



CENTRE FOR QUALITY ASSESSMENT IN HIGHER EDUCATION

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**EVALUATION REPORT**

**STUDY FIELD of DENTISTRY (Odontology)**

at LITHUANIAN UNIVERSITY OF HEALTH SCIENCE

**Expert panel:**

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4. **Mr. Bronius Einars** *representative of social partners;*
5. **Ms. Ieva Bartkevičiūtė** *students' representative.*

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Report language – English

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## Study Field Data

Title of the study programme	<b><i>Odontology</i></b>
State code	6011GX002
Type of studies	University studies
Cycle of studies	Integrated studies
Mode of study and duration (in years)	Full time (5 years)
Credit volume	300
Qualification degree and (or) professional qualification	Master of Health Sciences, odontologist
Language of instruction	Lithuanian, English
Minimum education required	Secondary education or equivalent
Registration date of the study programme	19 05 1997

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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 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 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 site visit to the HEI was conducted by the expert panel on *11<sup>th</sup> of September, 2022*.

1. **Dr. Kevin John Davey** (panel chairperson), Associate Dean for Learning and Teaching, Periodontology, Dundee Dental Hospital and Research School, University of Dundee (Scotland);
2. **Associate Professor Dr. Barbara Kirnbauer** (member of academic community), Associate Professor at Medical University of Graz Oral Surgery and Orthodontics Department (Austria);
3. **Prof. Dr. Rui Alberto Amaral Mendes** (member of academic community), Professor at Medical School of the University of Porto (Portugal);
4. **Mr. Bronius Einars** (representative of social partners), Deputy Director at Dental Centre "LELA" (Lithuania);
5. **Mr. Domynikas** (students' representative), (Lithuania).

## 1.3. GENERAL INFORMATION

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

No.	Name of the document
1.	
2.	
...	

#### **1.4. BACKGROUND OF DENTISTRY (ODONTOLOGY) FIELD STUDIES AT LITHUANIAN UNIVERSITY OF HEALTH SCIENCES**

Lithuanian University of Health Sciences (LSMU) was established in 2010 after the merger of Kaunas University of Medicine and the Lithuanian Academy of Veterinary Medicine.

In 2022 the University had 120 study programmes (including residency studies). The Academy of Medicine consists of the following faculties: Medicine, Pharmacy, Nursing, and Public Health. Until 1968, when the Faculty of Odontology (FO) was established, Odontology was part of the wider Faculty of Medicine. OF consists of five clinical units: Prosthodontics, Maxillofacial Surgery, Dental and Oral Pathology, Preventive and Paediatric Dentistry and Orthodontics. Two study programmes, Odontology and Oral Hygiene are taught in parallel, with the five year 300 ECTS credit Odontology integrated study programme also being taught in English. The Odontology study programme is awarded as a master's degree in Health Sciences and is the professional qualification for an odontologist. The programme ends with a practical internship and the defence of a master's thesis, with the aim of being able to offer general dental care in a safe and unsupervised manner. Post-graduation six residency studies and doctoral programmes are available.

The previous external review was performed in 2012, with the consequence of the accreditation for 7 years.

## II. GENERAL ASSESSMENT

The *Integrated studies of the Dentistry (Odontology)* 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	3
2.	Links between science (art) and studies	4
3.	Student admission and support	5
4.	Teaching and learning, student performance and graduate employment	4
5.	Teaching staff	4
6.	Learning facilities and resources	3
7.	Study quality management and public information	3
	<b>Total:</b>	26

\*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 (not applicable to HEIs operating in exile conditions)*

Despite Lithuania having one of the highest number of dentists per capita in the European Union (EU), labour market needs remain very high, especially with regards to specialists in orthodontics and periodontics. The number of students admitted annually onto the programme is based on the workforce planning documents and recommendations provided by the Ministry of Health (<https://sam.lrv.lt/en/>) and the Government Strategic Analysis Centre (STRATA, <https://strata.gov.lt/en/home/>), with final number of students admitted being recommended by the Rector and the Senate Council of LSMU. It is predicted that the demand for odontologists will continue to increase due to the ageing population and the general oral health needs of the population, with the undergraduate curriculum needing to adapt to ongoing developments in digital dentistry and new treatment methodologies. Approximately 10% of the students on the study programme (in English) are international students, the majority of whom do not enter the Lithuanian labour market post-graduation.

There was clear evidence from the Self-Evaluation Report (SER) and from the inspection meetings, that there are good lines communication between the OF and the alumni/employers /social partners, aided by many of the OF staff working part-time in external dental practices, and the aims and outcomes of the programme conform with the needs of labour market. However, the employers/social partners were keen to further strengthen the communication with the OF to ensure the undergraduate curriculum continues adapt to rapid changes in dentistry, such as students having greater experience in digital dentistry (e.g. use of intra-oral scanners).

*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*

The vision, mission and objectives of the Higher Education Institution (HEI) were clearly articulated and are fully reflected in the dental field of study, as stated in the SER (section 1.2 p-9). LSMU's mission and objectives are appropriate for a modern forward thinking healthcare institution intent on developing well-educated and skilled graduates, who will have an ongoing positive impact on society. The objectives of the study programme are well-defined and conform with the European requirements for dentistry, as shown in Annex 1. The coherence of the study programme aims and expected learning outcomes with the LSMU's strategy are monitored by the Study Programme Committee (SPC) and the OF Council (OFT).

It was evident from the expert panel meetings with the Faculty and SER Group that the construction of the new OF building will make a significant contribution to the ability of the



programme to achieve the LSMU mission and objectives, especially regarding the enhancement to the teaching facilities (e.g. clinical skills facilities, inclusion of more digital dentistry workflows, etc) and the students' ability to engage more readily with research. The expert panel view the new OF building as an essential enhancement to the programme.

