



Research  
Council of  
Lithuania




Assessment Report of  
Comparative Expert  
Assessment of Research  
and Development Activities  
Carried out by Universities  
and Research Institutes for  
the Group of Units of  
Assessment VV\_GR\_S\_3

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**Assessment Report of  
the Group of Units of Assessment  
VV\_GR\_S\_3**

Approved by Order of the Chair of the Research Council of Lithuania No V-551 of 13 October 2023.

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## Terms & Abbreviations

**CEA** – Comparative Expert Assessment of research and development activities carried out by Lithuanian universities and research institutes

**FTE** – Full-Time Equivalent

**Institutions** – Lithuanian universities and research institutes

**RCL** – Research Council of Lithuania

**R&D** – Research and Development

**UoA; Unit(s)** – Unit(s) of Assessment

**FTE<sup>1</sup>** – the number of working hours worked during the year by a certain group of employees divided by a number of working hours in the 12 months of that year, as set by the Minister of Social Security and Labour (with a 5-working-day week). <.> The FTE unit – a person per year.

**FTE(SD)<sup>1</sup>** – the sum of the FTE of teaching staff members with a science degree divided by 3, and the FTE of research workers and other researchers with a scientific degree.

### Research areas:

**S** – Social Sciences; **M** – Medical and Health Sciences

### Universities:

**KTU** – Kaunas University of Technology

**KU** – Klaipėda University

**LSU** – Lithuanian Sports University

**VDU** – Vytautas Magnus University

**VU** – Vilnius University

### Research Institute:

**LSMC** – Lithuanian Centre for Social Sciences

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<sup>1</sup> Description of the Comparative Expert Assessment of Research and Development Activities by Universities and Research Institutes approved by Order No V-1593 of the Minister of Education, Science and Sport of 2 September 2021

# 1. INTRODUCTION

## 1.1. Purpose, Scope, Goals of the Comparative Expert Assessment

The Comparative Expert Assessment of research and development activities carried out by universities and research institutes of Lithuania (hereinafter – CEA) was carried out in 2023 by Research Council of Lithuania (hereinafter – RCL) in accordance with the *Description of the Comparative Expert Assessment of Research and Development Activities by Universities and Research Institutes* approved by Order No V-1593 of the Minister of Education, Science and Sport of 2 September 2021 (hereinafter – the Description), the *Regulation on Procedures for the Comparative Expert Evaluation of Research and Development Activities Carried out by Universities and Research Institutes* approved by Order No V-486 of the Chair of the RCL of 8 August 2022 (hereinafter – the Regulation), and other related legislation.

The purpose of CEA is to provide a picture of research and development (hereinafter – R&D) performance, socio-economic impact, and the development potential of Lithuanian universities and research institutes (hereinafter – Institutions) based on their R&D activities during the period of 2018–2022.

The scope of CEA encompasses both state and non-state Institutions operating in Lithuania. All state universities (in total eleven) and all state research institutes (in total eleven as well), four non-state universities and two non-state research institutes were participating in the CEA in 2023. The Institutions or parts thereof were assessed as the units of assessment (hereinafter – UoA or Units). The CEA facilitates the comparison of R&D performance of the UoA against international standards and within the national context. It provides valuable evidence to R&D policymakers at different levels, as well as offers the Institutions involved in the assessment a significant incentive to enhance their performance.

Since 2018, the CEA has been an integral part of assessment of R&D activities of Lithuanian institutions. The annual assessment of R&D activities carried out by the Institutions together with CEA conducted every five years constitutes the Lithuanian assessment system of R&D activities. The results of the two-step assessment are used to allocate state funding for R&D activities for Institutions. The results of the CEA implemented in 2023 will determine 70% of state budget funding for R&D activities of Institutions for the subsequent five years.

The assessment results will also determine the continuity of doctoral studies as well as the new rights to carry out doctoral studies at Institutions in accordance with the *Regulations on Doctoral Studies* approved by Decision No. V-739 of the Minister of Education, Science and Sport of 18 May 2020. Moreover, the findings from the CEA might serve as a trusted source of evidence on R&D performance of the Institutions for assessments concerning other funding instruments or higher education studies.

## 1.2. Comparative Expert Assessment Organization and Assessment Criteria

The CEA relies on international peer review panels to evaluate Lithuanian Institutions' R&D activities. Using panels rather than individual peers creates a possibility for discussion and debate within the peer group and enabling comparison within the group.

The assessment is carried out on the UoA level, which is the organisationally defined structure – ranging from a whole Institution to a division of an Institution corresponding to the faculty or other formal structures of the Institution. In accordance with the Description the rules for the formation of the UoA are as follows:

- the UoA should be interrelated by common R&D activities and might operate in one or two research areas;
- the minimum size of the UoA should be no less than 5 full-time researchers with scientific degree (FTE(SD)) and the maximum size of UoA should not exceed 75 FTE(SD).

The exceptions could be made for better reflection of R&D activities in the Institution. If an Institution had a UoA with a higher number of FTE(SD) or/and UoA operated in three research areas, it should have submitted arguments and obtained RCL approval for participating with not typical composition.

Following the instructions, Institutions have formed eighty-five UoA. All these UoA were split into thirteen groups resulting from four to nine UoA per Panel. The interval of the UoA size ranged from slightly above 5 FTE(SD) to UoA of more than 150 FTE(SD). The number of research areas and research fields one UoA was operating in also varied, i. e., while most UoA operated in one or two research fields, there were outliers where Units were involved in up to five research fields. The variations in size, composition, and research areas among the UoA within each group posed challenges for comparison and required careful consideration by the Expert Panel.

The assessment of the Units is based on three criteria:

- The quality of R&D activities (weight 0.65) of UoA in the research field(s) (group of research fields);
- The economic and social impact of R&D activities (weight 0.2) of UoA;
- The development potential of R&D activities (weight 0.15) of UoA.

The quality of R&D activities is assessed either in each research field or the group of research fields within the research area while economic and social impact as well as development potential are assessed on the UoA level. Each assessment criterion is scored on a five-point scale, namely, ranging from excellent [5] to poor [1] or no R&D [0]. The description of the values of the scores for each criterion are provided in the Description. Half point scores were allowed, and that provided a possibility for more nuanced assessment when necessary.

The quality of R&D activities of the Unit is assessed following these rules: if UoA has at least 10 FTE(SD) in the research field or has between 2 and 10 FTE(SD) and has the right to provide doctoral studies (or intends to seek such right in the next 5 years) in the research field, then the research quality is assessed in the research field; if UoA does not meet these criteria, then the research quality is assessed in the group of research fields within the research area. In the latter case, the assessment considers the collective quality across the research fields within the group.

The assessment was based on the material provided by the UoA to the RCL information system “Vieversys” and covered the period 2018–2022, as well as summarized results of the annual assessment of R&D activities of Institutions (for 2018–2021) provided by RCL, alongside the information obtained during the visits of the Panels to the Institutions and meetings with the representatives of the UoA. Following the Description and the *Procedure for the Submission of Data on Results of Research and Development Activities Carried out by Universities and Research Institutes for the Comparative Expert Assessment* approved by Order No V-1593 of the Minister of Education, Science and Sport of 2 September 2021 (hereinafter – the Procedure for Submission of Data) relevant data was examined when assessing the UoA against each of the CEA criteria. In most cases the number of provided outputs for the assessment depended on the size of the UoA varying from a minimum of five to maximum of eighty-two outputs.

It should be noted that since the previous round of CEA in 2018, several organisational improvements of assessment have been made, therefore caution should be exercised when comparing the results of these two assessments. Some of them are worth mentioning:

- 85 UoA were formed and grouped into 13 Expert Panels in 2023, while the first CEA resulted in 117 UoA formed and grouped into 6 Expert Panels. The cause is mainly due to the change of rules for setting up a UoA. During the 2018 CEA, forming a UoA was allowed in only one respective research area, i. e., if the UoA operated in two research areas, it had to be split into two Units for the assessment purposes. In 2023 this restriction was eliminated, and Unit could easily operate in two (and in some cases in three) research areas. As well UoA formation was influenced by changing landscape of Institutions during the assessment period as mergers of several institutions took place: Aleksandras Stulginskis University and the Lithuanian University of Educational Sciences merged with Vytautas Magnus University since 1<sup>st</sup> January 2019; Šiauliai University was merged with Vilnius University, as well as the Institute of Law, the Lithuanian Institute of Agrarian Economics and the Lithuanian Social Research Center were merged into Lithuanian Centre for Social Sciences since 1<sup>st</sup> January 2021.
- The CEA scoring system has also undergone some changes. While five-point scales were used in both assessments, in 2023 half points were allowed, while in 2018 only whole numbers were used.
- There were some changes in the requirements for documentary input. In 2023 one list of Unit's R&D outputs for a five-year period was required while in 2018 a list of R&D outputs for each assessment year (from 2013 to 2017) and an additional list for the entire assessment period were required, resulting in a large volume of data.

### 1.3. Expert Panel for the VV\_GR\_S\_3 Group of Units of Assessment

The Expert Panel for the VV\_GR\_S\_3 group had to assess eight UoA of six Institutions:

- **Kaunas University of Technology** – 1 UoA:  
*Social Sciences* (abbr. *KTU\_Socio*);
- **Klaipėda University** – 1 UoA:  
*Health and Social Sciences* (abbr. *KU\_SvSOC*);
- **Lithuanian Centre for Social Sciences** – 1 UoA:  
*Lithuanian Centre for Social Sciences* (abbr. *LSMC\_LSMC*);
- **Lithuanian Sports University** – 1 UoA:  
*Social Sciences EU* (abbr. *SM LSU*);
- **Vytautas Magnus University** – 2 UoA:  
*VMU Educology* (abbr. *VDU\_EDU*);  
*VMU Sociology and Psychology* (abbr. *VDU\_SOC\_PSI*);
- **Vilnius University** – 2 UoA:  
*Educational Sciences* (abbr. *VU\_Edu*);  
*Sociology\_Psychology* (abbr. *VU\_SP*).

The Units were operating primarily in the Sociology, Psychology, Education, and as well in Economics, Management, Law, Political Sciences, Communication and Information, Public Health, Medicine, Nursing research fields, and considering these research fields RCL has appointed the Expert Panel members with the main responsibility to assess UoA against three criteria and provide recommendations for UoA future development. The Panel consisted of nineteen members affiliated with institutions abroad:

- Andrea Kárpáti (*Panel Chair*), Corvinus University of Budapest, Hungary
- Antoni Abat Ninet, Hebrew University of Jerusalem, Israel
- Branko Ančić, Institute for Social Research in Zagreb, Croatia
- José Ignacio Antón Pérez, University of Salamanca, Spain

- Ivars Austers, University of Latvia, Latvia
- Paško Bilić, Institute for Development and International Relations Zagreb, Croatia
- Benő Csapó (1953 03 05 – 2023 06 26), University of Szeged, Hungary
- Erik de Gier, Radboud University, Netherlands
- Manuel Fernández Esquinas, Institute for Advanced Social Studies, Spain
- Thomas Hartman, Stockholm University, Sweden
- Iiro Jääskeläinen, Aalto University, Finland
- Allen Kaasik, University of Tartu, Estonia
- Leif Kalev, Tallinn University, Estonia
- Äli Leijen, University of Tartu, Estonia
- Jaroslav Mokry, Charles University in Prague, Czech Republic
- Elina Oinas, University of Helsinki, Finland
- Joaquín Sarrión Esteve, Distance Education National University (UNED), Spain
- Johanna Swennen, VU Amsterdam, Netherlands
- Anna Tatarczak, Maria Curie-Skłodowska University, Poland.

#### 1.4. Assessment Organization for the VV\_GR\_S\_3 Group of Units of Assessment

Timeline of the assessment organization for the VV\_GR\_S\_3 Group of UoA:

**Submission of data.** Institutions participating in the VV\_GR\_S\_3 Group submitted data on R&D activities of their UoA to the information system “Vieversys” by the 21<sup>st</sup> of February 2023 following the Procedure for Submission of Data.

**Individual assessment.** Prior to the visit to Lithuania, the data of each UoA submitted for the assessment was individually evaluated by at least three experts from the Panel. The number of experts assigned to assess each UoA would increase based on the number of research fields within the UoA. The individual assessment of the Units within the VV\_GR\_S\_3 Group was conducted till the 20<sup>th</sup> of March 2023.

**Visit to Lithuania.** The Panel members for the VV\_GR\_S\_3 Group visited Lithuania from the 25<sup>th</sup> to the 31<sup>st</sup> of March 2023. The main objectives of the visit included discussing the results of the individual assessment within the Expert Panel, ensuring a uniform and consistent application of the assessment criteria among the Panel members; visiting and familiarizing with the academic and administrative staff, PhD students, and research infrastructure of the UoA (at least three experts from the Panel had to visit one UoA); and collectively agreeing on all scores for the Units within the group in the joint session.

**Final report.** After the visit to Lithuania, the preparation of the Panel report took place. The coordination of the preparation was done by the Panel chair. Before the submission of the Panel’s report, the institutions were given an opportunity to provide comments on the factual errors if any observed in the written justification of the scores for UoA. Taking into consideration the comments, the Panel's report has been adjusted where necessary. In addition, the Panel prepared a reply to the commenting authorities. The report was submitted to the RCL with the agreement of all Panel members.

**Appeals.** Upon receiving the final results on each Unit, the Institutions had the right to submit a substantiated appeal to the RCL if they believed there were factual errors in the justification of the UoA assessment and/or if they suspected a breach of the assessment procedures that may have affected the assessment outcome.

RCL has established an external Board of Appeal, comprised of seven members selected from the candidates nominated by the Lithuanian Research Academy, the Conference of Rectors of Lithuanian Universities, the



Conference of Directors of the Lithuanian National Research Institutes, and the Ministry of Education, Science, and Sports. The Board of Appeal was responsible for determining whether the appeals adhered to the specified provisions and in case of favourable decision to examine the appeal thoroughly.

The Panel VV\_GR\_S\_3 has received two appeals. The Board of Appeal dismissed the appeals due to non-compliance with the established appeal provisions.

**Approval of the report.** The final report of the VV\_GR\_S\_3 group is approved by the Order of the Chair of the RCL in accordance with the Regulation.

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## 2. ASSESSMENT REPORTS

### 2.1. KU\_SvSOC Unit of Assessment

Name of the institution	<b>Klaipeda University</b>
Official abbreviation of the name of the institution	<b>KU</b>
Name of the Institution's unit of assessment (hereinafter – UoA)	<b>Health and Social Sciences</b>
Abbreviation of the UoA name	<b>KU_SvSOC</b>
The scope of the UoA (FTE(SD))	<b>42,31</b>
Research area(s)	<b>S 000 - Social sciences, M 000 - Medical and health sciences</b>

### Quality of the R&D activities by research fields (groups of research fields) of the UoA

#### Social sciences

Research field	Scope (FTE(SD))	Score (points)
<b>S 007 - Education</b>	<b>12,17</b>	<b>3,5</b>

#### Reasoned justification of the score

This is medium level Unit in the field of Education, which includes 12 professors, 14 associate professors, 5 chief researchers, 1 junior researcher, 4 lecturers with scientific degree and 7 senior researchers. It is questionable, why there are so many training programs if enrolment is insufficient. Moreover, the reduction of administrative staff by 2/3 (forced by governmental budget cuts) and allocating their duties to academic staff seems to be counterproductive for research.

