stated in the SER, these results are also used in teaching basic and applied epidemiology, epidemiology and prevention of chronic diseases, health education for different population groups and planning of prevention programmes, management of changes in the health care system, organisation of scientific research and other study subjects.

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

The extensive international network of collaborations also facilitates the process of rapidly incorporating key research findings and their health policy implications into educational

material and using them in an analytical way in training. The expert panel notes that, as in the field of education, there is a tendency for scientific work to be medicalised, with less attention being paid to more generic areas such as health promotion, marketing, communication, health economics, etc.

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

#### *(1) Factual situation*

First and second cycle theses are prepared with the help of supervisors, who involve students in the activities of scientific projects in collaboration with business entities. Students who are involved in research projects have access to faculty equipment, specialised experimental science laboratories and open-access centres.

Students who are/were involved in projects also participate in the preparation of scientific articles, become co-authors, submit abstracts for scientific conferences and present reports. During the reporting period, 13 articles were co-authored by students.

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

All students in all programmes are required to undertake research as part of their theses. It is important to note that during the evaluation period, 13 articles were co-authored by students. Summer school training programmes organised by the WHO Collaborating Centre are also useful to improve students' knowledge and methodological skills. Support for students in research ethics is also recognised. Although students are well prepared to continue their studies after graduation, the number of government-funded PhD positions is limited.

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

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

1. Extensive network of collaborations within the University, nationally and internationally.
2. Impressive publication activity.
3. Effective motivation of students to participate in research activities, which can be shown as papers published with students.
4. The existence of a PhD programme which makes the second cycle studies more attractive for the students.

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

1. The medical aspects are overemphasised in research.

### 3.3. STUDENT ADMISSION AND SUPPORT

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

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

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

LSMU regulates a transparent student selection and admission process, aligning with national and EU legal frameworks and guidelines. Admission criteria are communicated through the University's student admission rules, which are annually updated to comply with current legislation. The process involves electronic submissions and evaluations for first and second cycle programmes, with the primary criteria being the competitive score, and detailed admission information is readily available on the University's website. LSMU maintains consistent student enrolment, with state-funded places being highly sought after. Although the competitive scores of admitted students have been on the rise, showing a growing interest in postgraduate studies and the number of students discontinuing their studies has decreased over time, the number of student admissions has decreased over the last 3 years.

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

LSMU has a reputation for being a top university in the country, and it is therefore preferred by students. Marketing of the study programmes leans on a strategy and student recruitment efforts are planned, monitored and evaluated. International student admissions are also addressed.

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

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

LSMU maintains the procedure for the recognition of foreign qualifications and partial studies, following the guidelines established by the Ministry of Education, Science, and Sports, also collaborating with the SKVC. Foreign qualification recognition is carried out within the legal framework, with some variations in outcomes for different programmes (APH, MPH, and LM). From 2019 to 2021, a notable percentage of qualifications (46.6%) were deemed unsuitable for recognition, primarily due to mismatches between previous Bachelor's and chosen Master's programmes, low grades, missing documents, or even falsification of data. The recognition of partial studies is conducted in compliance with LSMU's internal procedure, and there is no data regarding non-credited partial studies at foreign institutions. SER demonstrates a defined process for recognising competencies acquired through non-formal and informal learning, although no applications have been received in this regard in the past three years.

## *(2) Expert panel judgement*

Recognition information is publicly available but it is not widely communicated with the students. Students who have gone through the recognition process have provided positive feedback about the accountability of the process. The introductory week should possibly include more information about the recognition pathways.

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

#### *(1) Factual situation*

The administration of Erasmus+ at LSMU is organised centrally, ensuring transparent and public selections according to approved regulations and criteria. Students have access to a full list of partner institutions for part time studies or traineeships. Information about mobility opportunities and foreign partners is published on the University website, communicated through various channels, and presented on various occasions. Moreover, Erasmus e-guides, information leaflets, and educational videos are readily available. SER gives data about the number of students and also indicates that LSMU has Erasmus+ agreements with 23 universities. Beyond Erasmus+, for MPH students LSMU also offers a joint Master's degree with the Maastricht University, a Master's programme called Governance and Leadership in European Public Health.