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

The Odontology programme is a five year programme split into 60 ECTS credits per year (30 ECTS credits per semester). As expected for a undergraduate clinical programme, there is a high percentage of contact hours (70%), with 30% being for independent study. For the academic year 2022-23, the total 300 ECTS credits were split between general subject modules (36 ECTS credits), study field modules (232 ECTS credits) and elective modules (32 ECTS credits).

There is clear evidence from the SER that the study programme complies with the legal requirements of both the EU and the Republic of Lithuania (SER section 1.3 p-9 and Table 1 below). The expert panel are satisfied that the programme complies with the appropriate legal requirements.

**Table 1:** LSMU Odontology study programme compliance with the legal requirements.

<b>Criteria</b>	<b>General legal requirements</b>	<b>LSMU Odontology programme</b>
Scope of the programme in ECTS	300	300
ECTS for internship	No less than 20 ECTS	20
ECTS for final thesis (project)	No less than 15 ECTS	16
Individual learning	No less than 30 % of learning	30%

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

The programme learning outcomes are benchmarked to the Association for Dental Education in Europe (ADEE) "The Graduating European Dentist" documents (2005, 2009 & 2017) and the European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System (ECTS) National Concept: Harmonisation of Credits and the Development and Implementation of a Methodology of Learning Outcomes-Based Study Programmes VP1-2.2-ŠMM-08-V-01-001" activities, the Medical Standard MN42:2015 "Odontologist. Rights, duties, competencies and responsibilities" and the Description of the Odontology Study Field (as stated in the SER section 1.4 p-10). The programme learning outcomes (Annex 1) are approved by the Council for the FO and are divided into eight broad learning outcomes:

1. "Professionalism, ethics and basic legal knowledge;
2. Communication and social skills;
3. Basic knowledge, information gathering and synthesis of data;

4. Collection of clinical data;
5. Emergency dental care and first aid skills;
6. Diagnosis and treatment planning of diseases of the mouth;
7. Treatment of diseases of the mouth;
8. Prevention of disease of the mouth and public health.”

The programme learning outcomes are clearly presented in annex 1, including an outline mapping in which modules the learning outcomes are attained. The study plan (annex 2) provides details of the individual modules and the associated assessments. The programme learning outcomes are appropriately benchmarked to the appropriate European standards, as stated above, and there is evidence of sufficient constructive alignment between the programme learning outcomes, teaching methodologies and the associated assessments. A good range of assessments tools are used to assess competencies, including traditional written examinations, project work and practical assessments, such as Objective Clinical Structured Examinations (OSCEs).

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

The Odontology curriculum is structured around the 2+3 model, with the first two years of the curriculum mainly consisting of general subjects, fundamental knowledge and some pre-clinical skills training. The final three years of the programme are mainly centred around further pre-clinical training, essential odontology knowledge and clinical practice, with the master’s thesis element in year five. Elective modules take place in years 1 to 4. The curriculum is designed to develop students’ knowledge and skills competencies through the academic years, resulting in students requiring the more complex competencies required for clinical practice at graduation. Details of the curriculum content are outlined in the SER (section 1.5 p-11) and in the study plan (annex 2 – AY2022-23).

There was evidence, from the SER and the expert panel meetings, there is a well-established annual review process of the curriculum content. This is carried out by the Odontology Study Programme Committee (SPC), the OF Council, the Rector’s Office and is finally approved by the LSMU Senate. There was evidence that feedback from students and other stakeholders (e.g. alumni, employer and social partners) has been used by the SPC to plan future changes to the curriculum, resulting in a number of changes to the curriculum (outlined in the SER p-12). Following the outcome of the previous inspection, which outlined the need to incorporate more aspects of clinical dentistry in Year 1, this has been implemented in the Introduction to the Specialty module. The previous inspection also highlighted the need for more Inter-Professional Education (IPE) of the odontology students with hygiene students and dental technicians, and there was evidence provided in the SER (p-11) and in the expert panel meetings, changes have been made to incorporate this. However, it was the opinion of the expert panel that there was more scope to develop IPE, with the development of the new OF building being fundamental to achieving this aim through having odontology and hygiene students working on the same clinics.

Other examples of recent curriculum changes include the reduction in credits of general and fundamental modules (by six credits), to allow more time for clinical skills development in paediatric dentistry, oral surgery, orthodontics and endodontics. There is now more emphasis on research skills following the introduction of modules on basic statistics, informatics and scientific research. In general there has been changes made to focus the teaching more on aspects directly related to clinical dentistry, rather than in more general medical aspects of teaching. Examples of this were given in the expert panel meetings, for example, in microbiology and radiology.

The expert panel support the on-going work to increase the horizontal and vertical integration of the basic science subjects and the development of a more competency-based curriculum. This is in line with current good educational practice. It was clear in the expert panel meeting with the SER group that regular meetings are taking place, which include staff from the basic science (anatomy, histology, etc), to better integrate the curriculum. Examples were given, which highlighted the need to better integrate the basic sciences into the curriculum learning outcomes and focus anatomy teaching more on head and neck.

#### *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*

There is scope for students to personalise their studies through selecting elective modules during years 1-4, during their internships and subject areas for their final year theses. There are a wide selection of elective modules available (annex 3), mostly involving subjects directly relevant to odontology and medicine, although students can also take second language modules, which may help promote student mobility. The expert panel would encourage the continued development of the elective modules, including consideration of re-introducing second language modules across more years.

Students also have scope to choose the location of their internships and organise additional internships, which can be valuable for their future employment. Evidence from the SER (section 1.6 p-13) shows that many students choose to undertake additional internships.

As discussed in more detail in section 4.2 of the SER (p-31), there are clear protocols to allow some adaptations to individual studies due to personal needs (disabilities, illness, pregnancy, etc), which may include academic leave. Evidence was provided in the SER (section 6, p-13) that since the previous inspection, six students have been granted adaptations to their studies and 52 students have been granted academic leave.