The number of full-time PhD students is almost constant (8 in 2018, 9 in 2019-2021 and 6 in 2022). There are no part-time PhD students and no students from abroad. Defended PhD dissertations during the assessment period are: 2018 - 1, 2019 - 1, 2020 - 0, 2021 - 1 and 2022 - 1. Four dissertations defended during this period is a rather modest training performance, especially when compared to the size of the staff.

The list of the best research output includes six works. These are articles published in Q1 and Q3 journals with impact factor ranging from 2.736 to 4.666 (source: Scopus, CA WoS), two chapters in a book published by an international publisher (Taylor&Francis Group) and one monograph published by Klaipeda University Press. The topics are focused on specific aspects of training of health workers, leading complementary schools, teaching-learning interactions, youth gambling and ethnographic research. The journal *Addiction*, which is a Q1 journal is not related to the field of Education but to Medicine. It is recommended to publish more in Q1 and Q2 category journals in the future. The staff has participated in international research conferences, including in large-scale recognized conferences such as AERA and ECER. EARLI conferences have not been reported, it is recommended to participate in EARLI network and conferences as well (e.g., instead of IATED conference, which has a high fee and only limited possibilities to disseminate research results).

Participation in competition-based R&D projects includes 2 medium projects (with a budget of EUR 343 thous. and EUR 600 thous.); Governmental Program for Applied Research and EU Investments Funds in Lithuania 2014-2020. Other 4 small projects (budget from EUR. 32 to 175 thous.) include ERASMUS+ programs (3x) and Nordplus Adult (2019) programme. Projects are focused on training of specialists, immigrants, educational programs, and applied research in health, education and training.

On the positive side, KU as an employer has several beneficial actions to increase the research potential and fight the geographical peripherality of the University: a post-doc program launched by the KU in 2022 to attract early-career researchers; the establishment of the R&D and Studies Promotion Fund in 2021; and a new salary system oriented towards supporting early-career researchers.

Research field	Scope (FTE(SD))	Score (points)
<b>S 005 - Sociology</b>	<b>12,77</b>	<b>3</b>

#### Reasoned justification of the score

The field of Sociology at the UoA is moderately present and the research carried out could be evaluated as rather strong, although it has limited international recognition. In Sociology, UoA has 9.09 full-time equivalent (FTE) staff with scientific degrees and a total of 16 teaching staff with scientific degree, representing 11.04 FTE. Therefore, it is the smallest research field in Sociology among Lithuanian universities. The ratio between teaching staff and research staff seems to be well-balanced, giving an advantage to further the development of research. Although doctoral studies are not currently implemented, they are planned for the future.

The list of research outputs in terms of publications includes six publications, out of which two are articles published in journals, two are book chapters, and two are books (monographs). Based on the list, an international orientation in publishing is present. Two book chapters are published by renowned publishing houses such as Routledge or Edward Elgar Publishing Limited. However, journal articles are published in international journals with a rather low impact factor and relevance. Two books are published by KU. Concerning conference participation, scholars within the field of Sociology have participated in international conferences, but none of the listed conferences are associated with significant sociological associations. These activities could be improved, and scholars could enrol in more respective conferences (e.g., events organised by the International Sociological Association: the ISA World Congress of Sociology; events by the European Sociological Association, traditional ESA conference; International Conference on Humanities, Social Science and Business Management (ICHSSBM); International Conference on Business Management and Humanities (ICBEMH).

The research projects listed in the report are mostly supported by the Research Council of Lithuania, without international competitive funding. This raises concerns as, in terms of the future development of research, UoA should diversify its funding sources.

In terms of themes present in the research field of Sociology at the Unit, it seems that it needs more profiling. One stream relates to socio-cultural exploration of Lithuanian society and its post-Soviet and Baltic context. The other one relates to issues of health (right to healthcare) and personal wellbeing (disability studies). However, strategically, KU set a thematic direction for Social Sciences towards exploring societies and cultures on the Baltic coast while directing health studies towards sustainable health and wellbeing. However, Sociology should be engaged more in the second stream since, when compared to other academic institutions in Lithuania, it could develop strong research in sociology of health and illnesses and medical sociology.

Research field	Scope (FTE(SD))	Score (points)
<b>S 006 - Psychology</b>	4,54	3

Reasoned justification of the score

Psychology in this UoA is a small but important field that, based on the publications and externally funded projects indicated in the materials as well as answers during the site visit, has notable synergy with especially the educational sciences and health sciences (in the area of psychopathology). Teaching staff with a scientific degree includes 5 professors, 3 associate professors and 3 lecturers. Research staff with a scientific degree include 1 chief researcher, 1 senior researcher, and 1 researcher. This accounts for 11 persons with scientific degree (4.54 FTE/SD). Critically, in the past five years, doctoral studies have not been implemented. This is one aspect that would be important to implement in order to reach for higher grading in the future. The research outputs listed as the best include four published papers in international peer reviewed journals (mostly in Q1) with impact factors varying between 3.5 and 7.2, and a chapter in a book published by Cambridge University Press. This can be considered as a clear sign that research is being carried out at high level, along with the fact that the four papers have been published from the period 2021-2022, which indicates that there is a positive trend. These studies are collaborative ones involving both local (in other universities in Lithuania) and international scholars. Given that the number of higher-impact publications is low, however, the international recognition is considered limited for psychology of this UoA at this point, thus warranting a score not higher than three. This conclusion is further supported by that only one best conference presentation is listed (at European Congress of Psychology, in Ljubljana, 2022). There are no presentations at other major international conferences of large scientific associations. The list of main national and international awards for R&D activities is empty. Participation on competition-based R&D projects is limited to projects with relatively small funding amount, including ERASMUS+ programmes (4x) and a National Foundation grant in the area of Public Health. Projects are focused on schools and education and try to help students, teachers as well as parents of children with special needs. Overall, psychology is the least resourced of the R&D areas. It is somewhat questionable where it is beneficial to keep developing this field as a separate research field in this UoA, and to what extent psychology should collaborate with the other fields, most notably education and health sciences. The local hospitals transforming into teaching and research hospitals of this university (information related during the site visit) is a future possibility for some working in the area of psychology, as many of the reports were on topics that can be characterized as relevant health/medical sciences.

### Medical and health sciences

Research field	Scope (FTE(SD))	Score (points)
<b>M 004 - Public Health</b>	3,89	3

Reasoned justification of the score

Public Health is a small group with 2.41 researcher with scientific degree FTEs and 4.45 teaching staff with scientific degree FTEs. The institution listed documents published in moderate to high-level international journals. It should be noted that the staff from UoA is the senior corresponding author in only one of the five listed papers, which was published in Nutrition, Metabolism & Cardiovascular Diseases. Furthermore, not all listed papers/journals clearly belong to the Public Health domain. Nonetheless, all listed papers were published between 2021-2022, indicating a positive trend. The UoA's staff has actively participated in

reputable conferences in the field, with five presentations at European or World congresses, two of which were held in Lithuania.

Several R&D projects are listed, with funding from sources such as ERASMUS+, the Sports Sponsorship Fund, the Research Council of Lithuania, and the Interreg South Baltic Programme. The projects focus on ageing population (education, physical activity), obesity and eating disorders, stress relief, and health in the South Baltic region. However, except for the project funded by the Research Council of Lithuania, all others seem to be related to education and supporting activities rather than directly linked with classical R&D activities.

It should also be mentioned that research in Public Health at UoA seems to be rather fragmented. The Principal Investigators have very diverse topics, research groups are small, and there seems to be relatively low overlap. This may be a necessity considering the fragmented funding and teaching load of the staff, but unfortunately, it also means that it will be more difficult to conduct the highest quality research and publish in top-tier journals.

In summary, the UoA's R&D activity in the field of Public Health over the past five years can be rated as good. It should be noted that although the current output is not impressive, the progress of the Unit made during the last five years, has been impressive. The Unit has recruited a new, Principal Investigator with an impressive publication record, and there is hope that participation in PhD studies in the future will help increase its R&D output, too. It is also worth mentioning that as of this year, Klaipeda University Clinics has affiliated with KU, providing staff members from Medicine, Nursing and Public Health with better access to medical data and patients.

Group of research fields within the research area	Scope (FTE(SD))	Score (points)
<b>M 001 - Medicine</b>	8,94	2,5
<b>M 005 - Nursing</b>		

#### Reasoned justification of the score

Medicine/Nursing is a relatively small group of research fields in the UoA. There has been no reported activity related to research training in the past five years. Teaching staff with a scientific degree includes 12 professors, 20 associate professors and 1 lecturer (33 persons - 13.33 FTE). Research workers with a scientific degree include 4 chief researchers, 2 senior researchers and 3 researchers (9 persons - 4.5 FTE). This accounts for 37 persons with scientific degree (8.94 FTE(SD)). It appears that most of the Unit staff do not work full-time in this specific domain. Even when taking into account the relatively low number of Unit staff, the research and development (R&D) output is moderate. Best research outputs include 5 papers published in international journals with impact factor ranging from 3.246 to 6.575. Three of these publications were accepted by Q1 journals, one in Q2 and one in Q3 journal (source: Scimago Journal Ranking). Four papers come from the period 2021-2022, which indicates a positive trend. Most of the contributions are in the form of participation in a large team of authors due to collaboration with other universities (in Lithuania, EU, USA, Colombia, Brazil) and for that reason a share of the research output attributable to the institution remains usually low. Only one paper (published in Cancers) has the first and corresponding author from KU. However, three of the listed journals come from MDPI and one from Hindawi Publishers. No best conference presentations delivered abroad are reported. The list of main national and international awards for R&D activities remains empty as well. Participation on competition-based R&D projects includes small projects: 1 European Union funds Investment Action Program used to submit the invention for obtaining a European patent, Erasmus (2x) and Lithuania-Russia Cross-border Cooperation Programme (2x). However, most of these projects seem to be related to education and supporting activities, rather than classical R&D activities.

R&D carried out in the fields of Nursing and Medicine in UoA in the period 2018-2022 can be rated little better than satisfactory. Positive trends have been achieved including publications in high ranking Q1/Q2 journals (source: Scimago Journal Ranking) an increase in the number of publications in recent years, participation in international publishing teams and the ability to utilize sources from foreign projects even if the projects are not very large in the total sum of money. Projects related to R&D activities do not appear to be central to the group's activities, although they may be important to their academic practice. Considering the share of senior staff members in this field, the research outcomes in this field are just modest. To ensure the highest quality of publication, the group should prioritize selecting journals that are widely respected and recognized for their adherence to best practices within the academic community. Additionally, it is important to exercise caution when considering publishing a significant portion of their best papers in journals that may have credibility concerns. Furthermore, the group should actively seek to increase their participation in international conferences.

## Economic and social impact of R&D activities of the UoA

Score (points)

4

Reasoned justification of the score

This UoA is vigorously engaged in the development of applied research and societal outreach at regional level, with some activities related to tourism and cooperation with other countries. The largest project was financed by EU funds investment action program (2014-2020) and implemented in cooperation with company Acetum (it was focused on propolis-based preservatives for food industry). Majority of research outputs, R&D orders and economic entities and projects have a strong connection with the region and its infrastructure. Klaipeda university researchers seem to be also actively converting their research results into national and regional educational policy. They are present in national and regional educational policy-making committees and collaborate with the Research Council of Lithuania, the Ministry of Education, Science and Sport, the Ministry of Health, NGOs, and the regional municipalities. The role of INTERREG Baltic Sea Region funding is also significant. Overall, the R&D activities of the Unit have socio-economic impact due to the interest and relevance to the topics addressed that include quality of life, culture, sport, health, education, reconstruction of cities, and tourism in South East Baltic Region. This is also advanced via participation of UoA staff members in various boards and expert groups (e.g., MESS, ME), national commissions, and in RCL committee as well as the city municipality. Moreover, there is an appointment in Horizon Europe Programme Committee. The list of cooperation agreements between research and economic entities involves municipalities and also shows a strong regional focus. Consultations on diverse topics were provided to public or economic entities, to local experts, officers, researchers, teachers and municipal urban planners; few consultations were also given to foreign bodies (e.g., OECD, Tourism in Lithuanian-Polish border, Culture Next, and an education-research programme at Massachusetts Institute of Technology). Scientific conferences and events organized by UoA gain some international visibility because they include participation in organization of international conferences abroad (in Poland, France) as well as organization of international conferences held in Klaipeda (10 x) and 1 European Olympic Academies Seminar. There were seven national conferences organized by KU; other events included seminars for PhD students and online educational forums. Some of the activities already have a tradition, e.g., International Conference on Social Innovations for Sustainable Regional Development (which has held since 2004). 9 researchers of UoA participate as Members in Editorial boards of scientific journals abroad (4 JCR journals; Frontiers in Public Health is Q1 journal), 7 researchers work in boards of national journals. 2 researchers are editors in 2 journals

abroad (1 JRC journal) and 3 in Lithuanian journals. Concerning membership in working groups or associations most examples listed include mainly European associations, but they also include American educational research association, British association for Slavonic and East European studies, International Society for the study of behavioural development, Intl. council of psychology educators incorporated, and Transforming care network. The UoA is successful in popularization activities (popularization articles, publications, and topical lectures). Other popularization activities cover TV interviews, radio broadcasts, links to websites, events at festivals and book fairs. The activities were aimed at children, students, local community and third age activities. Cooperation agreements between research and economic entities are focused on secondary schools, health and sport facilities, police department, national agencies, but also business and innovation centre and company Airplus1 Lituanica. Overall, the impact of the UoA in the remote yet nationally important Klaipeda area is highly significant.

## The development potential of R&D activities of the UoA

Score (points)

3,5

Reasoned justification of the score

Available infrastructure of UoA includes 6 labs. Planned R&D infrastructure development is directed towards acquisition of new equipment for Health Sciences (focused on 5 actual areas), upgrading equipment for psychological testing, and establishment of a new lab for developing competences in social research methods. Other accessible infrastructure includes Labs at KU Marine Research Institute and KU STEAM centre. UoA does not participate in international RD infrastructure; participation in national infrastructure involves KU Hospital and Dolphin Assisted Therapy Centre. UoA had 214 employees (99 are members of teaching staff with scientific degree, there are 48 researchers with scientific degree, and 67 other employees. Doctoral programme in Educational Sciences had 6 Ph.D. students in 2022. Most of these Unit staff members teach an impressive number of degree programs (undergraduate: 8, graduate: 12 programs). Declining student numbers have led to the employment of researchers who attract external funding and devote only 10% of their time to teaching.