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

The panel acknowledges the barriers of mobility for students such as language, family or work commitments, but also highlights that LSMU needs to provide alternatives such as shorter Erasmus+ traineeships, virtual mobilities, and attending conferences for students. Leaving their comfort zone may be challenging for students but once they do, they have the possibility of getting multiple skills. Although information regarding mobility is available, students may need to be inspired by good examples of mobility, including meeting international scholars, both students and teachers, and be encouraged to apply.

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

#### *(1) Factual situation*

LSMU has addressed the academic, financial, social, psychological, and personal needs of its students. The University's provision of psychological support, with consultations available both remotely and in person, has been particularly essential during the pandemic, with a notable increase in consultations in 2022. Additionally, LSMU encourages students to engage in a variety of extracurricular activities, including sports and participation in student organisations. Financial assistance, such as incentives, social, and nominal scholarships, is awarded based on academic performance and socioeconomic factors. Dormitory accommodations and

opportunities for employment guidance through the Career Centre are available for LSMU students. During the evaluation period, a significant number of students received incentive scholarships.

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

LSMU implements various support services for students who are very content with them, however, students are providing feedback about these services on a voluntary basis and not in a systematic method. The effectiveness of the services is not monitored. LSMU needs to assess the effectiveness of the services and take appropriate actions for further improvements. Students with special needs and foreign students need to be separately investigated in terms of support services.

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

#### *(1) Factual situation*

LSMU offers resources in both Lithuanian and English, available on its website, to address a wide range of academic and well-being needs. Information published is related to details regarding study programmes, credit requirements, rotations, and procedures for handling academic-related matters. Introductory weeks are organised and the curators are appointed to assist freshers. Information about academic subjects is readily accessible through LSMU's virtual learning environment. The University conducts surveys, meetings with curators, and dean-student interactions.

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

While curators only assist freshers, other students may also benefit from personal tutor support that might be individually assigned. Survey response rates are low and students' perceptions of counselling and information lack an effectiveness assessment. The panel also acknowledged that students may benefit from career events, and Public Health career pathway information either by inviting externals or covering this in the intro week.

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

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

1. Competitive admission over the past 3 years.
2. High student satisfaction with support services.
3. Constant response action to student needs and requests.

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

1. Limited assessment of the effectiveness of student support services.
2. Feedback mechanisms of student evaluations are not systematic.

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

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

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

*(1) Factual situation*

Some details of all modules covered were provided in Annexes 1.2 and 1.3 of the SER. For each module in the first and second study cycle, there is a document outlining learning outcomes (with indicative teaching/learning methods and assessment methods), and the details of the responsible lecturer. The panel was not able to review a detailed syllabus of each teaching session, key references, or distribution of work tasks and influence on final grade. Course structures were listed as Lithuanian or English versions of the programme (second cycle), so it is assumed that the content was the same except for language of instruction.

The range of topics covered is mentioned in section 3.1.5, and assessment is discussed in 3.4.3.

*(2) Expert panel judgement*

A wide range of teaching and assessment methods are employed, and adapted to the individual topics taught.

There is a reference in the SER to the fact that modules are taught in Lithuanian, and in English, in parallel. The panel heard that there was very little mixing between the two tracks. It was noted by the panel that the course documentation implies that the courses are identical in English and in Lithuanian, but it would be appropriate to ensure evidence of this was routinely collected, for quality assurance purposes.

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

*(1) Factual situation*

Support for students with special needs, including financial support, exists at the University, such as access for students with impaired mobility and parking spaces in close vicinity, visual magnifiers to screens as well as audio to read text out loud exist. There are also a number of criteria for internship placements, and international students receive additional support during internships and practical experiences. For instance, students are sent in small groups for internships, and international students are included in these groups.

Good conditions for disabled persons to access all facilities and premises are observed at the University buildings related to Public Health studies. Representatives of foreign students denied a lack of tolerance or discrimination towards the foreign students although mentioned that some of them face difficulties finding a living place and therefore expect some support from the University. Students have the opportunity to receive psychological support from experienced psychologists. Delivery of information is ensured for students equally in Lithuanian and English. Moreover, the website is comprehensive so it is expected that important information is available for those in need. LSMU ensures adaptation of the study process to socially vulnerable groups and students with special needs, consultations are provided at both faculties' dean's office. Forms and means of integrating students from socially vulnerable groups and those with special needs into the life of the academic community.