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

The final master's thesis is completed in Year 5 of the programme and accounts for 16 ECTS credits. The regulations for the master's thesis in Odontology are available on the LSMU website (<https://lsmu.lt/wp-content/uploads/2022/12/regulation-of-masters-thesis-of-en.pdf>). All thesis supervisors must be LSMU staff members, have a PhD and can supervise a maximum of four students. Final master's thesis must be relevant to Odontology and be either a scientific research project or a literature review, the majority of which being related to clinical topics, with only 3-4% being basic science-based. Outline details of the final master's theses are

available in the SER Annex 4 and a selection of theses, along with the grades awarded, were made available to the expert panel online and during the inspection.

The expert panel were satisfied that the regulations relating to the final master's theses were clear and widely available, with the standard of the theses was at an appropriate level and the marking was consistent and fair. The Student group reported to the expert panel that staff provided good support to students who wish to undertake research.

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

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

- A well developed and designed curriculum with clear programme learning outcomes and assessment processes.

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

- Lack of integrated clinical facilities.
- Need to further develop Interprofessional Education (IPE), particularly in the clinical setting.

## **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***

The Research & Development activities developed at the LSMU evidentiates the institution's high profile and rating in the field of biomedical sciences, thus providing a clear indication as to the quality of research being conducted at the university. The increase in citations and h-index in the field of biomedical sciences from 2018 to 2021 suggests that the university's research is gaining international recognition and impact. Overall, the university actively engages in publishing scientific journals, books, textbooks, and organizing scientific conferences and events, all of which are essential for knowledge dissemination and collaboration. LSMU is also involved in various research projects, both nationally and internationally. However, while some international collaboration is mentioned, there could be room for further expanding international partnerships and joint research projects. Collaborating with institutions from different countries can bring diverse perspectives and resources, thus enhancing the quality and impact of research.

While the university seems to excel in the field of biomedical sciences, it's essential to ensure that other disciplines are also adequately supported and encouraged. Overemphasis on one field may lead to neglecting other important areas of education and research. Interdisciplinary research is becoming increasingly important in addressing complex global challenges. Encouraging collaboration between different departments and faculties can lead to innovative solutions. The university's strategic research areas should reflect this trend.

Overall, it appears that LSMU is doing well in terms of research quality and output in the field of biomedical sciences. Nonetheless, diversifying research areas and fostering more

international collaborations would be beneficial. Focus on the integration of research and education need to be improved to provide students with hands-on research experience.

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

The teaching staff's commitment to regularly update the course material and share the outputs from international scientific conferences ensures that students are exposed to the latest scientific advancements and research findings in the field of odontology. Likewise, actively involving students in ongoing research at LSMU units and encouraging them to participate in scientific discussions is a valuable practice, as it provides students hands-on experience and allows them to learn from scientific innovations up close. Moreover, encouraging students to attend scientific conferences and lectures helps to keep them informed about the latest scientific achievements and trends in the field, thus fostering a science-driven educational environment. Ideally these opportunities are accessible to all students and that they are actively encouraged to participate.

Despite the aforementioned positive aspects, the promotion of collaboration with international partners is essential for broadening the horizons of students and exposing them to diverse perspectives and research opportunities. While the outlook highlights students' exposure to the latest methodologies and technologies during their research work and internships, it is not clear how deeply and comprehensively these technologies and methodologies are horizontally integrated into the curriculum. Thus, the curricular design should ideally embed a clearer and better-defined scientific approach and involvement of students throughout. Furthermore, one must highlight the call for interdisciplinary approaches. Given the complex nature of healthcare, integrating insights from other fields like biology, engineering, and data science could be beneficial for students and research in odontology.

In summary, the outlook demonstrates a strong commitment to keeping students updated with the latest developments in science and technology. However, for continuous improvement, the institution should focus on deeper integration of these advancements into the curriculum, transparent assessment of teaching materials, and ensuring that all students benefit from these opportunities.

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

The requirement for a final master's thesis that is linked to ongoing research projects is a positive practice, as it allows students to apply their knowledge and skills in a real research context. Encouraging students to get involved in scientific activities from the early years of their studies must be fostered, as it enhances students' interest in research and provide a seamless transition into more advanced research activities. The existence of Students' Scientific Society (SSS) groups specializing in Odontology and Oral and Maxillofacial Surgery provides a supportive structure for students to engage in research. Student's participation in various conferences and the award of prizes to the best papers and offering extra points for scientific activity during admission to residency studies can motivate students to actively engage in research. Recognizing and rewarding their efforts is crucial for student motivation. Accessible and inclusive research opportunities for all students need to be provided, thus ensuring that all interested students, regardless of their background or circumstances, have the chance to participate. Students should be encouraged to collaborate with peers from other disciplines. Interdisciplinary collaboration can lead to innovative research projects and broader perspectives.

Overall, the institution demonstrates a commitment to involving students in scientific activities, but there is room for some improvements in terms of inclusivity, mentorship, interdisciplinary collaboration, and the assessment of long-term impact. Additionally, gathering feedback from students can help in refining and enhancing these programmes.

Although some frailties have been mentioned in the analysis in section 3.2, it is the panel's view that these should not reflect negatively on the overall outlook of the programme. Nonetheless, it would be wise and highly recommended to address these frailties in order to avoid undesirable impacts on the programme's quality and secure the present scorings.

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

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

- Faculty members with a strong scientific-drive.
- Science-driven education environment.

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

- Scant interdisciplinary collaboration and modest international outlook.

## **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***

Applicants to the Lithuanian-language Odontology study programme in LSMU are admitted through a procedure curated by the Association of Lithuanian Higher Education Institutions for Centralized Admissions (LAMA BPO) and regulated by corresponding legal acts of Lithuania. The process is online and uniform for all HEI's in Lithuania. Applicants must have accomplished secondary or equivalent education and meet threshold requirements to participate in the competition. Main entrance criterion is the competition score, calculated from the results of state matriculation exams or annual grades. Extra points can be awarded following a separate Order of the Lithuanian Minister of Education, Science and Sport.

Each year, in collaboration with faculties, LSMU Council approves the number of students to be admitted in each study programme. The Lithuanian Ministry of Education, Science and Sport approves the number of state-funded places.