Age distribution displays a peak for the 45-54 years followed with closely similar numbers in 35-44 and 55-64 classes (showing an even distribution); the youngest group, aged 25-34, has the fewest employees (12). Gender distribution shows the proportion of women is twice larger than that of men (in all categories of employees). Principles of Human resources are closely aligned with national regulations. Since 2019 a salary system has been modified by adding a reward payment for academic performance. Mobility of the staff is supported, and an increasing proportion of academic staff improved their qualification abroad in recent years. UoA does not have its own strategic plan. The strategic management of the University is based on key documents, which include Strategic Development Plan of KU (2012-2020), Action Plan for Optimization Activities (2018-2019), KU Activity Plan (2020-2022), and KU Development Strategy (2020-2030). R&D themes supported include preparation of project applications and grants to young researchers. Thematic direction for Social Sciences and Humanities is focused on societies and cultures on the Baltic coast; Thematic direction for Health Science is focused on sustainable health and wellbeing. Training of young researchers is based on development of competence for high quality research and knowledge transfer. Students have opportunities to get support via student projects. A care is given to student mobility and international cooperation. Doctoral programme has been carried out in Educational Sciences only. It runs jointly with other Lithuanian universities with the advantage for students to get intellectual and other resources of other universities. A Unit's report also states that at the University level 2 recent pilot PhD projects were financed by the industry

oriented towards social needs of the coastal region. SWOT analysis identifies the most important favourable and unfavourable factors. Weaknesses involve fragmentation and individualisation of research, uncompetitive salaries, reallocation of administrative burden to academic staff, and geographical peripherality of KU. On the other hand, many new international and national programmes offer a support for participation in or establishment of competitive collaborative research in the coming period, including topics of the KU Social Sciences. Post-doc programmes can be promising for attracting early-career researchers and there are plans to open new PhD programmes in Public Health and Sociology/Social Work. A positive trend is that UoA identifies its strengths and many new opportunities (which seems to outnumber the threats) and thus situational analysis provides direction to the next stages of the change process. Overall, based on the assessed threats in SWOT analysis there are major concerns for the development of UoA in terms of future R&D activities. However, international orientation of researchers in terms of publishing and academics networking in combination with current material infrastructure and Human resources could develop towards R&D activities producing relevant and high-quality scientific knowledge.

### **Recommendations for continuity and/or improvement of the activities of the UoA**

Many good decisions have been made in KU in recent years. The strategy has been focused to fewer areas, and there has been a push to be a robust actor in the region via applied research and societal outreach. At the same time, there has been success in internationalization, there are meaningful collaborations, and the University has support services for this, including publishing in English (though we would encourage attempts to publish in really high-impact journals, i.e., setting, where appropriate, the bar higher than mere Q1). The amount of external funding is also relatively large compared to basic funding (60% and 40% of the total, respectively). The Unit or the University is also active in attracting postdoctoral researchers from other institutions. They have research centres where researchers can focus on research, also the approach to create projects is very much bottom-up. The UoA has transformed from a 20-80 teaching vs. research ratio 50-50 teaching-research balance. Gender equality plans have been implemented very effectively. The fragmentation of research projects and challenges to acquire sufficient critical mass seem to be at least partially offset by high degree of collaborative efforts across disciplines.

One of the recommendations is to acknowledge these important choices and give further support for them. There are indeed some very good opportunities that should be seized. With the extra funding in the form the stimulus funding to educational sciences, and other government sources, there could be further strengthening of the R&D along the lines of the strategic choices outlined above. The merging of the hospitals in the area and closer collaboration with the University will be a major opportunity for the health sciences as well as researchers in some other disciplines in the UoA.

Some specific challenges that seem to come up are low salaries of senior personnel that makes it more difficult to hire academic staff. The lack of PhD programs in areas other than educational sciences is also something that we recommend fixing to boost the quality of research.

There are also two Lithuanian-level structural challenges. As the first of these structural challenges, in Klaipeda, they would be well served by interdisciplinary study programs, however, setting up interdisciplinary study programs is prevented by the strict discipline-based categorization in Lithuanian higher education. As the second structural challenge, something that diminishes healthy interdisciplinary (and other) collaboration is that co-authorships in the Lithuanian system are penalized by division of points based on the



number of co-authors in publications. This can have a negative effect also on international research networking as scientists are penalized for publishing together with others.

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## 2.2. KTU\_Socio Unit of Assessment

Name of the institution	<b>Kaunas University of Technology</b>
Official abbreviation of the name of the institution	<b>KTU</b>
Name of the Institution's unit of assessment (hereinafter – UoA)	<b>Social Sciences</b>
Abbreviation of the UoA name	<b>KTU_Socio</b>
The scope of the UoA (FTE(SD))	<b>23,91</b>
Research area(s)	<b>S 000 - Social sciences</b>

### Quality of the R&D activities by research fields (groups of research fields) of the UoA

#### Social sciences

Research field	Scope (FTE(SD))	Score (points)
<b>S 007 - Education</b>	<b>6,02</b>	<b>3,5</b>

#### Reasoned justification of the score

The UoA which is part of the Faculty of Social Sciences, Arts and Humanities of KTU, operates in the following research fields: Education, Sociology, Political Science, Communication and Information, and Psychology). Until 2018 the organization within the faculty was mono-discipline research of the small areas, although now the orientation is more multidisciplinary. Regarding PhD studies, over the past five years 1-2 students were involved in doctoral research. 7 theses were defended during the assessment period. This is rather a modest result, although bigger than in other fields in the same UoA. However, those PhD students who finished successfully were satisfied with the supervision they received: they had a supervisor and a consultant. They were also involved in seminars such as methodology and science communication skills seminars. PhD students also were able to attend national and international conferences, online and in person PhD-students are still rewarded their doctoral in a discipline, while their research may also be involved in multidisciplinary research. The number of doctoral students in 2022 was 6. It has increased in comparison with previous years (4), but it is still relatively low.

As Education had to provide 5 best research outputs based on their FTE(SD): of five best research outputs in Education: one is a book published by an international academic publisher, one is a chapter in an international edited volume, two journal articles are published in international renowned academic journals and one in an international journal. The quality of the publications included in the list is high (prestigious international publisher (EN), 3 research papers, 2 of which were published in Q1 journals (Journal of Educational and Social Research: Q4; Sustainability: Q1, Thinking Skills and Creativity: Q1). These outputs show that educational research is improving.

Educational researchers of KTU take part in and present at European research conferences, including recognized conferences such as ECER. For further development it is recommended that the members of

Education field take an active role in journals (as reviewers or editors) and educational associations (in academic or administrative boards or in special interest groups).

In the report, the Educational research group lists five projects as most important achievements in which they participate: three Horizon 2020 projects, one research project funded by the European Regional Development Fund and one project funded by the Lithuanian government. This is an impressive achievement. The aim of the UoA is to apply as coordinator for large international projects. For that they want to strengthen the collaboration between the research areas and the multidisciplinary research of the UoA.

Research commissions from economic entities are impressive and the international projects mentioned have high relevance for conducting educational research: Open Access Infrastructure for Research in Europe 2020 (OpenAIRE2020). The network of National Open Access Desks (NOADs), established in 33 countries may significantly contribute to research quality through data exchange. A staff member of the UoA is responsible for the NOAD in Lithuania.

A strength of the field may be that the research is now organized as a multidisciplinary Unit. Educational researchers collaborate with other field within the faculty and on a national and international level. A specific topic they study is educational technology, which may facilitate multidisciplinary collaboration.

On the website of the KTU it is said: "The research group conducts research on educational ecosystems for the development of sustainable and smart societies; it creates new knowledge in the framework of educational policy and leadership, modern curriculum and didactics, educational technologies, and social inclusion, as well as disseminates research findings to increase the impact of scientific knowledge on individuals, organizations and communities."

Some research (based on the outcomes) is in line with this description, but not all and the outcome of the research shows a diversity of topics and themes. Again, from the outcomes it seems that research activities are based on individual work of small groups. As a result, there is little cohesion in themes and methodology. The members of the field of education may take in consideration structural and organisational processes and find solutions to difficulties revealed.

Research field	Scope (FTE(SD))	Score (points)
<b>S 002 - Political Science</b>	5,02	3,5

Reasoned justification of the score

The Political Science staff of the Unit numbers 15, with 5,02 calculated FTE (SD) that makes it a relatively small Unit. It is supported by 9 other employees and PhD students with 6,66 calculated FTE. The overall ratio between research and teaching staff seems balanced.

There is a PhD program in Political Science with 6 students. A total of 5 doctoral theses were defended in the field during the assessment period. There are between 5 and 6 PhD students on average every year. The PhD program is run smoothly since there are regular defences of thesis, and, based on the provided statistics the dropout rate is low.

The publication output is considerable given the smallness of the Unit: there have been international monographs, articles and conference presentations. the publications are internationally oriented and published by recognized journals and book series. The list of the best research outputs is very good (section 5.1 of Unit's report). The best results include top-quality international peer-reviewed journals (East European Politics, Memory Studies, Environmental Politics, Global Policy) and a monograph by Taylor & Francis.

Political scientists attend top international conferences (section 5.2 of Unit's report), such as the General Conference of the European Consortium for Political Research.

The conference presentations show participation at important events. Based on the conversations during the site visit, encouraging the participation in the larger conferences (e.g., ECPR, IPSA, IPPA, ISA, EISA and other associations) should be considered.

The impact and the quality of work evident in the national awards for R&D activities (section 5.3 of Unit's report). They include the State Independence Scholarship, Global Lithuanian Award for Global Experience for Change in Science.

The research field of Political Science has attracted serious research funds. There are international projects and other grants, as well as societal impact-oriented activity and networking. In particular, political scientists are regularly involved in primary, international and national competition-based R&D projects (section 5.4 of Unit's report), such as HORIZON2020, the European Social Fund, and the Research Council of Lithuania. They participate in several large-scale projects, which shows that the field is strong at international level. There is still room left for a coordinator role in Horizon Europe programs. Comparatively, the KTU is among the leading institutions in funding received from international R&D programs and orders from economic entities (average of four years).

The main challenges of the Unit seem to be related to the future. The overall strategy of integrating various areas of Social Sciences in an interdisciplinary fashion may be reasonable, given the smallness of the Units. However, this creates challenges for all the disciplines beyond sociology that at least based on the site visit discussions has benefitted from the integration. During the site visit Political Science related topics, plans and interests were little visible. The suggestion is to think through the interdisciplinary strategy and find meaningful roles for Political Science and Political scientists in this.

Research field	Scope (FTE(SD))	Score (points)
<b>S 005 - Sociology</b>	6,02	4,5

Reasoned justification of the score

The field of Sociology at KTU is formed by a total of 14 persons with a scientific degree (section 3.3 of Unit's report) – calculated FTE (SD): 6.02,- and 12 employees and doctoral students related to R&D and studies (section 3.4 of Unit's report). The overall ratio between research and teaching staff tends to be research-oriented: the Sociology part of the Unit seems to be focused on creating new knowledge through research activities.

The Unit carries out doctoral studies in the field of Sociology. A total of 6 doctoral theses were defended during the assessment period. There were 4 PhD students in 2022. This number of PhD students has been the same in the previous years. The PhD program is run smoothly - there are regular defences of thesis and based on the provided statistics it can be assumed that the dropout rate is low. Based on this number, the activities related to PhD students are likely to produce a similar number of dissertations in the next period.

Overall, the Unit show a good research performance based on the information presented in the section 5.1 of Unit's report). Selected results include 1 book chapter in an international monograph (Palgrave) and 4 articles in international peer-reviewed journals (Safety Science; International Migration; Acta Astronautica; Sustainability), some of them from STEM fields.

The outputs selected for the Sociology field reflect a wide selection of topics. It is difficult to figure out the coherence of research programmes. Publications could be more focused on major journals achieving high ranks in Sociology or monographs by international publishing houses.

Sociologists are present at top international conferences (section 5.2 of Unit's report), such as the European Sociological Association, the International Sociological Association and other conferences organized by significant international associations. The impact and the quality of work is reflected in the awards for R&D activities (section 5.3 of Unit's report) of national character (Lithuanian Sociological Association, or a scientific grant from the Marius Jakulis Jason Foundation).

Sociologists are regularly involved in international and national competition-based R&D projects (section 5.4 of Unit's report) such as Horizon 2020, ENUTC and "Researcher Groups projects" by the Research Council of Lithuania. Regarding international projects, researchers are primarily involved in the role of project partners and subcontractors rather than in leading projects. Thus, the researchers can excel in that role in the future. A remarkable participation in several types of research projects applied to different topics of interest for the country and other research fields is evident. According to the summary of annual assessment, the KTU is among the leading institutions in funding received from international R&D programs and commissioned projects from non-academic entities.

A key characteristic of the Sociology area (in collaboration with Political Science) is the role of providers of research infrastructure for the Social Sciences of the country and for comparative research purposes. In particular, the Unit is the official partner of ESS, CESSDA, ISSP and other international surveys. This participation requires a very international orientation and strong commitment to methodology. Sociologists of the Unit also collect and archive Social Science data produced by other institutions of the country.

In comparison with other universities, the infrastructure to provide services to other research institutions in Social Sciences, the multidisciplinary orientation, and the methodological and technological strengths provide the distinctive character of the Sociology field in the R&D system. This justifies a high score in research activities. The meeting with the staff and the visit was very useful for making these characteristics visible.

Group of research fields within the research area	Scope (FTE(SD))	Score (points)
<b>S 008 - Communication and Information</b>	6,85	3
<b>S 006 - Psychology</b>		

Reasoned justification of the score

The group of communication, information and psychology fields in the UoA has ten teaching staff with scientific degree (3.76 FTE) and eleven researchers with scientific degrees (5.6 FTE ). Fourteen other employees and doctoral students are related to research, development, and studies. The UoA does not offer doctoral degrees in Communication and/or Psychology. The overall ratio between research and teaching staff is balanced.

There is no declared activity related to PhD studies in collaboration with other areas or institutions, and no doctoral students, which reflect the scarce cohesion of the area and the lack of a strong structure of research groups.

The list of best research outputs is good. Best results are published in top-quality international peer-reviewed journals such as Environmental Sociology, Scientometrics, and Identity: An International Journal of Theory and Research. The best outputs could focus more on journals achieving a high ranking in these fields, even though the Unit is an interdisciplinary collection of Social Science fields. No monographs or edited volumes

from international publishing houses were presented by Communication and Information, and Psychology scholars from this Unit.

Scholars attended international conferences, such as the European Association for Research on Adolescence, International Conference on Communication & Media Studies, and European Conference on Social Media. However, a listing of leading media and communication studies conferences was lacking, such as the International Association for Media and Communication Research (AMCR), the International Communication Association (ICA), the European Communication Research and Education Association (ECREA), and the Association of Internet Researchers (AoIR).