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

Several adjustments to students with disabilities were seen and financial support is announced on the LSMU website and information about these possibilities is provided by the Study Centre. There is no evaluation of variation in academic outcomes for students with disabilities, socially vulnerable or international students, compared with any other groups.

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

#### *(1) Factual situation*

Details of assessments for students are included in the module descriptors. The SER states that since the last review "The teaching, learning and assessment strategy was aligned with the programme's aims, objectives and performance areas. Updated and implemented new, innovative, coordinated teaching (problem solving, case analysis) and assessment methods (portfolio, test, analysis of scientific article, peer assessment and self-assessment) ensuring smooth achievement of programme results and progress monitoring." However, no further detail was provided.

There is no specific reference to self-assessment within the SER, but self-reflection and self-assessment are mentioned in a small number of individual modules within the programmes. No individual assessments were available for review, and no rubric for the thesis grades was included.

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

There is little detail provided to understand the implementation of a teaching, learning and assessment strategy within these programmes. In particular, it is not possible to determine how well assessments map to teaching without viewing them at an individual level (although the methods outlined are appropriate). Where modules are run in both English and Lithuanian it



would be beneficial to be clear whether the same assessment is used, and how comparability is maintained.

There is no good evidence of students receiving formative assessment or opportunities for self-assessment, to allow them to receive feedback in advance of their summative assessments. This should be included within all modules to enhance student learning.

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

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

There is a good overview of the current employment situation in the SER, where also a very useful table is shown of possible workplaces. Workplaces for the graduates of the Public Health study programmes are proposed at the municipal Public Health Bureaus, National Public Health Centre, State Food and Veterinary Service, National Food and Veterinary Risk Assessment Institute, National Public Health surveillance laboratory, Hygiene Institute, Radiation Protection Centre, private companies employing occupational health specialists, Public Health impact assessors, food production quality specialists, etc. At the moment the major employees are Public Health Bureaus.

As mentioned before the demand for Public Health specialists is high and expected to increase, therefore, the employability of graduates is supposed to be good. As presented in the SER, according to the data of the National Education Agency for the year 2021, approximately 7% of graduates from the first cycle of the field do not work after 12 months from graduation and nearly 14% from the second cycle. As mentioned in the SER, there was a large proportion of foreign students among the unemployed graduates of the second cycle although the exact causes of this are not well understood. LSMU tracks graduate careers by evaluating available statistical data and surveying both postgraduates and employees. The results of the evaluation are considered when planning for student admission rates.

During the visit, the group of students emphasised the lack of efforts from the University in supporting students with special needs searching for a job.

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

There is a constant discussion regarding employment situations between LSMU, alumni and social partners in order to prepare a set of professionals ultimately equipped to deal with challenges within their areas while introducing new aspects in course modules such as prevention of infectious and non-infectious disease after the pandemic. Although it is not the responsibility of the University to ensure employment for all or for disadvantaged students, more attention could be given to helping such students understand their advantages and disadvantages depending on the origin of the disability to target the best suitable jobs.

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



### *(1) Factual situation*

The University declares adherence to the principles of academic honesty, tolerance and non-discrimination. Site visit and information given in the SER proves those policies are implemented at the University. The principles of academic ethics and honesty are regulated by LSMU Study Regulations. Information about academic ethics is conveniently and clearly presented on the website of the LSMU, and students are introduced to the principles of academic ethics during the "Introduction to Studies". The LSMU website also provides information on help in cases of unethical behaviour and conflicts, in the event of sexual harassment, persecution or violence at the University. The academic ethics are enacted in the corresponding rules. As observed during the review visit, the University both students and teachers are aware of how to act in case of a breach of academic ethics.

The information is placed on the website of the University that if somebody has experienced or noticed a case of sexual harassment, psychological abuse or discrimination based on gender, age, disability, sexual orientation, ethnicity or other discriminatory grounds, shall report it by given e-mail. The University's policy on implementation of equal opportunities and harassment prevention rules is also published on the website.

### *(2) Expert panel judgement*

Conditions of implementation of the policies to ensure academic integrity, tolerance and non-discrimination are good, with training also involving medical ethics, academic dishonesty and its consequences. There is a University regulation on academic honesty, tolerance and non-discrimination in the LSMU SER that is referred to and which is available on the public website.