Admission to the English-language Odontology study programme in LSMU is regulated by the admission rules approved by the LSMU Senate each year and managed by LSMU International Relations and Study Centre (IRSC). Applicants who graduated outside of EU, EFTA countries, UK, Canada, or USA, must submit official graduation certificates. In the SER, LSMU provided four criteria by which the applicants are evaluated:

- Eligibility for higher education studies (evaluated by the IRSC in collaboration with the Lithuanian Centre for Quality Assessment in Higher Education (SKVC)).

- Competition score (determined by an entry exam or calculated from the grades in the school graduation certificate, if the applicant comes from a country with a trusted education system).
- Motivation to study (compulsory).
- Appropriate English knowledge (determined by the presence of official English-language certificates or LSMU test).

Applicants who meet these criteria can participate in the competition.

Detailed information about the Odontology study programme and the admissions procedures can be found on the website of LSMU (both in Lithuanian and in English). Applicants can also find out about the study programme from social media, IRSC staff, student recruitment agencies abroad, study fairs (both in Lithuania and abroad) and webinars. LSMU also has its Ambassador and Parent Ambassador programmes which aim to share experience and give advice for potential applicants abroad.

The expert panel are satisfied that there are robust student selection and admission procedures and this information is widely available to applicants.

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

LSMU is granted an autonomy in the field of academic recognition by the Ministry of Education, Science and Sport. The University has an internal procedure for recognition of foreign qualifications which was agreed upon with the SKVC. In cases where no guidelines exist, LSMU consults with SKVC. Applicants can also apply directly to the SKVC for recognition of their education in foreign institutions and estimation of subject equivalents.

In the SER, LSMU provided clear principles and criteria according to which foreign qualifications of applicants are evaluated and recognised. LSMU also provided statistics about this process. During the period of evaluation (2019 -- 2021), 34 cases of foreign qualifications of applicants to the Odontology study programme were evaluated. Two of them were rejected with sufficient reasoning (questionable authenticity of a document and qualification not equivalent to secondary education level of the Republic of Lithuania).

Results of partial studies abroad or results acquired during international exchange programmes are recognised following Studies Regulations of the LSMU.

Under the period of evaluation, there were no cases of recognizing competences acquired through non-formal and informal learning, however, there is a special procedure for this cause approved by the LSMU Senate.

The expert panel consider the procedure of recognition of foreign qualifications, partial studies and prior non-formal and informal learning to be clear, transparent and appropriate.

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

According to the SER, dental students in LSMU can participate in academic mobility programmes under the Erasmus+ exchange platform. Students who want to apply for exchange can find all related information on the University's website. Also, the University promotes academic exchange via email, social media, and the University's newsletter. As found by the expert panel, Erasmus+ is the only platform used for academic mobility in the FO in LSMU.

Current period of evaluation involves the pandemic period which constrained students' abilities to participate in academic exchange programmes. However, as reported in the SER, 19 students went abroad for partial studies (one or two semesters) and 43 students participated in Erasmus+ internships throughout the period of evaluation.

The expert panel consider academic mobility in Odontology studies in LSMU is good, even though the situation was distorted by the recent global pandemic. The University recognizes the importance and benefits of academic mobility and promotes it among its students.

### *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*

As reported in the SER, both local and international LSMU students are provided with comprehensive academic, psychological, financial and career support. According to the SER, these measures are well organized among various departments of the University, each having clear responsibilities. In the year 2022, LSMU introduced a Student Affairs Office which, besides many other functions, represents the students and helps to manage student welfare issues.

It was apparent to the expert panel during the site visit that the student support system was actively working. HEI representatives were keen to promote a positive atmosphere in the University and to help students on their academic and personal issues. The students were aware of the support available from the University and were accessing this support. One of the outcomes of the previous inspection was the need to better integrate international students, as a result, a programme of events and support has been developed to help international students adapt to studying at LSMU.

The expert panel would like to commend the exceptional level and range of student support services and facilities available to the students, which was confirmed during the onsite meeting of the expert panel with the students.

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

Study information about the Odontology programme is provided to students in a clear and efficient way. Each subject's aims and objectives are uploaded on the LSMU Study Information System and Moodle. Study material is also accessible on Moodle. Additional information reaches students via e-mail and also can be found on the University's website.

A significant effort is put into introducing first year students into the community of the University (introduction to studies, student mentors – curators, additional integration



programme for international students and similar initiatives). The onsite visit revealed a collaborative environment inside the FO. Students are represented in various levels of University governance. There are several ways students can provide feedback on the study process, subjects and tutors ('quality thermometer', students representatives in study programme committees, Students' Representation in LSMU and others). Both administration staff and students provided examples of changes to the study process or curriculum that were initiated by students themselves (e.g. adapting the radiology course to be more focused on clinical dentistry and uploading lecture recordings onto Moodle).

The expert panel considers that there is sufficient study information provided and this is readily available. There is good access to student counselling, which definitely strengthens the good relationship between the students and the academic staff.

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

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

- Robust student admission processes.
- The exceptional range and quality of student support services available to the students.

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

- None.

### **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***

The Odontology programme curriculum is well-structured and is designed around three main integrated themes: (i) clinical knowledge and practical skills; (ii) critical thinking, evidence-based decision-making; (iii) leadership and motivating patients (SER section 4.1 p-29). There is a logical sequence of mainly general and pre-clinical modules in the first two years, which support the transition to the more complex clinical knowledge and skills training required for clinical care in years 3-5 (annex 2). Currently, a more horizontally and vertically integrated competency-based curriculum is being phased-in.

A range of modern teaching pedagogies, supported by various online learning resources (Moodle, Library search engines, etc), are used in conjunction with a range of well-recognised formative and summative assessment tools to promote learning and to provide evidence that students attain the programme learning outcomes by graduation. Students receive assessment feedback on the LSMU study information system and on Moodle, as well as immediate verbal feedback during practical and clinical sessions, which help students' on-going learning (feeding forwards).