There are no international awards for R&D activities. The only one listed is a national award (Marius Jakulis Jason Foundation scientific grant).

Scholars regularly participate in competition-based R&D projects, such as Horizon 2020, as project partners, and the Research Council of Lithuania. Communication scholars open important national topics such as policy issue life cycles in Lithuanian media, information vulnerability in Lithuania and climate crisis communication.

Given the characteristics of publications and activities, R&D can be considered as strong but with limited international recognition.

Within the UoA, Communication and Information, and Psychology add to interdisciplinary topics, not necessarily independent research fields. This is a strong strategy for attracting international competition-based research projects but can, on the other hand, stifle the fields' development. The internationalisation of research should focus on top journals in Communication and Information, and Psychology and leading international conferences. In addition, Psychology is barely visible within this group of these research fields.

## Economic and social impact of R&D activities of the UoA

Score (points)

4

Reasoned justification of the score

The estimated impact of the activities is remarkable having in mind the number of researchers and the diversity of topics. The reports reflect a high involvement of the members of the Unit in most of the activities (applied research, policy activities, dissemination). The exercise for this assessment shows a great effort to identify areas of the possible impact of their activities. It also shows an interest of the Unit staff for being proactive and an orientation towards external goals. There is a considerable presence of the staff in editorial boards given the small size of the area.

The UoA emphasizes the socio-economic impact of the scientific projects it conducts. In particular, it focuses on the issues of processes of democracy, education and risk perception. Direct collaboration with the public sector was reported. Unit staff members also serve in decision making bodies of the national importance. The Unit also reports a direct collaboration with the business sector. Popularization activities are frequent and of a high relevance.

The list of research outputs is impressive. It covers areas such as open science and open government data policy, climate change policies, environmental citizenship education, youth development, citizen science, biodiversity governance, societal resilience, school teachers' competences, migration policies, educational technologies, social entrepreneurship and gender equality (section 6.1 of Unit's report). This is reflected in the participation of researchers in working groups, panels or committees by the Ministry of Social Security

and Labour, Transparency International Lithuanian Branch Council, Department of National Minorities under the Government of the Republic of Lithuania, Libraries Council of the Ministry of Culture, Ministry of Education, Science and Sport, Agency for Science, Innovation and Technology (till December 2022), Ministry of Environment, National Agency for Education, and other bodies and authorities (section 6.2 of Unit's report). Unit's scholars regularly consult public or economic entities such as UNESCO, European Commission, Lithuanian Parliamentary offices, National Audit Office, Intergovernmental Panels, and other bodies (section 6.3 of Unit's report).

The UoA actively participated in organizational and programme committees at national and international conferences (section 6.4 of Unit's report). Researchers are members of editorial boards in national, regional, and international scientific journals (section 6.5 of Unit's report) and international working groups and associations (section 6.6 of Unit's report). They regularly participate in the scientific popularisation of research results (section 6.7 of Unit's report). The Unit listed no cooperation agreements with economic entities. This seems like a minor issue, given the tremendous societal and public impact (section 6.8 of Unit's report).

However, the way of organizing the information about impact has some important drawbacks. The topics are not ordered in a logical way to be understood by external evaluators. It is difficult to trace the link of specific outcomes with the research work carried out by research programmes of the groups of the Unit. There is a little effort to relate the impact items with the research lines with a narrative, in order to show coherence with the internal organization. The research lines are explained in the Unit's reports, but all the work related to coherence of research programmes is left to the evaluators. Some items are repetitive, and the organization is not clear. For instance, some consultancy activities are carried out by the same person, but they are not ordered.

A common impression by the members of the Panel is that the achievements are remarkable, but it is not clear how it relates with the internal organization and the actual work of the teams and individuals of the Unit. It seems that many of the activities are of an individual nature or carried out by a specific research group. But somehow this has been obscured by the way of the information provided. This may be a result of the structure of the assessment.

Research activities are multicultural and interdisciplinary, in line with EU research calls that prefer the diversity of epistemological, conceptual, and methodological viewpoints. KTU is a member of the European consortium of innovative universities (ECIU), which facilitates the engagement of international academic community members.

Representation of the UoA in education-related state and municipal working groups, commissions, or committees is outstanding and facilitates the implementation of research results. (Major areas of social relevance involved in consultation activities: open science, citizen science, climate change, and biodiversity management).

## The development potential of R&D activities of the UoA

Score (points)

4

Reasoned justification of the score

The UoA has a great potential to maintain excellent ratings in the future. It has a young group of employees, with most falling in the age group between 35 and 44 (48 out of 108). The demographics and the number of

young doctors provide a sustainable picture. The employees are relatively young (the proportion of scholars younger than 45 is large), Human resource and management principles focus on responsibility to the University community, cooperation, and continuous improvement. It complies with the European Charter for Researchers and the Code of Conduct for Recruitment of Researchers.

The gender balance is skewed towards women with 83 women and 25 men. This issue should be taken into account in the planning of Human resources.

The strategic operating plan of the Unit builds on the existing strengths. It is future-oriented and well-aware of the international research and development context of the EU, in which most of researchers participate actively. The description and justification of the R&D subjects to be developed are well grounded.

The information on the Unit's SWOT is very realistic. It shows a discrepancy between human resource management principles and potential weaknesses and threats in remuneration and salaries that do not necessarily follow the increasing workload and demand from providing excellent R&D. However, the policy of training new generations of researchers is well-developed for doctoral students but remains unclear for post-doctoral and early-career scholars. The organizational culture seems to be very goal oriented. The capacity of the Unit is visible on the ability to attract funding on both national and international level. Also the topics to be developed by the UoA are promising in attracting funds as well as in terms of being published in outlets with a high impact factor.

The organization is not based on department but on groups, depending on projects. Projects – specially applied projects - seems to be the most important incentive and the principle for the organization of work. This may be a good potential, but it may be also a cause for dispersion and lack of coherence of research lines. There are some specific collaborations highlighted by members of the Panel that should be mentioned: Ongoing cooperation with the Lithuanian Ministry of Environment, the Government Strategic Analysis Centre (STRATA), and a local network of innovation-oriented secondary schools that test the educational resources developed by the UoA provide opportunities for applied educational research and innovation. Teaching employees of small businesses the application of the Design Thinking method in R&D&I at the National Innovation and Entrepreneurship Centre's TECHNORAMA event (<https://technorama-en.ktu.edu/#fields-for-ideas>) may significantly contribute to their development.

An important part of the research infrastructure and a usability advantage for KTU is the excellent data accessibility that supports (inter) national comparative databases. The participation in the Consortium of European Social Science Data Archives – CESSDA ERIC, and the coordination of the development of the Lithuanian Humanities and Social Sciences Data Archive (LiDA) and Open Access Research Infrastructure access in APCIS system, together provide an excellent potential if they are used to strengthen the internal research capacities of the teams. In addition, physical infrastructure seems appropriate for the amount of people working at the Unit.

On many strategic issues, the Unit is dependent on the overall policies of the University, particularly in the field of Human resources. Unit members have explained the principles and procedures of the University and the Government (for attracting researchers, securing meritocracy and so on), however, the report does not provide an explanation of how the Unit will specifically address these issues. It is not clear what are the issues that depend on the people of UoA and the issues that depend on a higher level of governance. This should have been explained better in the Unit's report and should be taken into consideration in future assessment exercises.

During the visit, more detailed components of the strategy were revealed. One important aspect highlighted was the active search for talented individuals, with an emphasis on proactively seeking out potential candidates (described figuratively as "hunting" for people). The way to counteract the outgoing mobility to



other more developed R&D systems is to create a research hub for attracting and retaining academics. Another issue is to focus on international level and use the experience from previous projects as a base for learning.

Two important characteristics of the orientation of the UoA were highlighted: the identification of stakeholders, and the identification of megatrends. Combined with a problem-oriented type of work and multidisciplinary collaboration, the staff of this unit considers these promising lines of action. These components of the strategy, along with related results, should be explained better in the next reports.

In sum, it seems that the UoA has a good understanding of the potential and limitations of the current situation. This unit has successfully identified the opportunities and difficulties. Overall, they have high chances to have very good scores in the next assessment exercise, although they should make an effort to plan and define research programmes in a more integrated way.

### **Recommendations for continuity and/or improvement of the activities of the UoA**

The number of activities is impressive, especially the projects, but they show a great number of research topics with little interconnectedness. In this regard, the report seems to give the impression of dispersion. The UoA should strive towards integration. Otherwise, the list of projects may give the impression of just an opportunistic participation, with little possibilities of obtaining relevant research outputs. More coherence of research lines and identification of the expected contributions that the different areas expect to make in the long term may help.

Doctoral training seems to be based on research activities and not only on studies. The projects provide the infrastructure for training and professional development. PhD students are not so much students but member of the project teams. This is a strength of the UoA, but it may pose the risk of poor integration into meaningful research lines. Postdoc positions, attraction of foreign researchers and career development plans should be specified more clearly. The scientific production of the UoA does not correspond to the long list of projects and activities. It seems that the Unit has difficulties in obtaining publications for the substantial and diverse data collected and experiences documented. A careful design for aligning research projects with prospective publications considered will help correct this imbalance.

Interdisciplinary belongs to the positive characteristics of this UoA, but specific measures for integrating several disciplines in research programs and more collective impacts are not visible yet. The role of specific disciplines in this collective effort, and the balance between disciplines, should be specified better.

The SWOT analysis indicates, “There is a lack of a specific long-term strategy for science communication at the University level. The success of science communication and dissemination of research results largely lies in the skills of an individual researcher. (...) Science communication activities need planning, synchronization between the central University administration and faculty coordinators, support, and services.” The SWOT details obstacles that are quite costly to overcome, e.g., lack of visualization services and funds for science popularization trips and other activities. The measures that the UoA is planning to develop to counterbalance these barriers should be considered.

### 2.3. VU\_Edu Unit of Assessment

Name of the institution	<b>Vilnius University</b>
Official abbreviation of the name of the institution	<b>VU</b>
Name of the Institution's unit of assessment (hereinafter – UoA)	<b>Educational Sciences</b>
Abbreviation of the UoA name	<b>VU_Edu</b>
The scope of the UoA (FTE(SD))	<b>24,07</b>
Research area(s)	<b>S 000 - Social sciences</b>

### Quality of the R&D activities by research fields (groups of research fields) of the UoA

#### Social sciences

Research field	Scope (FTE(SD))	Score (points)
<b>S 007 - Education</b>	<b>24,07</b>	<b>4</b>

#### Reasoned justification of the score

With 34.04 FTE(SD), the UoA has a staff distribution that shows *an impressive number of highly qualified staff* – an important requirement for successful research work.

*Research outputs cover a wide range of themes connected to diverse areas of educational science.* Participation in 32 competition-based R&D projects is praiseworthy. The journal quality of publications listed under best outputs is high: from the 12 works, 8 research papers were published in top-level journals (3 in Q1, 5 in Q2 publications, source: Scopus), and 3 book chapters were included in English language collections of studies by prestigious publishers. The monograph in Lithuanian, also listed, shows responsibility for developing the professional language of the country. Conference presentations are mostly specialized educational events and include some regular meetings of international professional associations. An impressive number of awards (14) show the (inter)national recognition of the UoA. The total number of PhD students enrolled at the UoA during the assessment period (2018-2022) was 22, and 13 doctoral theses were successfully defended. PhD students in training and successful doctoral defences have played an important role both in the generation and dissemination of research results.

*An important area that reflects the high quality of research activities of the UoA* is participation in international networks. Partners include both established professional communities like ATEE (the Association for Teacher Education in Europe and grassroots communities that have the potential to play an important role in catalysing educational research like NETT (Network for Education and Teacher Training).

## Economic and social impact of R&D activities of the UoA

Score (points)

4

Reasoned justification of the score

The (inter)national projects listed have the potential of high *economic impact* and show the quality and relevance of research activities of the UoA in the field of Education. These are well-published, high-level international co-operations with prestigious universities and research centres. From among them, the economic and social impact of the Horizon 2020 project, Dialogue and Argumentation for Cultural Literacy Learning in Schools (DIALLS) is especially noteworthy. Its outputs (e.g., the Cultural Analysis Framework, The Student Cultural Literacy Manifesto, and the Cultural Literacy Learning Program) address internationally relevant sociocultural issues. The theme and methodology of the Horizon 2020 Meaningful Open Schooling Connects Schools to Communities (MOST) has direct social implications and useful results for both formal and informal educational contexts.

An important area of economic impact is the cooperation between research and economic entities. Agreements reported involve private firms and municipalities and target areas where private-public partnerships are evidently beneficial, e. g. educational computing, STEAM education (an excellent example of collaboration of higher education and the municipality is STEAM: Education for Leadership": the Šiauliai City Municipality and Šiauliai City High Schools cooperation program "Natural Sciences, Technologies, Engineering, Arts, Mathematics").

The *social impact* of the UoA is clearly visible in the representation of VU in education-related state and municipal working groups, commissions, or committees, e.g., membership of the Education Council Parliament of the Republic of Lithuania, membership of Working Group for Creation of National Research Program guidelines for educational sciences Ministry of Education, Science and Sport of Lithuania. The active involvement documented here facilitates the implementation of research results. Science popularisation activities represent a critical viewpoint about important national issues of educational policy making. Activities are diverse and involve interviews, online forum presentations, national portal entries, and social media posts for maximum reach. In the area of consultation and organisation of conferences, the roles that this UoA assumes are appropriate for a leading national research University. Researchers representing the UoA in editorial boards of scientific journals include high level international publications (e.g., American Journal of Educational Research, Journal of Social Science Education).

## The development potential of R&D activities of the UoA

Score (points)

4

Reasoned justification of the score

The UoA has a clear vision of its potentials and obstacles, summarized in the SWOT analysis attached in the section 11 of the self-assessment report. The senior staff is well-qualified and active in the development and realization of (inter)national projects. Intensive cooperation of the staff with government stakeholders also supports the implementation of research planned by the UoA.

The UoA reported 32 research projects, including 3 HORIZON projects – an impressive achievement indeed. Many of the research areas focus on socially relevant, high-stake issues that are likely to receive (inter)national funding. The development of inclusive education in schools and a related, research-based study program on special pedagogy and speech therapy as well as the development of in-service teacher competence programs will contribute to the national recognition of the UoA. An important measure to increase international visibility: young researchers have the opportunity for internship to make connections and eventually co-publish with Italian, Austrian, Dutch, or Irish colleagues.

The collaboration with schools is exemplary: teachers and scientists seem to be mutually supportive and work together in knowledge production. Participation of the UoA in the national curricular reform and evaluation system of public education may result in an optimal utilisation of research.

A significant problem is the increase of the number of MA and PhD students (and thus ensure the continuity of the study programs and the availability of qualified teaching and research staff), because more places for MA and PhD students require state permission and funding.