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

### *(1) Factual situation*

If the student does not agree with the results of the assessment or the procedure for organising the assessment, one has the right to appeal. If the student does not agree with the assessment of the thesis, the appeal is submitted to the rector of LSMU. The detailed procedure for examining appeals is described in the LSMU Study Regulations. Students may submit complaints about the organisation of practices. The procedure for submitting appeals of students is described in detail on the LSMU website: if the student does not agree with the evaluation of study achievements and their explanation or evaluation procedures, one has the right to appeal to the dean of the faculty within one working day (regarding the results of the interim evaluation) or within two days (regarding the results of the exam). An appeal regarding the results and procedures of the final exam or final thesis assessment shall be submitted to the rector within 1 working day after the announcement of the results. The appeal commission is made up of representatives delegated by the Students' Representative Office, administration

and/or teachers' representatives, who by consensus make the decisions which can be appealed to the LSMU.

On the website of the University, instruction is given on how to make a request for an appeal and how to track its status. During the last three years, the LSMU dispute resolution commission has considered no appeal in the study programmes of the field.

### *(2) Expert panel judgement*

During the meeting both students and teachers confirmed they were well aware of the procedures for submission and examination of appeals and complaints.

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

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

1. Good insight into labour market needs and possible needs for updating.
2. Good follow-up of students' employability.

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

1. Lack of clarity about equivalence of courses run in both English and Lithuanian.
2. Lack of clarity about how students can monitor their progress and adapt their learning plans, before summative assessments.

## **3.5. TEACHING STAFF**

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

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

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

In Annex 5.1. of the SER, 162 teachers are listed, most of them with impressive publication records. In the academic year 2021-2022, as in previous academic years, about 80% of the teachers of all subjects in the first cycle study programmes had a doctorate degree in the field corresponding to the subjects they teach. The distribution of teachers by position was on average 22% of professors, 24% of associate professors, 32% of lecturers with a doctorate degree, 6.4% of lecturers without a doctorate degree and 16.1% of assistants. In 2021-2022, 80.2% of teachers in second cycle programmes in all subjects had a doctorate degree. The distribution of teachers was on average 32% professors, 23% associate professors, 26.5% lecturers with a doctorate degree, 10% lecturers without a doctorate degree and 8.5%

assistants. The proportion of second cycle teachers remained high over the three-year period, averaging 63% of the number of teachers in all subjects.

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

The number and qualifications of the teachers meet the legal requirements. Inter-faculty collaborations can ensure a well-established teaching staff, with sufficient representation of teachers with doctoral degrees. Collaboration with the FVM is particularly important in the area of teaching students about healthy nutrition and preparing them for useful participation in lifestyle counselling activities at the primary care level.

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

#### *(1) Factual situation*

Lecturers have the opportunity to participate in academic mobility programmes and projects lasting from 2 days to 2 months to European and other higher education institutions and/or companies with which inter-institutional agreements have been signed. The academic mobility of LSMU faculty is centrally managed. The opportunities for LSMU faculty mobility, the selection process and criteria, and the list of foreign higher education institutions to which LSMU faculty can go for teaching and practice are presented on the LSMU website. Faculty academic mobility has been high over the evaluation period (around 80 visits abroad), although there was a significant drop in 2020/2021 due to the restrictions of the COVID-19 pandemic as planned visits and trips had to be cancelled or postponed.

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

Teaching staff mobility is quite intensive, the selection process is transparent and mobility is supported by the relevant office. Lecturers are encouraged to initiate new inter-institutional agreements for student and faculty exchanges with institutions abroad. The University operates the LSMU Science Fund, which supports researcher travel to conferences and placements. The fact that the International Relations Office is actively involved in inviting teachers abroad further enhances the quality of education.

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

#### *(1) Factual situation*

Programmes to improve the pedagogical competencies of the teachers are prepared and implemented by the Innovative Education Department of the Study Centre (InoEdu), which carries out the monitoring and improvement of pedagogical competence, whose activities are defined by the Regulations of the LSMU Study Centre. The training plan organised by InoEdu is updated every academic year, and all teachers must complete at least 30 academic hours of pedagogical qualification during a 5-year period.

## *(2) Expert panel judgement*

Teaching skills and competencies of teachers are continuously improved in organised training. The University organises annual training cycles for academic staff. In 2020-2022, distance, interactive and practical teacher training and practice abroad took place within the framework of the project “Improving the quality of LSMU studies and related processes, increasing the potential of human resources.” Positioning teachers in government boards further improves teachers’ competencies and points to the LSMU’s important National position.