During the staff and student meetings with the expert panel, it was apparent that there is a fair and caring working relationship between staff and students. The students acknowledged that they are very satisfied with the teaching and clinical experience they receive, including exposure to a broad range of patients (e.g. different ages, medical conditions, etc). Students are also able to access more modern equipment during internships with the social partners, and observe more advanced clinical procedures. Furthermore, students can also attend staff sessions in private practice. Students reported that they found the feedback they received on clinics to be very supportive in their learning, but would like more individualised assessment feedback. Generally, only students who fail assessments receive detailed assessment feedback, however, the students recognised the issues relating to the OF having a closed question bank. The students also reported having a more senior student as mentor was useful, especially for providing academic support.

Some concerns were raised relating to the limitations of the current clinical facilities, such as radiographic facilities only being on the paediatric clinic and need to have more experience of using intra-oral scanners. The international students reported that they were well supported, but did have some language difficulties with regards to the electronic patient record and communicating with some patients who are only able to speak Lithuanian (e.g. young children). There has been staff discussions about more integration of the international students with Lithuanian students on clinics in order to overcome these difficulties, and the expert panel fully support this change.

Evidence was provided in the SER (section 4.1 p-29) and in the various expert panel meetings, that appropriate support was provided by the university during the Covid lockdown to allow the efficient transition to online teaching in spring 2020. During the initial complete lock down, the theoretical teaching was carried out online, until the summer semester when clinical teaching resumed. When clinical practice resumed, measures were taken to ensure the students refreshed their clinical skills in the practical skills laboratory prior to restarting patient work. The summer semester was used for Year 3 and 4 students to help mitigate for the loss of clinical experience during the lock down period. Due to the Covid restrictions, the patient capacity of the clinics was reduced by a half and the students worked in pairs in order to get as much clinical experience as possible. In 2020, all assessments were carried out online, with students being required to sign a honesty agreement, and remote proctoring and plagiarism checking software were used to ensure integrity of the assessment processes. In the academic year 2020-21, a hybrid learning approach was used using a combination of online theoretical teaching with face-to-face practicals and clinics.

It was evident to the expert panel that staff and students felt well supported during the Covid pandemic and that appropriate measures were taken to ensure teaching, assessments and clinical activity continued. It was clear to the expert panel that the OF staff had reflected on the changes made during Covid, aided by student feedback, and have continued to incorporate various online resources to help support student learning. The employers and social partners acknowledged that there was good communication from the OF regarding the measures taken to help mitigate the shortfall in clinical experience of the final year students during 2020, such

as arranging mentorship following graduation. The OF staff should be commended for their management the programme during the Covid pandemic.

It is the opinion of the expert panel that are strong learning and teaching processes in place to enable students to achieve the intended learning outcomes, and effective measures were efficiently and effectively put into practice to continue teaching during the Covid pandemic. The expert panel also support the phasing in of the horizontally and vertically integrated competency-based curriculum as this would further enhance the learning and teaching.

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

As reported in the SER, there are various measures in place to assist disadvantaged and/or socially vulnerable students, including scholarships (provided by the State Study Foundation), individualisation of the study plan, modified assessments (e.g. extended assessment times, increased font size, verbal examination, etc) and special workplaces, with the University investing in dedicated infrastructure and equipment. Also, special courses are available for staff to improve their knowledge and skills of teaching students with special needs. Students requiring assistance can apply to a University-wide special commission, which co-ordinates the assistance. Also, information about resources available is accessible on the LSMU website. As seen during the onsite visit, LSMU campus is readily accessible by students with special needs, especially in the newest and modernised facilities such as the library and simulation centre. Most of the study material is digital or available in digital form, which is convenient for students who have, for example, difficulty seeing and/or hearing.

The experts view the current procedures and facilities at LSMU for students from socially vulnerable groups and/or with special needs is good. There are various processes in place aimed to assist such students throughout their study process.

#### *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*

Odontology Study Programme Committee (SPC) has overall responsibility for monitoring student progress, which carries this function out at least twice a year. Students meet with staff every semester to discuss their progress. As outlined in the SER (section 4.3 p-31) and discussed in section 3.4.1 of this report, students receive assessment marks and feedback online (LSMU study information system and on Moodle). A practice diary is used to record student clinical activities.

At the expert panel meeting with the students, it was confirmed that students are satisfied with the feedback they received on the clinics and the practice diary is used to monitor clinical activity, as well as for carrying out reflection. Student's clinical activity is monitored each semester, and if students are deemed to be behind schedule, they can readily arrange additional clinical sessions to catch up.

The expert panel are satisfied that there are robust processes in place to systematically monitor student progress and provide feedback to promote subsequent learning (feeding forwards).

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

LSMU monitors the employment and graduate career pathways using surveys at six months and at one, three and five years. The surveys at six months and one year assess employment and adaptation to working in practice. The later surveys assess and monitor career pathways. More objective official career monitoring of graduates is undertaken by the Ministry of Social Security and Labour of the Republic of Lithuania. LSMU also conduct an employers survey every 3 years. Data regarding the employment and career pathway of international students is less clear due to the majority of the graduates leaving Lithuania following graduation or after postgraduate studies.

Data provided in the SER (section 4.4) and discussion between the expert panel and the alumni, employers and social partners indicated that there is a high market demand for graduates, with employers actively competing for new graduates. Many students work in practices where they have completed internships following graduation. The employers and social partners stated that they were satisfied with the competency of the graduates, which was mirrored in a LSMU employers survey in 2022 (87.5% satisfaction), but there is more need for experience in digital dentistry.

The expert panel are satisfied that there is sufficient evaluation of employability and career tracking of graduates. It is clear that there is a high demand for graduates in the Lithuanian labour market.