### **Recommendations for continuity and/or improvement of the activities of the UoA**

During the site visit, the Panel was informed about difficulties in harmonizing a teaching and research career. Heavy teaching workload clashes with the research effort needed for developing high level publications in academic journals. Sabbaticals, shorter study leaves and temporary reduction of teaching workload to devote more time to publications may increase publishing productivity and help avoid burnout.

Staff members also indicated difficulties to obtain data for our research due to privacy policies. Curriculum assessment, for example, is a matter of state policy and may not be given permission to investigate. The same goes for the abolishment of special education facilities and full integration of SEN students: this is government policy that may be difficult to critically study. These obstacles have to be dealt with through discussions with government officials about the necessity of educational research for the improvement of teaching and learning. Integration of SEN students, for example, is an effort that would be much more successful if carefully monitored by researchers and reported back to policy makers.

Another interesting area may be action research in teacher education and mentoring. A big proportion of staff effort seems to be dedicated to teacher education and mentoring. Discipline-based studies are being conducted, e.g., on, digitization of education, but the process of pre- and in-service teacher education could also be a fruitful area of study that might lead to program improvement.

## 2.4. VU\_SP Unit of Assessment

Name of the institution	<b>Vilnius University</b>
Official abbreviation of the name of the institution	<b>VU</b>
Name of the Institution's unit of assessment (hereinafter – UoA)	<b>Sociology_Psychology</b>
Abbreviation of the UoA name	<b>VU_SP</b>
The scope of the UoA (FTE(SD))	<b>45,93</b>
Research area(s)	<b>S 000 - Social sciences</b>

### Quality of the R&D activities by research fields (groups of research fields) of the UoA

#### Social sciences

Research field	Scope (FTE(SD))	Score (points)
<b>S 006 - Psychology</b>	<b>27,09</b>	<b>4</b>

#### Reasoned justification of the score

This research field in this UoA is at very good level. In this research field of the UoA, there is evidence of very good level international publishing activities, both in terms of publications in high-ranking journals and citations to those publications. It is notable that all the 14 publications that were included in the self-assessment report have an international profile, with the impacts ranging from middle to high. There is also active participation in renowned international conferences, as well as impressive number of national and international prizes. They have been awarded to different scholars working in different sub-fields of Psychology; for both scientific and applied research. The funded projects also exhibit strong international collaboration (Horizon+SHARE, Cooperation with Taiwan and Japan, Erasmus+), and there is good amount of national competitive projects as well. PhD training is very active, with 18 theses in 5 years. Based on the summaries that were presented, the theses also seem to be relevant and of high quality. The number of full time PhD students is also high at 24 in 2022. During site visit, about half of the PhD students confessed that they have to have some other source of income, about half of them are pursuing article theses and about half monographs. The students relate that they are getting very good support from their seniors. The Lithuanian system where PhD students have to have four international peer reviewed publications accepted or published for article thesis we see, overall, as pushing students towards the monograph option and reducing the potential quality of articles. It is also due to this not any wonder, that PhD on average takes about 5 years to complete. Naturally, this is not criticism towards the UoA, but rather the issue concerns the national level policies, since in many notable universities outside of Lithuania, including Aalto University, the requirement is much lower (e.g., three articles without having to have all the articles accepted for publication; this is to boost the chances to obtain higher quality publications). The management has a good bottom-up approach, researchers get to freely decide which topics of research they wish to pursue, and they have been very successful in obtaining funding for both basic and applied research. Incentives are in place to promote publishing internationally, however, the next step for a high quality UoA and research area such as

psychology in VU could be promoting/supporting attempts to publish in journals of the highest calibre, rather than in the top 25% (i.e., Q1) journals. In this type of situation, the number of publications will be lower, however, with success the international recognition and impact of the scientists will be much higher. Relatively low salary levels are (like in many other UoAs) seen as a factor that hinders researchers from moving from abroad to work in this UoA.

Research field	Scope (FTE(SD))	Score (points)
<b>S 005 - Sociology</b>	<b>18,84</b>	<b>4</b>

#### Reasoned justification of the score

The UoA provided information in the self-assessment report and through interviews with employees for comparative expert assessments to evaluate the UoA. In the research field of Sociology. As UoA offers studies in Psychology and Sociology, it is understandable that there is a skewness towards teaching staff in both research fields.

The research area of sociology at UoA is at a very good level, with publications from the research field appearing in international journals and respected publishing houses. Some of the journals in which articles were published are high-ranking with moderately high impact. Researchers are capable of producing good quality papers relevant for an international academic audience, and the choice of scientific journals could be more inclined towards journals with higher impact factors and H-indexes. Book chapters or books listed among best publications are mostly published by internationally renowned publishing houses such as Springer, Brill, and SAGE. Conferences listed among best achievements are leading events within the field. Awards received for merit are national in character, and there are only two of those. However, awards within the field of Sociology are less common when compared to some other social science research fields like Psychology or Economics. Project funding showcases a clear international orientation and a stable diversity of research funding, extending from Horizon 2020, European Social Fund, to national level research such as the Research Council of Lithuania (national competitive projects). Sociologists at this Unit are rather focused on several sociological themes that are interconnected and based on their publications and projects. They do not seem to dissipate research energy on research areas outside of the listed ones, including criminology, social policy, social work and welfare, social geography, and sociological analysis of society and culture.

During the assessed period in Sociology, 11 theses were defended while the number of PhD students enrolled fluctuated between 17 and 19, with only one thesis written in the English language. The same comment as for Psychology PhD students is applied to the Sociology research field in terms of the four-article thesis system, which guides students mostly towards monograph theses (see below).

During the visit, UoA management stressed that researchers are supported in their research work through a foundation on the faculty level aimed at increasing international publishing activities and conference participation. It was also emphasized that the number of publications is increasing, and the international dimension is an important objective of research activities.

## Economic and social impact of R&D activities of the UoA

Score (points)

4

Reasoned justification of the score

In assessing the economic and social impact of R&D activities, the UoA presented 23 research outputs commissioned from national or international economic entities or projects with the highest socio-economic impact. The list indicates a clear variety of research and expertise outputs with significant socio-economic impact. Many of the projects are relevant for policy usage and development. For instance, a project like SHARE, which is a longitudinal multidisciplinary study on health, ageing, and retirement in Europe, is a fruitful source of empirical insights that are relevant for social and health policies. In addition to projects with real policy potential, the UoA is engaged in projects that target vulnerable groups, improve the inclusion of marginalized populations, or train a large number of professionals in specific fields, such as the project on evidence-based therapies aimed at reducing the risk of suicide in healthcare institutions. Members of the UoA have also provided important consultancy to the Lithuanian government, public service sector, and other state institutions on a variety of relevant social and political issues, such as the matters of territorial structure and organization of Lithuania or issues of the national electoral system. Furthermore, research activities on issues related to the COVID-19 pandemic, such as research-based coping recommendations for psychosocial stress or analysis of unemployment and poverty in the COVID-19 crisis, showcase the research orientation and readiness of the UoA to explore socially relevant topics and problems with a clear aim of utilizing research findings to create needed solutions to social issues.

Staff members of the UoA are also members of various working groups and advisory bodies, providing important consultancy to various Lithuanian ministries and other public bodies on a variety of social issues. Most of them are engaged by Lithuanian ministries and public bodies, although some are also engaged with the European Commission. In addition, researchers are actively involved in the editorial boards of academic journals, mostly at the national level, while the international ones are mostly not listed in the SCIMAGO journal ranking. On the other hand, UoA researchers are actively involved in national and international scientific organizations, with two researchers serving as presidents of international scientific associations/organizations. During the assessed period, the UoA organized and hosted national and international conferences on various topics.

## The development potential of R&D activities of the UoA

Score (points)

4

Reasoned justification of the score

The UoA's overall developmental potential of R&D activities could be evaluated as a very good and with current activities, strategic orientation, human resources and infrastructure it has the potential to achieve very good ratings in the next period of five years. The Unit has a strong international orientation in its research activities and participation of employees through projects, conferences, and academic cooperation. Strategic plans relevant for UoA put an emphasis on international-level research. Based on the listed project UoA is capable to attract national and international funding while the research outputs, presented through

publications, also indicates international scientific relevance. However, although research orientation is clearly international UoA is not successful in attracting international doctoral students, post-docs, and researchers.

Research topics and themes explored at UoA are recognized by the wider academic community, national and international, and by the wider interested public. Additionally, dominated research themes are enabling interdisciplinary and cross-disciplinary collaboration within the UoA and currently it is a mildly developed practice at the Unit.

Research relevant infrastructure is existent and is available for people employed in research activities. In the period of assessment UoA has developed Researcher's House with all the necessary equipment used for hybrid meetings and for various research activities. Research labs are well equipped and utilized for fundamental and applied research. In terms of the human resource, UoA has the largest number of academic staff among academic institutions in Lithuania in assessed research fields. In terms of the age structure the majority of teaching and research staff falls under the age group 35-44 which seems a good age balance while in terms of gender balance there is a clear dominance of women in both research fields. However, there is a disbalance between a ratio of researcher positions and teaching positions which should be addressed in the next 5 year period. Teaching workload and administrative burdens are clear obstacles for developing further research.

UoA is aware of its internal weaknesses and its possible opportunities, however contextual obstacles like insufficient state funding for Social Sciences, from funding research to state-funded positions for PhD students, pose a significant obstacle for further improvements.

### **Recommendations for continuity and/or improvement of the activities of the UoA**

To further increase interdisciplinary endeavours in research since UoA has internationally active scholars experienced in international publications and in conducting internationally funded projects in psychology and sociology, and since both research fields have mutual research areas like criminology. It is recommended that the UoA fosters cross-disciplinary collaboration between its departments and encourages joint research projects and publications. The UoA can organize regular workshops and seminars to promote interdisciplinary research and encourage scholars to work across departments and faculties.

Although scholars are oriented in publishing in international journals, they could choose journals with higher impact factor and H-index or even try to publish in journals of the highest calibre in order to position itself as a top player in the field. Due to mutual interest of sociologists and psychologists in criminology it seems there is a potential to launch the UoA towards top international players.

Ratio of researchers to teaching staff is not satisfactory and slows down further research development. UoA should address this issue and try to reorganize for the purpose of increasing overall research activities.

PhD theses are mostly written as monographies and in Lithuanian language. In order to increase the international visibility of UoA's research, we recommend that the Unit encourages PhD students to write their theses in English or other widely spoken languages. This will not only make the research more accessible to a wider audience but will also increase the chances of the research being cited by international scholars. Additionally, UoA could establish partnerships with international universities to facilitate joint supervision of PhD students, which would further enhance the internationalization of the Unit's research.



While UoA has a strong focus on international research, it has been less successful in attracting international doctoral students, post-docs, and researchers. To address this, we recommend that UoA actively promotes its research opportunities and scholarship programs to international candidates through various channels such as social media, academic networks, and international conferences. The Unit could also consider offering more competitive scholarship packages to attract top talent from around the world.

UoA is aware of the internal weaknesses and external obstacles that it faces in its efforts to improve research excellence. To address the challenges related to insufficient state funding for Social Sciences, we recommend that the Unit actively engages in advocacy efforts to raise awareness among policy makers and the wider public about the importance of Social Sciences research for society. UoA could also seek opportunities to collaborate with other academic institutions and research organizations to increase the leverage of its advocacy efforts. Due to its recognition in various ministries and public bodies UoA could create partnerships with public institutions to secure funding for research projects.

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## 2.5. VDU\_EDU Unit of Assessment

Name of the institution	<b>Vytautas Magnus University</b>
Official abbreviation of the name of the institution	<b>VDU</b>
Name of the Institution's unit of assessment (hereinafter – UoA)	<b>VMU Educology</b>
Abbreviation of the UoA name	<b>VDU_EDU</b>
The scope of the UoA (FTE(SD))	<b>46,58</b>
Research area(s)	<b>S 000 - Social sciences</b>

### Quality of the R&D activities by research fields (groups of research fields) of the UoA

#### Social sciences

Research field	Scope (FTE(SD))	Score (points)
<b>S 007 - Education</b>	<b>46,58</b>	<b>4,5</b>

#### Reasoned justification of the score

This is the largest Unit in the field of Education in Lithuania, which includes 33 professors, 47 associate professors, 18 chief researchers, and 22 senior researchers, to mention only the senior staff. This UoA conducts high-level research in the field of Education and has a strong focus on research-based university teaching. Therefore, it is essential that high-level scientific research serves as the foundation for different higher education programs in this UoA, including teacher education.

During the assessment period, a total of 27 PhD dissertations were defended: 6 in 2018, 3 in 2019, 1 in 2020, 6 in 2021, and 11 in 2022. Although a high number of dissertations were defended in 2022, the total number of defences could be higher considering the number of PhD students and senior academic staff of this UoA. Thus, there is even more potential to develop the excellence of this UoA. It is noteworthy that training of new researchers and supporting PhD students has received considerable attention in recent years, and many valuable initiatives have been introduced to help PhD students socialize with the international research community.

A total of 23 significant publications were listed, including several books (and chapters of books). Reported articles were published in Q1, Q2, and Q3 journals (source: Scopus). One article was published in Learning & Instruction, which is a highly recognized international journal. Although the involvement of this UoA was only 0.125 in this publication, this achievement is crucial, and publishing in such high-level publications should be supported more.

Senior UoA staff members have participated in many well-recognized large-scale conferences on education, such as ECER, and more specialized conferences. Unit Staff members have very good international collaborations. However, according to the report, no one from the UoA attended EARLI conferences. EARLI is the leading network of educational researchers in Europe and has very strong journals.

Various research projects were funded during the assessment period, including funding from H2020 projects, the Norway Grant, and the Research Council of Lithuania. Several projects were also funded by European Structural Support Funds. Although these projects are of high quality, given the size of the UoA, there is potential for higher competitive funding in the future. Additionally, leadership in international projects could be higher.

Many of the outcomes of this Unit are of a very high level. However, considering its size, even more high-quality research outcomes could be expected, indicating that this UoA has great potential for developing scientific excellence even further.

## Economic and social impact of R&D activities of the UoA

Score (points)

4,5

Reasoned justification of the score

The research findings presented in this report hold great practical relevance for a number of reasons. Firstly, the UoA responsible for this research has been involved in several international and national projects that are specifically designed to address various societal needs. These projects are aligned with global trends in education and aim to improve different aspects of learning across a wide range of contexts. For instance, some of these projects are focused on the use of ICT to enhance education at different levels, while others explore innovative pedagogical approaches in areas such as pre-school, kindergarten and general education as well as in teacher education.

In addition to this, members of this UoA have also been working on urgent societal issues, such as developing more inclusive and sustainable societies, supporting cultural and creative innovations, and promoting business development. Conducting multidisciplinary research and collaborating across study fields has been especially valuable to target important societal issues and finding practical solutions in this UoA.