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

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

1. Operation of an Innovative Education Department of the Study Centre to monitor and improve the pedagogical competencies of the teaching staff.
2. Intensive international mobility of the staff.
3. Significant involvement of teachers invited from abroad in training.

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

*No weakness identified*

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

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

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

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

The LSMU study centre was recently built and includes excellent facilities such as teaching rooms, laboratories and seminar rooms as well as auditoriums. The offices are divided between the different departments involved in the study programme and eduroam is provided for student use as well as statistical software for their own computers and for biostatistics laboratories. The whole centre is well equipped for harbouring all students for the study programmes in laboratories with all types of needed equipment for the studies. There are well-equipped teaching rooms with video and audio equipment as well as computer training rooms. Access to electronic journals and books is provided through the library services.

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

A library was shown in an adjacent building, and reference was made to another larger library in another part of Kaunas. The facilities were impressive, with all types of equipment and staff

in the laboratories and biostatisticians teaching using SPSS software in the computer rooms. There is access to eduroam for all. Several aids are installed for the mobility impaired and for those in need of audiovisual support, such as enlarging equipment for computers and software that reads text out loud and others.

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

#### *(1) Factual situation*

The teacher responsible for teaching the subject submits proposals for planning and updating the necessary resources to the head of the department and the Study Programme Committee, the Faculty Council and the Dean. Assessment of the infrastructure and material resources required is carried out at the departmental level. The Study Programme Committee analyses needs and makes proposals for updating.

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

The building and the equipment appear to be updated and not many proposals might be needed for updating the resources at the moment, however, there is a process for doing so, as described in the paragraph above.

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

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

1. Beautiful new building, well-planned office space, laboratories and teaching rooms.
2. Good access to electronic journals and plenty of books in English in the library.
3. Access to eduroam, use of educational platforms and biostatistical support available.

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

*No weaknesses identified*

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

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

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

#### *(1) Factual situation*

A Study Quality Monitoring and Assurance Commission on the institutional level is responsible for ensuring the quality of studies. They regularly arrange meetings to discuss study quality assessments where they analyse and evaluate the quality of studies, making suggestions for

improvements and collecting feedback on changes installed. This information is published on the website. There is also internal quality assurance implemented by the Study centre and a Student Affairs Office is installed. A lot of the work is also taking place on the faculty level through Faculty Councils. Study Programme Committees are formed for each study programme and these operate in accordance with the regulations of Study Programme Committees and the Procedure for creation, improvement and management of programmes.

Regular surveys are conducted with teachers, staff, employers, graduates and students. The results are fed back to the Study Programme Committees in order to enhance the study quality. The Quality Thermometer is an innovative standardised instrument that is used to evaluate the quality of the content of each module/subject.

### *(2) Expert panel judgement*

The quality monitoring framework seems to work well, with feedback from regular surveys completed by teachers, staff, students and social partners as well as from the tutors and Study Programme Committees.

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

#### *(1) Factual situation*

Students and other stakeholders are involved in the development of the study programmes as well as in quality assurance processes. The framework for study quality assurance includes internal as well as external parts. On the institutional level, quality assurance takes place through a Study Quality Monitoring and Assurance Commission (SKSUK). This Commission organises regular meetings where it approves quality assessment forms and reports. The external part of the quality assurance involves SKVC and other agencies, as well as international bodies such as WHO and ASPHER. Staff, stakeholders and students are involved in regular surveys. These are used in the internal evaluation at the study centre level where the survey results as well as tutor reports are provided to the relevant Study Programme Committee and reported to the SKSUK (Internal quality assurance system), which is in place at the University.

As stated in the Study Quality Guide of the Lithuanian University of Health Sciences, in order to carry out the highest quality studies, which provide the individual with a higher university education based on scientific research that meets the modern level of knowledge and technology, and to constantly improve the content of study programmes and the organisation of execution, Study Programme Committees, subordinate to the deans of the faculty ensure the constant quality of the supervised study programme(s) in cooperation with the units conducting the studies, the faculty council, the dean's office, the Commission for Monitoring and Study Quality Assurance and other University units and the Student Representative Office.

The composition of the Study Programme Committee includes at least three lecturers from the departments conducting studies of the programme(s), one or more student representatives of the programme(s) delegated by the Student Representative Office, and one or more representatives of the social partners.