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

The LSMU Study Regulation document defines academic integrity for the programme ([https://lsmu.lt/wp-content/uploads/2022/06/studyregulation2021.04\\_conf.pdf](https://lsmu.lt/wp-content/uploads/2022/06/studyregulation2021.04_conf.pdf)). Prior to every assessment students must sign an Academic Honesty Agreement. Further measures were put in place to ensure academic integrity of the online assessments completed during the Covid lockdown (see section 3.4.1). Although there were no cases of academic misconduct reported relating to the Odontology programme in 2021 and 2022, two cases were reported in 2019 and four in 2020. As evidenced in the SER (section 4.5 p-33), LSMU have policies to ensure equality, prevention of discrimination, allowance for personal circumstances (e.g. academic leave due to pregnancy, etc) and prevention of sexual harassment.

The expert panel are satisfied that there are clearly defined policies and procedures in place to prevent and appropriately manage violations relating to academic integrity, intolerance and discrimination.

#### *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*

As outlined in the SER (section 4.6 p-33) there is a well-defined appeals and complaints procedure, which is initiated by written submission to either the Dean of the Faculty or the Rector, depending on the circumstances. Appeals are assessed by the Appeals Commission, which has student representation from the Student Union, and student involved can give an

oral statement at the meeting. The outcome of the Appeals Commission can be referred to the LSMU Commission for Student Disputes.

The expert panel are satisfied that there is a clear and fair appeals and complaints procedure in place.

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

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

- Strong educational environment.
- Robust processes in place to systematically monitor student progress.
- Robust policies and procedures in place to promote academic integrity, ethics, tolerance and non-discrimination.
- Effective management during the Covid pandemic which ensured students' education was able to continue.

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

- Lack of integration between the Lithuanian and English language students on the clinics.

## **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***

Currently, there are approximate 200 members of teaching staff on the programme, with a good balance of junior and senior staff. The gender balance of the teaching staff reflects the higher number of female graduates in the profession and there are sufficient childcare facilities readily available close to the FO to promote female staff career progression. The teaching staff are appropriately qualified and experienced in both clinical dentistry and research, and effort is made to integrate these competencies into their teaching. Many teachers are teacher-practitioners (i.e. work part-time in the OF and in general dental practice) and are able to bring their current clinical practice experience to the teaching of the students. There is clear evidence of a good responsive and co-operative working relationship between the staff and students, with the students being actively heard in a professional manner.

The University supports continuing staff development by providing a range of free educational courses and there is a mandatory requirement for staff to participate in at least 40 hours of educational development in every five year employment cycle. Staff can choose which courses they participate in. The aim of this staff development is to continually improve the staff's pedagogical skills in order to have a positive impact on student education. Staff are also able attend national and international clinically-related and scientific conferences, undertake research internships and exchanges in order to increase their knowledge and skills.

It was evident to the expert panel during the site visit, that the students and staff were satisfied that there was a good teacher-to-student ratio on the clinics, typically around 3.0, with higher ratios of between 7-10 students in some of the internships. The expert panel view the teacher-to-student ratio is good and is appropriate for the student learning needs and for patient safety.

The expert panel are satisfied that there are sufficient number of appropriately qualified and experienced staff employed, covering the required basic science and clinical disciplines, to be able to achieve the teaching of the learning outcomes.

### *3.5.2. Evaluation of conditions for ensuring teaching staffs' academic mobility (not applicable to studies carried out by HEIs operating under the conditions of exile)*

The OF teaching staff are able to undertake academic mobility through Erasmus+ arrangements or through teaching and/or study visits to international institutions (ranging from 2 days to 2 months in length). As outlined in the SER (section 5 p-35), 17 teachers and three members of staff have undertaken Erasmus+ exchanges to a range of European and Middle Eastern partner institutions in the last five years. Six teachers and two staff members have visited the LSMU OF. LSMU staff have an equal opportunity and are encouraged to undertake international exchanges as part of the annual appraisal processes.

Although Covid-19 pandemic restricted internationalisation, the FO constantly tries to expand international agreements within the ERASMUS+ programme. While the outgoing mobility of teachers is increasing, the local staff may benefit from more visiting academics to LSMU. This in turn could also positively impact research activities. Currently, LSMU has 28 agreements with international partner universities.

The expert panel supports LSMU's policy of encouraging staff to undertake academic mobility, and reflects the open-minded spirit of the University. The expert panel support the continued development and expansion of academic mobility, including encouraging more international staff to visit LSMU.

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

The Innovative Education Department at the LSMU monitors and supports staff educational skills development by providing a range of courses and educational events designed to improve staff pedagogical competencies, especially in light of current need for more hybrid educational approaches. There has also been two educational development conferences held at the FO. Furthermore, the participation at international conferences, (e.g. ADEE annual conferences) are financially supported and promoted. As a consequence, different innovative teaching methods, especially digital ones, has been introduced since the COVID pandemic. These have been well supported by administrative staff. As stated in section 3.5.2 of this report, staff are able to undertake academic mobility in order to improve their academic, clinical and research competencies. Staff are also able to use student feedback (e.g. from the "thermometer" surveys) to help teachers to reflect upon their teaching and make subsequent changes.

Although some work has been undertaken, research integration and connection with industry could be further expanded in future to offer students and potentially future staff wider research opportunities and to stay internationally competitive.

It is clear to the expert panel that there is good positive support by both the University and the FO for staff development relating to teaching, clinical practice and research.

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

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

- Good working relationship between staff and students.
- Good availability of educational training programmes to develop staff pedagogical competencies.
- High numbers of clinical teacher-practitioners.
- Good support for staff to undertake academic mobility, including attendance at international conferences.

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

- Lack of international academic staff visiting LSMU FO.

## **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***

The LSMU and the FO are continuing to modernise their facilities, as outlined in the SER (section 6 p-37) and seen by the expert panel during the onsite inspection. Examples include the modern library, hybrid labs and medical pre-clinical simulation classrooms. The library is a modern, well-equipped and staffed building open 24/7, with good access to a broad range of online resources (journal databases, e-books, etc) and has facilities for self- and group study, creating a good learning environment for the students. Internet access is widely available on the campus, including in the library, and the University uses a good range of standard educational software (e.g. Moodle, Microsoft 365, OneDrive, etc), has a rolling policy of upgrading staff/student computers and has specialist technology available for students/staff with special needs.