Furthermore, members of this UoA have also made important contributions to the development of national policies and practices. The UoA has served on different national working groups, commissions and committees, and provided consultations to various public entities. The expertise of the Unit has been sought after by national media outlets, where pressing issues such as educational reforms, teacher education, inclusive practices and parenting were discussed. Additionally, researchers of the UoA have conducted science popularizing activities to raise public awareness of important scientific findings.

This UoA has also established fruitful collaborations with different partners, including companies, to ensure that their research findings are put into practice. The staff of the UoA has organized numerous international and national conferences in diverse areas and have been involved in editorial boards of different publications. Moreover, the R&D infrastructure is modern and includes several basic and innovative facilities. R&D infrastructure of this Unit is comparable to that of high-level universities in the region.

As a large academic entity with substantial resources and expertise, this unit has managed to conduct a high volume of quality R&D activities.

In conclusion, the practical relevance of the research conducted by this UoA is very high, as it addresses a range of pressing societal issues and is aligned with global trends in education. Their contributions to national policies and practices, as well as their outreach activities, demonstrate their commitment to making a positive impact on society.

## The development potential of R&D activities of the UoA

Score (points)

4

Reasoned justification of the score

Considering its size (33 professors, 47 associate professors, 18 chief researchers, 22 senior researchers, 13 researchers, 4 junior researchers with scientific degrees, 18 lecturers and 1 assistant with scientific degree), composition, developments since the last assessment, and strategic plans outlined by the University, the development potential is very high. This UoA has a clear strategic vision regarding developing R&D activities. During the assessment period, a merger of two independent units took place. Although it is understandable that consolidation of research topics and prioritizing research developments was needed and seemed to be handled smoothly, it is very important that diverse areas of research in both locations of this UoA are supported since different study programs and professional development activities organized by this UoA need to be supported with research activities.

Somewhat questionable is why such a large Unit of senior staff has not reported even more high-impact publications and research funding. Perhaps this also illuminates structural problems that are outlined by the UoA in SWOT analysis as threats (including insufficient focus on education research topics in national research programs and the Education science field being underrepresented on the national level). It seems that educational research has not received considerable attention in the Lithuanian context in the recent past. This is very worrisome since the development of high-level general education depends very strongly on strong scientific research (see e.g., examples of Finland and Estonia), and supporting educational research should be a priority in the national agenda.

Several valuable initiatives have been introduced in doctoral education, including participation in international networks and conferences and forming larger supervisory teams for PhD students. International collaborations and the involvement of high-level foreign scholars such as Professor Erno Lehtinen in PhD students' mentoring have been very good strategic decisions. Renewing PhD studies and support for PhD students has been significant and is similar to top-level research universities in the field. However, what is somewhat worrisome is the necessity for PhD students to work part-time or full-time besides their PhD studies in Lithuania. If possible, PhD students could be involved even more in different projects and research groups, so that they would not need to work additionally to support themselves financially.

Many research outcomes of this UoA are excellent. PhD students and academic staff members could be encouraged to participate more in high-level, internationally recognized conferences and networks such as EARLI (European Association for Research on Learning and Instruction) and JURE (Junior Researchers of EARLI) to share the research outcomes and develop new ideas and interventions with colleagues.

## Recommendations for continuity and/or improvement of the activities of the UoA

It is recommended that publishing in high-quality peer-reviewed journals should be encouraged (not merely in journals that are included in WoS or Scopus databases, but the quality and international reputation of the journals should receive more attention). Journals that have very quick and low-quality review processes should be avoided (even if they are included in WoS or Scopus databases). This suggestion might not be

supported by the current research administration policies in Lithuania that seem to focus more on the quantity of publications rather than quality.

In addition to preparing high-quality publications for an international audience, publishing high-level research outcomes in the Lithuanian language should be maintained and fostered.

Although staff members of this Unit are participating in international networks, it is also recommended to participate in the EARLI community and conferences as well. For example, instead of some of the reported conferences such as EDULEARN, which have high fees and provide only limited possibilities for disseminating research outcomes. Besides senior staff, PhD students could also be introduced to the EARLI community (starting from being involved in the community of junior researchers of EARLI).

Unit staff members have been very successful in receiving international and national projects. As a recommendation for the future, taking leadership of international projects could be supported more in this UoA (not merely demanded but scaffolded and supported).

It is visible that PhD students and future researchers have received considerable attention since the last assessment. Attention should also be paid to supporting the continuing professional development of the Unit's senior staff members. It is recommended to provide more support for the development and publishing of papers in the highest impact and quality journals, participation in scientific networks, and preparing project applications, e.g., for ERC grants.

Overall, PhD students and staff members are ambitious in finding solutions to different practical and scientific problems. They are very committed and are very aware of important outcomes. However, both PhD students and several staff members are involved in a variety of research and teaching activities, and it is not always clear whether high workload in different areas is sustainable for a long time. Regarding PhD students, the recommendation would be to try to employ them in different projects and other research activities so that they would not need to work outside academia.

Another recommendation is also to focus more on the well-being of PhD students and Unit's staff and the long-term perspectives and purposes of academia. Improving work-life balance is clearly related to the structural conditions and constraints of the Lithuanian research context and does not depend solely on the UoA.

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## 2.6. VDU\_SOC\_PSI Unit of Assessment

Name of the institution	<b>Vytautas Magnus University</b>
Official abbreviation of the name of the institution	<b>VDU</b>
Name of the Institution's unit of assessment (hereinafter – UoA)	<b>VMU Sociology and Psychology</b>
Abbreviation of the UoA name	<b>VDU_SOC_PSI</b>
The scope of the UoA (FTE(SD))	<b>24,63</b>
Research area(s)	<b>S 000 - Social sciences</b>

### Quality of the R&D activities by research fields (groups of research fields) of the UoA

#### Social sciences

Research field	Scope (FTE(SD))	Score (points)
<b>S 005 - Sociology</b>	<b>14,21</b>	<b>4</b>

#### Reasoned justification of the score

The UoA provided information in the self-assessment report and through interviews with employees for comparative expert assessments to evaluate the UoA's performance. In the field of Sociology, UoA has 8.68 full-time equivalent (FTE) research staff with scientific degrees, and a total of 30 teaching staff, representing 16.60 FTE. Although the ratio is skewed towards teaching staff, it does not indicate a concerning situation. During the visit to UoA, management and researchers stressed that they have increased the number of people engaged in research. The research area of Sociology at UoA is at a very good level, with publications from the research field appearing in international journals and respected publishing houses. Publications written as book chapters or books are mostly published with internationally renowned publishing houses such as Taylor & Francis, Peter Lang, and Lit Verlag. Journal articles listed in the report are mostly in Q1 ranking and have sufficient citations according to the Field-Weighted Citation Impact (FWCI). Nevertheless, international orientation and experience in publishing is present and should be further improved and enhanced. The conference presentations listed as best achievements were delivered at top-level event within the field. Awards received for merit are national and local in character. Many of the awards relate to master's theses and are provided by the VDU. Project funding is mostly dependent on the Research Council of Lithuania and EU Funds Investment in Lithuania. However, the HORIZON 2020 project provides a reassurance of the potential of UoA to apply successfully for international competitive funds. During the assessed period, seven theses were defended, six were written in Lithuanian and one in English: Saulius Matulevičius (2020). Religious change after totalitarianism. Cultural trauma and the inner healing movement in post-socialist Lithuania. This Panel recognises the importance of cultivating professional language in mother tongue. The institution acknowledges the importance of English language theses for higher visibility and referencing, so four doctoral students are currently preparing doctoral theses in English and some of them even implement their field work abroad. The PhD defence committees of PhD dissertations have at least one international researcher from foreign University present on board.

Research field	Scope (FTE(SD))	Score (points)
<b>S 006 - Psychology</b>	10,42	3,5

Reasoned justification of the score

The following list of arguments is based on the information provided by the UoA, the information gathered during the visit and other official sources. It has 22 teaching staff members with scientific degrees and 10 researchers with scientific degrees. There are 18 other employees and doctoral students related to R&D and studies. The balance between teaching and research is skewed towards teaching staff with scientific degrees (FTE 20.75). compared to research staff with scientific degrees (FTE 3.50). A total of 7 theses were defended in the field during the assessment period. There are between 8 and 12 PhD students yearly. The number of doctoral students proportionally corresponds to the size of the department; however, the number of defended theses is very variable, some years are high, and some years low (or none). The defended thesis' topics follow a general pattern of interests in similar programs in both Lithuania and neighbouring countries. The papers included in the list of best achievements are of high quality. is. The best publications list includes articles in journals such as Cyberpsychology, Children and Youth Services Review, International Journal of Mental Health and Addiction, and Accident Analysis and Prevention. Researchers attend top international conferences, such as the European Council for High Ability Conference, the European Health Psychology Society Annual Conference, and the European Brief Therapy Association. The impact and the quality of work evident in the awards for R&D activities are primarily national (e.g., Lithuanian Psychological Association, yet, also international – The International Commission for Driver Testing). Many listed awards are related to Master's theses and student awards. Some of them are provided by the VDU. The total amount of competitively obtained funds is good and a high proportion of the grants are of the EU origin. The Psychology Unit boasts EUR 737 thousand grant within the European Social Survey project. This constitutes a major focus area in this Unit, and what is notable thus is the synergy between the Sociology and Psychology. Other fundings include funding for traffic psychology research, mindfulness training of police officers, and for genetic studies on alcoholism. The psychology Unit also has and uses a modern set of lab equipment. This equipment is used both for regular research, as well as for working on PhD thesis. The research of this Unit can also be seen as societally relevant, with some potentially useful synergy with the Unit in sociology.

## Economic and social impact of R&D activities of the UoA

Score (points)
4

Reasoned justification of the score

The UoA carries out very important scientific research and is a very important partner in R&D beyond the academic community. The listed activities are very important yet has not reached status of outstanding activities. Overall, the projects cover a good range of societally relevant research areas from participation in the study of inequality, urbanization, and territorial cohesion across EU, via research helping promote gender equality in the academia, participation in the European Social Survey. Overall, the study of inequality, urbanization, and territorial cohesion across the EU is crucial for promoting social, economic, and environmental sustainability and ensuring that all individuals have equal opportunities to succeed. By identifying effective strategies for addressing these challenges, policymakers can work towards a more equitable and sustainable future for all. The social impact of research outputs and R&D orders of economic

entities is predominantly focused on scientific publications and dissemination, public awareness and policy recommendations, policy briefs, stress reduction programs for the police, traffic safety, cognitive aspects of the elderly and other areas related to ongoing research projects. It struggles to reach the public beyond research projects and project objectives. The Panel would like to stress the importance of the work performed by researchers of the UoA. These publications form a basis for evidence-based psychological and educational tools that increase traffic safety. Researchers participate in working groups, panels or committees such as the Social Work Council of Lithuania under the Ministry of Social Security and Labour, State Progress Council, Association of Lithuanian Anthropologists, Kaunas City Municipality, Lithuanian Society of Sociologists, Lithuanian Academy of Sciences, Research Council of Lithuania, and Lithuanian Human Rights Centre. The UoA consults public or economic entities, such as the United Nations Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, and Lithuanian Association of Local Community Centres. The UoA also provides mediation and counselling for notaries, school psychologists, specialists working with migrants, and child and family welfare professionals. The UoA organizes national events with occasional international conferences such as the international conference "Family, Class and Inequalities in Central and Eastern Europe", and the international conference "Social work with a family: towards a safe society". Researchers are well-represented in national and international editorial and advisory boards in peer-reviewed journals and international working groups and associations. The researchers of the UoA regularly participate in the scientific popularization of research results. Popularization activities include innovative initiatives such as creating a board game, "GAMLEC", podcasts on the Lithuanian National Radio and Television, conferences for teenagers, stress management lectures, activities for gifted children and about them, and so on. The Unit listed cooperation agreements with economic entities, primarily public administration.

## The development potential of R&D activities of the UoA

Score (points)

4

Reasoned justification of the score

The UoA has a very good developmental potential. (1) The research output with clear international orientation. The Unit actively participates in and implements research projects funded by the European Commission research and innovation programs (e.g., H2020, COST). Research with a clear international orientation is essential for advancing knowledge, promoting cross-cultural understanding, and addressing global challenges. (2) The capacity of the Unit is visible in the ability to attract funding on both national and international level, since the topics to be developed by the UoA are promising in attracting funds as well as in terms of being published in outlets with a high impact factor. Also, the UoA has a well-recognized research portfolios both in national and international arena. (3) There is also sufficient critical mass in the Unit, and in case the internationality (in publishing the research results) was boosted, there would be good chances of obtaining higher amounts of international funding and also increase in the volume and level of R&D activities. (4) There have been significant infrastructure investments to the UoA recently. The research labs are both relatively well equipped and the equipment is actively used for fundamental and applied studies. Also, PhD dissertations are developed by using this equipment. (5) The UoA has the potential to achieve good ratings. Most employees fall in the 35 to 44 age group (35 employees) and the 45 to 54 age group (35 employees). The organizational culture within the UoA incorporates both the experience of the mature researchers and the passion of the younger generation. (6) Human resource and management principles are relatively brief and generic, which in the case of the UoA should be considered as an advantage, since it allows flexible actions under the changes of circumstances. (7) The UoA has a very strong potential in further developing a



cross-disciplinary approach to obtaining research funds, since it unites not only units of Psychology and Sociology, but also units of Anthropology and Social work. (8) The UoA has a good experience of cooperation with field stakeholders, such as NGOs, public institutions, local communities and interest groups, trade unions, regional and national authorities. Research cooperation with NGOs is important for promoting socially relevant and impactful research, facilitating knowledge transfer, and ensuring that research is responsive to the needs and priorities of communities. This enables the UoA not only to introduce evidence-based social policy initiatives and working programs, but also gives an opportunity to be successful in receiving smaller grants of a smaller amount which are aimed at solving specific social problems.

### **Recommendations for continuity and/or improvement of the activities of the UoA**

To further encourage interdisciplinary research, the UoA has a very strong potential in further developing a cross-disciplinary approach to obtaining research funds, since it unites not only units of psychology and sociology, but also units of anthropology and social work. By pooling resources and expertise from different fields, interdisciplinary research can be more efficient and cost-effective than single-discipline research. Collaboration between researchers from different fields can also lead to new ideas and insights that would not have been possible within the confines of a single discipline. By bringing together diverse perspectives and expertise, interdisciplinary research can spark creative solutions and innovative approaches to longstanding problems.

The Panel would like to stress that description and justification of the R&D subjects and topics to be developed could be done by primarily addressing existing capacities, not necessarily moving forward and developing new areas or priorities. This recommendation is in line with the fact that the UoA already actively participates in and implements research projects funded by the European Commission research and innovation programs (e.g., Horizon, COST).