One of the criteria of the internal processes of preparation, monitoring and improvement of study programmes is that a programme shall correspond to the expectations and needs of the employment market, society and students. The Career Centre operating at the University maintains close relations with the University's graduates and social partners, expands career opportunities, develops students' career planning abilities and, in cooperation with employers, strives to match the students' competencies with the domestic market demand.

Feedback surveys are an approved method to collect information on the quality of study programmes. The University regularly and systematically conducts surveys of students, graduates, teachers, staff, and employers. Information about studies, their assessment and improvement processes and results are collected in accordance with the organisational procedure for improving the quality of LSMU feedback surveys. A brief evaluation questionnaire for modules, "Quality Thermometer" provides the overall evaluation of the module as soon as the student answers the questions. The University has signed agreements with several social partners in order to get good feedback from employers regarding the alumni skills and competencies. A survey to employers has pointed out areas that need to be included in the programmes, and changes have been made in those areas that did not meet the employers' expectations. Among other things, Vytautas Magnus University is collaborating in running a course in Informatics System in parallel in order to increase the knowledge among the students in data analytics, and a separate block has been added to the second year of the study plan called "Optional subject of general competencies in public health" due to expectations from social partners. Heads of departments conducting studies use feedback information during annual interviews with teachers; teachers use the results of the module/subject and teaching quality survey and other received feedback information to improve the quality of teaching.

## *(2) Expert panel judgement*

Some of the teachers are also employers, therefore, it may be assumed that they can influence study programmes the most. The impression is that teachers and other staff involved in Public Health programmes assessment and improvement are open to the proposals of students on how to improve course material. Tutors also helped with the communication of student's suggestions for change. Students were able to list skills needed for their future work but most seemed content with their competence so far. It is not clear if public opinion on Public Health specialists' performance is collected. Employers have had different suggestions of additional skills and competencies that needed to be included in the programmes, such as data analysis and public health practice and these have been added to the programmes.

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

#### *(1) Factual situation*

Several pathways are used for publishing information on studies, including visits to schools, communications to Public Health officials and to the public, also through channels like social platforms and the website. The National Public Health conference provides an important possibility to communicate the programmes and their updates. All quality assurance results are made public and can be found on the website.

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

There is a regular newsletter sent out to all social partners as well as alumni. There is also a National Public Health conference organised annually where news in regard to research as well as published theses are communicated. Social media are used for communication purposes and the website is constantly updated with news as well.

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

#### *(1) Factual situation*

The LSMU students have expressed high satisfaction in the panel visit. The students in LSMU are asked to give their opinion about their studies at the end of their studies, as well as on a regular basis from the enrolment and onwards. The final students' suggestions were used to correct the study plans and study process.

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

During the panel visit several student feedbacks were identified such as course structure being severely medicalised, student research opportunities being limited, and the need for more various internship places.

The alumni suggested health marketing skills as something that they would suggest as an add-on to the programmes, otherwise, they were all happy with their studies although they said that working in real life requires some adjustment.

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

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

1. The study quality management is strong and supported by several mechanisms.
2. The communication with alumni, social partners as well as the public is sufficient and supported by an active website with text in English and Lithuanian.



3. National Public Health conference is used as a part of teaching, research and communication.

**(2) Weaknesses:**

1. Possible need for feedback from the public regarding perceived needs of professionals' competencies.

## IV. EXAMPLES OF EXCELLENCE

**Core definition:** Excellence means exhibiting exceptional characteristics that are, implicitly, not achievable by all.

- Excellently equipped training localities, also providing support to physically impaired and socially vulnerable students.
- Excellent development of the Lifestyle Medicine programme in international collaboration.
- Excellent in regards to scientific publication.