Dental instruments and materials are free of charge for students, which enables students to complete sufficient numbers of patient treatment procedures required for the odontology programme. However, the clinical departments are currently in separate buildings, which prevents access to modern clinical facilities across all of the clinical areas (e.g. intra-oral scanners, 3D printing, CBCT machines, etc). The current clinical facilities are also in need of modernisation (e.g. dental units, pre-clinical skills laboratory, etc). The development of the modernised integrated clinical facilities in the new FO building would overcome many of these shortcomings.

As outlined in section 3.4 of the SER (p-26), LSMU provides a broad range of academic, financial and pastoral/psychological support, as well as promoting extra-curricular activities (e.g.

sports), to promote good student welfare during learning. It was very apparent to the expert panel during the site visit that the students were well supported by the University and the FO, and they had the educational, sports and social facilities they required.

Overall, the expert panel consider the university has good physical, IT and financial resources to support the on-going needs of students on the Odontology programme, however, the opening of the new FO building will be a significant enhancement (see section 3.6.2).

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

Plans for a new integrated FO building, financed by the university, have been developed and building is expected to start in 2024, with a completion date at the end of 2025 or early in 2026. The new building will have 9000m<sup>2</sup> of space, with 180 dental units, a pre-clinical skills unit (60 dental simulators and a 3D virtual simulation centre), modern dental technical laboratories and a centre for dental diagnostics, research laboratories and a number of teaching rooms. As emphasised in the SER (section 6 p-39) and during the expert panel discussion with the senior faculty staff, the new facilities will integrate clinical teaching, provide modern hybrid teaching resources promoting more hands-on independent pre-clinical learning and promote dental research.

The expert panel fully support the development of the new OF building, as it will provide a significant enhancement to the learning environment of the students, especially by having modern clinical and pre-clinical facilities on one site. This will also provide more opportunities for student involvement in research and for more interprofessional learning (IPE) – see section 3.1.5. However, it is important that the FO ensures that there is good collaborative working between departments in the new building and across LSMU.

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

#### *(1) Strengths:*

- Excellent library and medical pre-clinical simulation facilities.
- Evidence of good ongoing financial investment to modernise LSMU facilities.

#### *(2) Weaknesses:*

- Lack of integrated clinical facilities.

## **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*

The LSMU quality system is aligned with national and international Higher Education documents, as well as internal strategic guidelines, involving different levels of governance, such as the Study Quality Monitoring and Assurance Commission (SQAMC) and Faculty Councils, is commendable. The engagement of different stakeholders is secured, including students, graduates, employers, and professional organizations. The use of surveys and data to measure the opinions of students, teaching staff, and other stakeholders is a positive practice.



However, it is crucial to ensure the effectiveness of data collection methods, analysis, and how the results are utilized for quality improvement. Moreover, the relationship with the Student Union needs to be strengthened and students need to be involved in open discussions, in order to secure the student's engagement and assess whether their concerns and feedback are addressed effectively.

Overall, the commitment to transparency and open communication about the quality of studies, including making results available on the university's website and in publications, should be regarded as positive. Ultimately, the effectiveness of the system must be assessed in terms of its impact on the quality of study programmes, including how well it leads to improvements in curriculum, teaching, and learning outcomes.

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

The involvement of stakeholders, particularly students, is portrayed as extensive, multifaceted and comprehensive. Students are actively engaged in various institutional bodies, committees, and working groups, including the highest administrative bodies. The use of diverse feedback mechanisms, such as surveys, meetings, discussions, and debates, allows students to express their opinions and concerns through various channels, with them being not only consulted on programme updates but also encouraged to submit their proposals. The inclusion of feedback from employers and graduates through surveys conducted by the Career Centre further demonstrates a commitment to understanding the employability of graduates. The commitment to publishing information on study programmes, qualifications, student opinions, and performance evaluations fosters transparency and open communication with stakeholders.

However, there is room for improvement as to the real impact of student and stakeholder feedback on programme refinement and development and whether the feedback is effectively integrated into decision-making processes. To gauge effectiveness, the feedback mechanisms need to be continuously improved based on the experiences and preferences of stakeholders.

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

The LSMU's system for collecting, using, and publishing information for quality improvement is robust, with evidence of positive changes resulting from feedback. The data collected is analysed and evaluated by various governing bodies and committees, including the Study Quality Assurance and Monitoring Commission, Faculty Councils, and the Study Programme Committee (SPC).

Evidence has been provided that surveys have led to tangible changes to the study programmes, with specific examples being presented in terms of curriculum revisions, addition of new electives, and enhancements to the master's thesis procedure. While the university has implemented changes based on feedback, the evaluation should assess the effectiveness of these changes in addressing the identified de facto issues and improving study quality.

#### *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*

The ratings resulting from the students' feedback appear stable, with a tendency to improve over time. The programme receives higher evaluations compared to the university's average. However, the low response rates in surveys indicate a need to encourage greater participation and understanding of the importance of feedback. In doing so, is pivotal to ensure that feedback represents the perspectives of all student cohorts. Moreover, stakeholders may also provide a more comprehensive view of programme quality, as to sustain and build upon improvements.

Overall, the results of surveys and feedback mechanisms must be more effectively communicated to the broader university community, creating awareness and understanding of the improvements made, thus maintaining a continuous focus on feedback and follow-up actions. The lack of student participation in surveys specifically organized by the Study Programme Committee (SPC) should be addressed to gather more comprehensive data. There is clearly room for enhancing response rates, increasing diversity of participants, and ensuring the sustainability of improvements, as well as for improving overall communication of survey results and feedback actions, which may further enhance the effectiveness of the feedback system.

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

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

- Good representation of students and other stakeholders in the internal quality framework.
- Proper set of surveys and quality assessment tools in place.