Although the publications at UoA appear in international journals and respected publishing houses, the quality and impact (including the number of citations) of publications could be further improved. It is recommended that the UoA invest in high-quality research, encourage its staff to publish in top-tier journals, and collaborate with other institutions and researchers internationally to increase the visibility and impact of their research.

To further invest in technologies and lab equipment, since working with equipment and technologies can help researchers not only to conduct experiments and develop new ideas more efficiently, but also may attract attention from industry and other public entities. Universities with state-of-the-art equipment and technologies are more competitive in attracting top-tier researchers and students. This can increase the quality and impact of research, as well as the university's overall reputation.

The policy of training new generations of researchers needs more specific and concrete details on funding mechanisms and innovative schemes for young scholars' career advancement. Having specific and concrete details can save time and resources, allowing researchers to focus on developing their research and advancing their careers.

To further strengthen partnerships with industry and the public sector. Collaboration with industry will give access to real-world problems and resources, as well as potential funding sources. For instance, this could include dedicated staff and resources to manage partnerships, as well as training and support for researchers and students on how to engage with industry and the public sector. Open communication could be another

goal to invest in. Regular communication can help identify new opportunities for collaboration, ensure that both parties are meeting their goals, and address any issues or challenges that arise.

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## 2.7. LSMC\_LSMC Unit of Assessment

Name of the institution	<b>Lithuanian Centre for Social Sciences</b>
Official abbreviation of the name of the institution	<b>LSMC</b>
Name of the Institution's unit of assessment (hereinafter – UoA)	<b>Lithuanian Centre for Social Sciences</b>
Abbreviation of the UoA name	<b>LSMC_LSMC</b>
The scope of the UoA (FTE(SD))	<b>93,00</b>
Research area(s)	<b>S 000 - Social sciences</b>

### Quality of the R&D activities by research fields (groups of research fields) of the UoA

#### Social sciences

Research field	Scope (FTE(SD))	Score (points)
<b>S 004 - Economics</b>	<b>36,60</b>	<b>4</b>

#### Reasoned justification of the score

The LSMC is composed of three strong units, of which Economics and Sociology are almost the same size. The Economics group is now the largest division of the UoA, with 37 researchers resulting in basically the same number of full-time researchers with a scientific degree. Overall, the quality of the R&D of the Economics group is very good, with international recognition and projection. The research group is a strong player at the international level in their field of specialization, Agricultural Economics and environmental issues, a relatively narrow area. Its orientation has to do with the history of the department, and it's former dependency on the Ministry of Agriculture.

The list of publications submitted to the assessment is coherent with the trajectory of the group, clearly centred on agricultural and environmental issues. It includes 17 articles (in journals indexed in the CA WoS) and a book published by Palgrave. More than 80% of the articles were published in journals indexed to the Q1 of the CA WoS and, in several cases, they belong to the top 10% of their category. With some exceptions (articles in *Energy Economics* or *China Economic Review*), these journals are more related to Business and, especially, Environmental Sciences or Energy than Economics. These sorts of publications are usually valued less in many international universities that prioritise quality over quantity than journals more closely linked to Economics. This strategy likely partly is a response to the incentives in force in Lithuania in other assessments (e.g., this strategy includes considerations such as publishing in CA WoS journals based on the ranking and the impact factor).

The list of conferences contains both regional and international events. With some exceptions (e.g., the conference organised by the European Society for Ecological Economics), the events are not of general interest (e.g., the annual conferences organised by associations like the European Economic Association) or top field conferences (e.g., the annual conferences organised by the European Association of the Environmental and Resource Economists).

Several members of the group been widely recognised by national authorities, and others have received awards for their papers in the field of Agricultural Economics. Overall, it seems that the contributions of the group to this field are widely recognised, indicating that the division has a well-established position. The research group of Economics carried out a good number of remarkable research projects during the period of assessment. More than a third of the R&D projects were competitive at the European level. More than a third of the R&D projects were competitive at the European level. Such a list includes two H2020 projects, an Horizon project, two Interreg projects and one COST project, with the LSMC acting as a partner in all of them. The rest of the projects, which also deserve praise, were funded by national authorities, and were of a very applied nature. It seems that the only pending issue of the group is to lead large EU projects.

Regarding its PhD programme, only five PhD dissertations were defended in the group during the period of assessment. This probably reflects some prioritisation of quality over quantity, and it is overall coherent with the number of PhD students. The number of PhD students increased over time, and the same applies to the presence of foreign students. All the dissertations consisted in monographs and were written in Lithuanian (at odds with international standards). This format is at odds with the most widely adopted international practices based on dissertations consisting of three potentially publishable paper. The group is attempting to promote this type of dissertation, however the national regulations on the format of theses played a significant negative role in this regard. Regarding the results reflected in the Annual Assessment of R&D activities, the Unit to which the group belongs attracted almost EUR 1 million from international R&D programmes, which meant EUR 11,9 thous. per full-time researcher with a scientific degree.

Overall, the performance of the group in this dimension was very good. The group produced a research output that made the Unit a relevant international actor in topics related to Agricultural Economics and environment.

Research field	Scope (FTE(SD))	Score (points)
<b>S 005 - Sociology</b>	<b>36,46</b>	<b>4</b>

Reasoned justification of the score

Sociology is one the units of LSMC with 36.46 FTE or 41 persons out of the total of 132 researchers in the UoA. The researchers do not have BA or MA teaching duties at all, making them in national comparison a research profiled Unit if compared to universities. Many staff members take on teaching duties in other universities alongside LSMC affiliation, which is recommendable. The staff in Sociology group has a slight bias towards senior scholars with solid research careers both nationally and internationally. There are only two PhD programmes in Sociology in Lithuania, making LSMC an appealing institute for junior scholars as well. LSMC organises the PhD studies together with Vytautas Magnus University and the Kaunas University of Technology.

There is no specific profile within Sociology but a broad coverage of phenomena in society, which makes sense for a unit that serves the society and the public sector in many roles. Some unifying themes are post-soviet society, welfare state, and age, including both elderly and youth.

The performance of the group is excellent, and the research is highly regarded both nationally and internationally. The researchers of Sociology collaborate well together and with other universities, especially Vytautas Magnus with which they share the PhD program and many staff members. Their record in international collaborations is excellent and they seem to be an attractive, reliable partner in EU funded networks.

The research funding and publications are on excellent level. The external funding of the Unit to which the group belongs in 2022 made up a 35% of the budget, which is a good percentage. The international collaborative projects are numerous and of high quality. The HORIZON projects are a considerable economic asset and are granted only in tight competition. The themes in both such large-scale projects, governance, and citizenship as well as the gender-based violence in universities and organisations, are societally and academically significant. They are conducted in excellent networks of partnerships. It is important that such projects are conducted with maximum resources as they can lead to future success also long after the project period is over. However, also smaller scale projects like the European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights or the Loneliness ones are crucially important, and diversity is an asset of this unit.

The list of publications is interesting and impressive in its richness. In publication outlets and titles there is a tendency for focusing on outlets where Baltic is mentioned, and the contribution is an empirically based discussion on the post-Soviet situation. While the regional and historical specificity is meaningful and often an inroad to international publications, the projects could also develop a publication culture where theoretical and conceptual developments are offered to broader mainstream high-impact journals, as the academic level is there, without the need to cover the message politely in regional exceptionalism. International co-publications are in this impressive list, and theoretical outcomes from for example the HORIZON projects would be next natural move and fit the profile of the institution as it is on the way to international excellence.

Research field	Scope (FTE(SD))	Score (points)
<b>S 001 - Law</b>	<b>19,94</b>	<b>3,5</b>

#### Reasoned justification of the score

The UoA in the field of Law, according to the Unit's report and the information provided during the visit, is a strong part of the Unit although it is smaller than the other two that form the UoA. There is a good distribution of employees in the research field of Law, and there are no research fellows from abroad. Although the Unit currently does not offer PhD programmes in the field of Law (with plans to do so in the future), the number of other employees and doctoral students in other programs seems to be high, including a PhD student in other Non-Law program of the UoA noted in the visit, and two places for PhD students in the field of law as part of a joint PhD programme with Mykolas Romeris University, according to the provided documentation.

The list of research outputs in publications -including papers, chapters of books, etc.- is strong at national and good at international level and acknowledges quite international recognition of the UoA in the field of Law. In fact, the articles comprise outstanding publications in the American Journal of International Law (top 10%), the European Journal of Criminology, and Modern Law Review or Energy Policy (top 10%).

The range of conferences included in the submission is quite impressive by the standards in Law. Half of them are presentations at conferences organised by the European Society of Criminology. The rest is mostly composed by international events with regional scope (Eastern Europe). Members of the Unit received national awards and recognition because of their scientific trajectory and mainly its collaboration with the public authorities, but not at international level. The group has carried out also an intense work attracting funds from R&D.

Moreover, the Unit participated in a high list of relevant research projects at national level and at European one, particularly funded by the EU JUSTICE Programme, most of them led by the Unit and including also the implementation of three EU "e-Twinning" projects - in Ukraine (as a leading organisation), Azerbaijan and

Turkey (as partner organisation). However, there were no significant international big collaborative research projects such as Horizon 2020. Several research awards are also outlined, but some of them are “best paper” awards.

## Economic and social impact of R&D activities of the UoA

Score (points)

4,5

Reasoned justification of the score

This UoA has a major role in society, both in civil society and public affairs, and internationally. The mission statement of the LSMC emphasizes that they both create and disseminate high-level scientific knowledge in the fields of Economics, Sociology, and Law in order to implement public policy solutions and innovations based on them, strengthening the cohesion of science, business and society. According to the Panel’s estimation, they fulfil this role excellently. LSMC deserves a special recognition for its ability to balance the specific societal needs of the Lithuanian context and the requirement to maintain academic relevance in English. The UoA participates in important international organisations and editorial boards, and the Unit organizes key conferences and events in all the areas of their research. The focus of research is the Lithuanian society, but through collaborations the Unit reached the potential to comparisons and contrasting, enabling meaningful, reliable societal impact.

For international impact, for example, staff members have served as guest editor on the journals *Sustainability*, *Agriculture*, *Energy*, and on Advisory editorial boards for example on *Social Responsibility Journal*. For international book series, for example the “Research in Comparative and Global Social Policy” (Policy press, University of Bristol) advisory board membership is a clear sign of international appreciation. Such board memberships are of value and enhance academic capacity also institutionally, especially if the contact is not only an individual effort.

The profiles of the divisions, Institute of Economics and Rural Development, Institute of Sociology and the Law Institute, are very different and lead to varying stakeholders, but all are engaged with key actors in society and international. Even within an area of research the stakeholder groups can be as varied as a business, the advocacy group of meat packers, or a forestry authority. The fields of the welfare state, social protection, minorities, legislation, the legal system, and agricultural development arise as the most central. All these consultation responsibilities are highly tasking and may pose a time use prioritizing challenge. In the field of Law, for example, the national advisory role is prominent, but such expert tasks do not easily translate to international academic publications. Such consultative expert work is however crucial for the society, so the current level of societal engagement is praiseworthy, despite its potential cost in terms of international academic achievements, as long as the high academic level is maintained, as it is now.

Currently, the international impact consultancy comprise the World Bank, the UN, NATO, OECD, the European Commission, etc. which is noteworthy considering that nationally, the UoA cooperates with the Parliament, the Government, the Presidency, the ministries of Social Security and Labour, Justice, Agriculture, Education, Science and Sport, etc. Potential growth might be in the private sector partnerships and in the third sector of civil society organisations.

## The development potential of R&D activities of the UoA

Score (points)

3,5

Reasoned justification of the score

The international collaborative projects are most impressive, but internal organisation still requires some work. The recent merger of discipline-based divisions is an on-going process and a reassessment of what direction should be taken is still needed. The UoA has an insightful SWOT analysis and can continue this work with the leadership.

The UoA does not have any basic level duties in teaching, only PhD training, but it partners with other universities, which is recommendable to achieve a diverse reach and to recruit excellence for future research capacity. Further international recruitments of junior staff and international PhD students is recommendable.

To harness the potential of the international projects to the fullest, the development potential is in the domain of publications. The Unit can publish more in highly ranked mainstream social science journals, as the research outputs from the projects are on an impressive scale, and could be published with even more international ambition. In all disciplinary areas options for publication outputs should be considered widely. For example, in Agricultural economy, the focus on China is an important contribution both nationally and internationally, but a wider scope could be considered. Area specific reports could be cultivated even further to comparative publications in mainstream journals. The impact in the field of general economics is still to be developed. In Sociology, there is room to find new audiences in general sociology, as the research networks are excellent. While the regional and historical specificity is meaningful and often an inroad to international publications, the projects could also develop a publication culture where theoretical and conceptual developments are offered to broader mainstream high-impact journals, as the academic level is there, without the need to cover the message politely in regional exceptionalism. International co-publications are already in the impressive list. The more theoretical outcomes from for example the Horizon projects require additional time but would be next natural move and fit the profile of the institution as it is on the way to international excellence. The Law publications could target both journals and the international book market.

The discipline based units are of an ideal size in terms of development potential. In general terms, it is advisable not to merge units forcefully but use a thorough consultation with all staff categories to secure voluntary collaboration and mutual benefits, in-house well-being, and to minimize harmful internal competitiveness. The collaboration in larger networks is already remarkable and a culture of collaborative research is already in place. There is a risk that the internal management of the reformed organisation may consume excessive time from actual research and therefore it is crucial to protect work time of Unit. New reward instruments should reflect the desired development goals.

## Recommendations for continuity and/or improvement of the activities of the UoA

In order to increase the quality of its research output the UoA should consider to targeting higher-tier journals, including top of the field (e.g. for the agricultural economics field, *Energy Economics*, *American Journal of Agricultural Economics*, *European Review of Agricultural Economics*, *Journal of Agricultural Economics*, *Agricultural Economics*, *Energy Policy*, *Journal of Environmental Economics and Management*,

*Resource and Energy Economics* or *Review of Environmental Economics and Policy*, among others. Similarly, but more broadly, major Sociological journals in specific thematic fields) and or general interest journals (such as *the Journal of European Economic Association* or even higher-quality outlets; *Current Sociology*, *Sociology*, etc).

While the journal impact factor (which seems to guide the strategy of the Unit) is to be considered, it is an incomplete indicator to guide a strategy of publishing alone (see., e.g., the San Francisco Declaration on Research Assessment). Lists like the Academic Journal Guide could help to set more appropriate standards. For Law publications, international traditions vary, and each field should carefully consider their goals. Each of the UoA fields has different views on how books are valued, so the units are recommended to consider field specific pros and cons, including societal impact publications, and aim for diversity in publication strategies. A multi-disciplinary unit need to value diversity in measuring outputs and . Whichever strategy is chosen, the ambition level needs to be set higher, as the substance is there.

Regarding conferences, UoA is encouraged to present papers at the main top conferences of each field, possibly together as a unit or in international network, to enhance collaboration and visibility (events organised by the European Association of Agricultural Economists, the European Association of the Environmental and Resource Economists or the Agricultural and Applied Economics Associations, for Sociology ESA, ISA and the specialized associations, among others).