## V. RECOMMENDATIONS

Evaluation Area	Recommendations for the Evaluation Area (study cycle)
Intended and achieved learning outcomes and curriculum	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Provide a programme-level map of competencies to be achieved.</li> <li>2. Consider the introduction of internship for MPH and LM (second cycle).</li> </ol>
Links between science (art) and studies	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Increase the number of doctoral positions; in addition to government-funded positions, stakeholder-funded positions can be created.</li> <li>2. Review the proportion of the course which focuses on biomedicine in relation to Public Health.</li> </ol>
Student admission and support	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Assessment of the effectiveness of student support services should be improved.</li> <li>2. Survey response numbers and systematic feedback collection mechanisms should be improved.</li> <li>3. Students may need to be inspired by being shown good examples of mobilities.</li> </ol>
Teaching and learning, student performance and graduate employment	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Map curriculum to competencies as well as learning outcomes.</li> <li>2. Evaluate courses where parallel sessions run in English and Lithuanian, to be confident of equivalence</li> <li>3. Ensure students have good systematic methods for gathering feedback on performance before summative assessments.</li> </ol>
Teaching staff	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Consider upgrading the training of Public Health professionals who will be involved in primary care to further improve their skills.</li> </ol>
Learning facilities and resources	-
Study quality management and public information	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Explore public feedback to assess perceived needs for professionals' competencies.</li> <li>2. The sensitivity of feedback collection could be increased to collect and take into account student feedback regarding the overly medicalised curricula, limited variety of internship places and research opportunities.</li> </ol>

## VI. SUMMARY

The Faculty of Public Health at LSMU carries out a scientific programme “Public Health Sciences”. As stated on the website of the faculty, research topics are related to the lifestyle and health literacy of the Lithuanian population, the development of the country’s health policy, health economics, health effects of the environment, effects of environmental pollutants on the body, etc. Public Health research carried out at the Faculty of Veterinary Medicine covers the quality and food safety of food raw materials, and the development of innovative technologies and products. The close cooperation of the two faculties opens up opportunities to implement the study programmes in the field of food safety and nutrition at a high level and also provides good possibilities for students to engage in research in both fields.

The University buildings are modern, well equipped, have good conditions for hygiene, and access to facilities for physically disabled persons. Good conditions are guaranteed for both students and teachers who want to engage in sporting activities.

The overall impression is that the management of the Faculty of Public Health is dedicated to the field of Public Health, and that the institution has an influence on the decisions made by the Ministry of Health in the field of Public Health development.

Detailed information for students is provided on a website of the University including different types of applications that could be compiled online.

In regards to the study programmes, it is advised to continue the development of competencies and to ensure that the mentioned self-assessment for students is adequate and clear. There is also a need to revise the study programme content in regards to content regarding biomedical content vs Public Health relevant topics, including health marketing. Also, environmental issues will need to be addressed. The Lifestyle Medicine Programme would benefit from adding another 30 ECTS, thereby reaching 120 ECTS for this second cycle programme. Sufficient attention should be given to students’ practice.

It is very clear that LSMU has an outstanding international and scientific profile with important collaboration with several well-known universities, with international bodies such as WHO and ASPHER and with national bodies of direct importance for policy development and supervision in the area of the studies. There is a lot of mobility for teachers and students and adequate time is reserved for research activities. Some support could be installed to further stimulate student mobility.

The scientific level of the programme teachers is high, which is shown by the number of publications in international journals. The teachers are also going through continuing education and especially in higher education pedagogics. The students are involved in research activities which is shown by the number of publications where students take part including international journals and abstracts for conferences.

Study Programme Committees are formed for the development, management, evaluation, and improvement of the first and second cycle, and integrated study programmes. The University has measures to prevent discrimination. There is a well-developed quality assurance system. The students are well motivated and knowledgeable and there are several channels in place to communicate with the public, social partners and alumni, including Open Days, participation in the National Public Health conference, a newsletter, and an updated website.

The University is opening up new study and career perspectives to study the study programme “Governance and Leadership in European Public Health” at Maastricht University under the double degree programme. Students have the opportunity to study at Vytautas Magnus University in the non-degree-granting study programme “Informatics Systems” and acquire bridging programming and data analytics skills, which are one of the priority competencies of future Public Health.

On the 25th of October 2023 during the site visit, the expert panel had the opportunity to discuss the programmes with faculty administration, self-assessment group, teaching staff, students, graduates and social partners. The panel also visited the library, classrooms, sporting facility and offices associated with the programmes. After the visit, the panel held a meeting in which the information gathered during the evaluation process was briefed and this evaluation report represents the opinion of the whole group. The expert panel would like to thank LSMU for their comprehensive SER report and for the welcoming and friendly atmosphere that was experienced during the visit. The visit was well-prepared and informative.

**Expert panel chairperson signature:**

**Prof. Dr. Agneta Yngve**