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

- Overall low level of engagement/participation of students and other stakeholders.
- Reduced awareness and understanding of the broader academic impact of the internal quality system.
- Poor communication of improvements made and a meager focus on feedback and follow-up actions.

## IV. EXAMPLES OF EXCELLENCE

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

If, according to the expert panel, there are no such exceptional characteristics demonstrated by the HEI in this particular study field, this section should be skipped / left empty.

## V. RECOMMENDATIONS

Evaluation Area	Recommendations for the Evaluation Area (study cycle)
Intended and achieved learning outcomes and curriculum	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• It is essential that the opening of the OF building proceeds in a timely manner to facilitate the enhancement of the teaching and research.</li> <li>• Continue to develop Interprofessional Education (IPE) to include other dental healthcare professionals (dental hygiene and dental technicians) in the clinical context.</li> </ul>
Links between science (art) and studies	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Increase interdisciplinary collaboration within LSMU and international collaborations to promote innovative dental research and increase access to resources.</li> </ul>
Student admission and support	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• None.</li> </ul>
Teaching and learning, student performance and graduate employment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Increase integration of the Lithuanian and English language Odontology programmes on clinics to aid patient communication.</li> </ul>
Teaching staff	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Continue to promote international academic mobility to LSMU to improve educational and research competencies, and to increase international collaborations.</li> </ul>
Learning facilities and resources	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• It is essential that the opening of the OF building proceeds in a timely manner in order to upgrade the clinical and pre-clinical facilities, and to have integration of the clinics within one building.</li> </ul>
Study management quality and public information	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Need to increase engagement/participation of students and other stakeholders in the quality assurance processes.</li> <li>• Improve communication of the outcome of the quality assurance processes to the university community and ensure changes made are clearly communicated.</li> </ul>

## VI. SUMMARY

On behalf of the expert panel, I would first like to thank LSMU, the FO and the students for their hard work preparing the SER and for their openness during the onsite visit. Overall, the study field has performed to a good standard across the seven aspects of the SKVC evaluation criteria, however, the expert panel have made a number of recommendations, which would further enhance the Odontology programme.

The LSMU Odontology programme has a well-structured curriculum which has been benchmarked to both national and European requirements, including to the Association for Dental Education in Europe (ADEE) guidance, and to the needs of the labour market. The teaching is constructively aligned to the learning outcomes and to the assessments, and the expert panel support the transition to a competency-based curriculum. There was clear evidence that changes to the curriculum have been made by the SPC following feedback from students and other stakeholders. The opening of the new OF building will be a significant enhancement to the programme, as it will have integrated modernised clinical and pre-clinical facilities in one building. For example, the new building will facilitate interprofessional education (IPE) of the odontology students with the hygiene students in the clinical context, promoting leadership and teamworking skills. Therefore, the opening of the new OF building is a major priority.

The scientific outlook for LMSU is good, as evidenced by the increased citations and international recognition, particularly in biomedical sciences. However, the need to diversify research areas and expand international collaborations deserves further advancement and support, alongside an increased emphasis on interdisciplinary research. The institution's commitment to involve students in scientific activities was well-noted, with efforts being set in place to keep course material updated and suitable conditions to foster students engagement in scientific activities. The importance of early student involvement, the presence of Students' Scientific Society groups, and recognition of student research efforts are to be highlighted, although there is a need for more inclusivity, mentorship, interdisciplinary collaboration, and long-term impact assessment.

LSMU has robust student admissions processes and offers a convenient and positive atmosphere for its community. First year students are introduced to the University campus, learning resources and facilities, and effort is made to help international students to adapt to studying in Lithuania. There is an exceptional range of academic, financial, psychological and career support available to students, including students with special needs who require various modifications to be made (facilities, learning resources and assessments) to facilitate their learning. Students have an active role in the University management processes and are well represented on various University and OF committees. There are also robust processes and policies in place to monitor student progress and to ensure academic integrity, ethics, tolerance and non-discrimination. However, better integration of the Lithuanian and International students on clinics would aid patient communication and cultural understanding.

It was very evident to the expert panel during the onsite inspection that there is a very good working relationship between the staff and students, with the students reporting that they are

very well supported, creating a very good educational environment. The students have access to very modern library and pre-clinical medical simulation facilities, and it is clear that LSMU have an ambitious planning strategy to further invest in facilities which will benefit the students on the Odontology programme. The teaching staff are highly motivated, well-qualified and there is a good mixture of young and more senior staff, with the gender balance reflecting the female dominance of the graduates. Many of the clinical staff are teacher-practitioners, who also work in external clinical practice, providing a strong link to the requirements of the labour market. LSMU provides good childcare provision, which aids female teachers' career development, and there is good provision of educational training programmes to help develop staff pedagogical competencies. Furthermore, there is good support for LSMU staff to undertake academic mobility, including the attendance to international conferences, however, following the Covid pandemic there is more scope for international academics to have exchange visits to LSMU.

The LSMU's quality system aligns with national and international higher education standards and enables the engagement of various stakeholders, including students, throughout the institution's governance structure. Nonetheless, there is a need to improve data collection methods, strengthen the relationship with the Student Union, and ensure effective use of feedback for quality improvement. As much as there is an evident commitment to transparency and open communication, the impact of student and stakeholder feedback on programme refinement and development deserves some improvement and fine-tuning. Student feedback ratings are stable and have improved over time, but there's a need to encourage students participation in order to enhance the current response rates, increase the diversity of participants, and sustain the improvements based on feedback representative of all student cohorts.

The expert panel would like to commend LSMU and the OF for the management of the Odontology programme during the Covid pandemic, which allowed educational studies to continue.

Overall, the evaluation process has demonstrated the strength of the LSMU Odontology programme, and the expert panel's recommendations will help to further enhance the programme going forwards. The expert panel are looking forwards to the significant enhancements the new OF building will provide to the programme.

**Expert panel chairperson signature:**

**Dr. Kevin John Davey**