Concerning projects, the UoA would strengthen its position by leading international R&D projects.

The UoA still has room for improvement in terms of the presence of its members in the editorial boards of international scientific journals. Participating in the editorial boards of journals published by companies like MDPI (or publishing in journals of this nature is strongly discouraged), since a significant proportion of the research community has concerns about the quality and rigour of the peer-review process of many of its journals. The current emphasis on Baltic region in Sociology publications is a merit and understandable, but the research here would have a lot to contribute to generalizable debates, without questioning the importance of context.

It would desirable that PhD dissertations follow the international practice. In Economics, a thesis based on compilations of three potentially publishable papers in English is sufficient, in Sociology practices vary, but four articles that have been already published is rarely a standard, and emphasis is then more on quantity than quality. Monographs in Lithuanian language should remain a possible format, but it cannot be the only feasible way of finishing an internationally oriented PhD path. Even if that issue depends on national regulations, there may be room for changes or discussion with the relevant agents.

LSMC has existed only since 1st of January, 2021, when 3 scientific research centres were merged after the reorganization by the decision of the Government. The very recent organisational restructuring within LSMC is still an on-going process and the results cannot be assessed yet. It seems, that collaborations across units are in early stages of development, but the units prefer to work along disciplinary lines or in teams outside the UoA. If the process is not well managed and supported there is a risk that the collation may gradually lead to divisions and unnecessary internal competition rather than cohesion. The current situation needs to be reconsidered so that structure serves academic needs, and all researchers have space for academic integrity within their fields of specialisation. Interdisciplinary collaboration is rewarding when it de facto brings about scholarly progress, but not out of organizational necessity to form larger units. This process requires some efforts from the leadership, with a fine ear to the needs of the staff. Here several possible pathways are to be considered, for example incentives for stronger collaboration across units, or alternatively, stronger autonomy and support for collaborations internationally and nationally. The Unit staff should be committed to an agreed vision and a road map ahead, to avoid unnecessary labour and competition around resources and leadership. The rewards instruments should reflect the chosen objectives.



The entire process of restructuring should not detract time from actual research, if well managed, and it can be an organic process if there is enough openness and commitment.

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## 2.8. SM LSU Unit of Assessment

Name of the institution	<b>Lithuanian Sports University</b>
Official abbreviation of the name of the institution	<b>LSU</b>
Name of the Institution's unit of assessment (hereinafter – UoA)	<b>Social Sciences EU</b>
Abbreviation of the UoA name	<b>SM LSU</b>
The scope of the UoA (FTE(SD))	<b>17,92</b>
Research area(s)	<b>S 000 - Social sciences</b>

### Quality of the R&D activities by research fields (groups of research fields) of the UoA

#### Social sciences

Research field	Scope (FTE(SD))	Score (points)
<b>S 007 - Education</b>	<b>11,55</b>	<b>3,5</b>

#### Reasoned justification of the score

Education is the largest teaching and research area within the UoA. Its research topics (sport, physical education, health-conscious behaviour, etc.) in Education fit within the main profile of the university. Important studies include research on moral identity and attitudes towards doping in sport; physical activity of high school students; social and emotional skills of students in physical education; and physical habits of adolescents. Although Education is not the main profile of the university, it is a medium sized research community within the country compared to other universities. The unit has enrolled a limited number of PhD students, the reason for this limitation may be that the number of PhD places is centrally decided. Between 2018 and 2022, an average of two PhD students graduated per year (11 in total). All dissertations except one were written in Lithuanian. The numbers in some years are comparable to those of larger UoA in the field of Education, so the medium-sized team of senior UoA staff was quite productive.

The results of the best research outputs were published in journals such as European Physical Education Review (Sage), Frontiers of Psychology, Behavioral Science, and Journal of Physical health. Most of the research was co-authored, in some cases with colleagues from other universities. Between 2018 and 2022, the research was presented at international scientific conferences abroad: USA, Finland, Spain, Croatia, Serbia and India. A number of employees are members of editorial boards of scientific journals.

Several nationally funded projects are presented, some of which were obtained in the form of individual research grants from the Government and the Lithuanian Research Council and the Ministry of Health. Some projects have been funded by the European Structural Funds. Success in competing for research funding suggests a medium level of competitiveness at the national level and limited exposure to international research teamwork.

Both senior and junior staff have received awards at the national level, e.g., from the Ministry of Education and Science. This reflects national recognition and importance for domestic actors in Lithuania. However,

international recognition is not reflected in awards such as best paper prizes, honorary memberships, prestigious positions in scientific societies, and similar awards.

Overall, the research output of the UoA is good, but there is room for improvement in terms of international recognition and participation in international projects. The UoA Strategic Plan for 2023-2027 outlines some steps to achieve this, such as publishing more articles in high quality peer-reviewed journals and encouraging staff to participate in international research conferences and projects. PhD students should be encouraged to participate in the work of international scientific associations and attend their meetings. They should also be encouraged to write their dissertations in English.

Research field	Scope (FTE(SD))	Score (points)
<b>S 003 - Management</b>	<b>3,95</b>	<b>3</b>

#### Reasoned justification of the score

The UoA has a dedicated group within the field of Management, comprising of one researcher and six teaching staff members. The Unit does not currently have any PhD students. This presents both a challenge and an opportunity for the team to develop and establish a strong research presence within the field of Management.

The group's research output is primarily focused on a range of important and topical themes, including corporate responsibility, evaluation of Lithuanian basketball websites, bullying and harassment in sports, evaluation of dual career athletes, performance of sports firms with regards to lifestyle motivation and corporate social responsibility. While the group's research has predominantly been published in national outlets in the form of monographs, the team has also collaborated with both national and foreign colleagues to publish in scientific journals. This has resulted in several publications in Q2-Q4 journals (source: Scopus, CA WoS) and one monograph, however, it is recommended that the group should aim to publish more frequently in Q1 journals, which are widely considered to have a higher impact within the academic community.

One notable achievement of the group was the publication of a monograph in 2018 that explored management culture and corporate responsibility, which is a significant and relevant topic in today's business landscape. The team's research output, though limited, has demonstrated that they are capable of producing high-quality research that addresses important issues in the field of Management.

The five projects were listed as best outputs during the assessment period, were all funded by European Structural Funds. The funding sources came from the European Social Fund for research on bullying in sports and the Kaunas Tourist Service. While the group has managed to secure funding for their research, more funding opportunities would be beneficial for the team to expand their research activities and further establish themselves as experts in the field of Management.

On an international level, the group has presented their research at various conferences held in the Netherlands, Chile, Japan and Germany, and some Unit staff members have also participated in editorial boards of scientific journals. This demonstrates that the team is actively engaging with the wider academic community and building their networks and collaborations.

Finally, it is worth noting that the group's research primarily focuses on sports management, and as such, it may be more beneficial for the team to identify more closely with the sports sciences field. This could include exploring opportunities to publish in sports management-specific journals and attend conferences and

events that cater to this area of research. By doing so, the group can establish themselves as leading experts in the sports management field and make a meaningful impact in this area of research.

Group of research fields within the research area	Scope (FTE(SD))	Score (points)
<b>S 004 - Economics</b>	2,42	2,5

Reasoned justification of the score

The UoA has a group in the field of Economics comprising one researcher (1.00 FTE) and three teaching staff members (4.27 FTE). There are no PhD students currently enrolled. The research output is accordingly not very extensive, with the best research outputs published in national outlets as monographs aimed at a local audience, with limited scientific impact.

The themes of research in this group include empirical analyses of indices such as KSE, LSE, and ISE, stock return and volatility in emerging and developed financial markets, and sustainable tourism. The five most significant publications were listed, including articles published in Q1-Q4 journals (source: Scopus, CA Wos), but only a few were listed in the Economics field. The best research output was published in international scientific journals and often co-authored, also with foreign colleagues, such as Sustainability, Sustainable Development (Scopus), Economic research, and Technological and Economic Development.

However, this group has a low level of funding, and no honours or awards received by researchers in this field. Only one small local research and development grant has been awarded to the Economics researchers. The conference presentations are also limited, with only a few taking place in Germany, the Slovak Republic, and Ukraine.

Overall, the research in this field is deemed satisfactory at the national level, but it raises the question of whether it is beneficial to keep developing this field as a separate research field. The outcomes of this group are modest, and perhaps it would be more advantageous to merge with the sports management group and focus more on research supporting sport science. At present, one research group is already formed to address social challenges in Human research management, and it is questionable whether this small unit should begin developing this area. Therefore, it is recommended that this group should increase its research output and expand its funding opportunities to improve its research impact. This could include establishing more international collaborations and seeking funding from a wider range of sources. Additionally, the group could benefit from expanding its research themes to include topics that are more relevant to the Economics field, with a focus on publishing in high-impact journals.

In conclusion, while the research output in the Economics group at the UoA is currently limited, there is potential for improvement by increasing research output and seeking greater funding opportunities. However, it is also suggested that the group consider merging with the sports management group to focus on research supporting sport science, rather than developing this field as a separate research field.

## Economic and social impact of R&D activities of the UoA

Score (points)

4

Reasoned justification of the score

The UoA is mainly concerned with applied research and has a clear economic and social impact, mostly at regional and national levels, but also internationally.

Due to its main profile, the UoA's most significant projects with socio-economic impact are related to health and sport, addressing societal needs that are in line with global trends in physical education, sport and health studies. The area of research and development itself is of great importance, with the impact of activities that affect the improvement of health-conscious behaviour of the population and the preservation of health. Research on high performance athletes also has a significant societal impact beyond the narrow scientific community. The combination of several disciplines can help to achieve a multidirectional effect, but also makes it difficult to achieve a more concentrated, stronger and broader impact. Some of the impacts are in public education, others in the military, but several projects affect the entire population.

The employees of the UoA carry out a wide range of consulting activities. They participate in the work of several national and international organizations. Several international and national conferences have been organized by the UoA staff. Some conferences were organized with external partners, for example with Sports Forum. Contract research has been carried out for the government, local authorities and the European partners (EU Commission, European Association for Health Management, Schools for Health in Europe Network). School and teacher organizations have also been served. The activities were partly co-financed by external partners (contractors). Topics of effective projects include habits of young adults, bullying in sports (monograph), physical fitness monitoring model, 2019 (ministerial funding), health determinants of military conscripts, (government funding), health database of schoolchildren (Kaunas region), and hidden corruption in higher education (Ministry of Education, Science and Sport).

The UoA is also in close contact with external decision makers in an expert or advisory role. The partner organizations include the Lithuanian Confederation of Employers, the Lithuanian Research Council, the National Olympic Committee of Lithuania, the Vocational Education and Training Department Centre, the Working Group on Physical Education. Several cooperation agreements were mentioned in the report. They concern mainly local organizations (municipalities/schools) as well as sports associations. Some agreements are without positive financial benefits (free of charge) and some with (limited) positive financial benefits for the UoA. Science popularization services include activities aimed at children, local science forums and topical lectures. These activities focus on the local environment and are quite limited in number.

In summary, the UoA is closely linked to business and decision-makers and has a wide range of consultancy activities, including participation in several national and international organizations. The practical relevance of the reported research is high in physical education, sport and health studies, with several projects addressing societal needs and in line with global trends. The UoA has contributed significantly to the development of national policies and practices, particularly in the areas of physical education, sport and health. However, it is not clear how the three different areas create synergies. While the management group focuses mainly on sports management, the focus of the economic groups is less clear, and it would be beneficial for future projects to consolidate more and focus on important societal issues from different perspectives. Overall, the UoA has a significant socio-economic impact for its size and diversity.

## The development potential of R&D activities of the UoA

Score (points)

3,5

Reasoned justification of the score

The size of the University and the nature of its research influence its potential for development. Taking these conditions also into account, LSU has outlined plans to create two strategic research areas: Physical Education and

Well-being, and Sports and Tourist Management. These areas are expected to support the University in increasing academic performance at various levels, including the international level, and to better exploit the university's unique selling point in sports and health specializations. However, there is a risk of fragmentation with eight relatively small research groups, and the university needs to create conditions that stimulate interdisciplinary and transdisciplinary collaboration. The economics research group's output is currently modest, and it may be more beneficial to merge it with the sport management group and focus more on research in support of sport science. A research group dealing with social challenges in human research management is rather small and it is questionable whether it should start to develop this area. Perhaps consolidation and a clearer focus for the UoA would be more beneficial.

The aging of the current academic staff is also seen as a threat in the medium term. Although the number of PhD students is proportional to the size of the staff, less than half of them plan to pursue an academic career. Many of them see the private sector (e.g., starting a start-up) as more attractive, and this situation threatens the recruitment of young staff.

Part of the research was conducted using (inter)-nationally validated questionnaires, scales, and advanced computer software. However, participation in large-scale surveys (nationally representative studies) is limited, researchers of the UoA tend to conduct studies with smaller samples. The University has collaboration agreements with various sports and education institutions. These partnerships may be further extended and better utilized in research as well. The university has access to foreign databases for international scientific research (for example of the prestigious Karolinska Institute in Stockholm), which could be better utilized in the future. However, the UoA still receives a relatively small research budget and insufficient funding for international research projects, which limits its ability to utilize all the potential for cooperation. The quantity of applied contract research is promising and using the income from such activities could help to support activities in the more academically oriented fields as well.

The university's background in physical education, sports and health studies is well suited to its development potential. The University has developed a strong financial incentive system to recognize the publication performance of researchers.

The University faces structural problems related to research funding, as outlined in its SWOT analysis. Several valuable initiatives have been introduced in doctoral training, including participation in international networks, projects and conferences. Overall, the UoA has high development potential, but needs to address its funding and research structure issues and focus on interdisciplinary and transdisciplinary collaboration to achieve its goals.

## Recommendations for continuity and/or improvement of the activities of the UoA

Although Social Sciences are not part of the main research and training profile of the LSU, there are several interdisciplinary fields that come into contact with sport science. These are primarily physical education and health education, but also important are sports economics, management issues, and sports tourism. The university has well-chosen the main research directions that best fit its profile, but the size of the institution and the number of faculty working in each discipline determines its possibilities. It is questionable whether it is beneficial to keep developing Economics as a separate field of research under the current conditions. Maintaining it as a separate field requires more human resources and financial support. It could improve the effectiveness of research if smaller units paid more attention to internal cooperation. The formation of focus groups on specific research topics and the involvement of PhD students (and sometimes MA students) is a promising initiative that could be further extended to transdisciplinary cooperation. Conditions must be created which stimulate transdisciplinary collaboration with the successful biomedical sciences within LSU. This could be the initiation of additional interdisciplinary projects, cooperation in solving research tasks, joint data collection, cooperation in building databases, software procurement, IT infrastructure development, etc.

Cooperation may extend to doctoral training. Due to the small number of students in a given field, there are few organized courses. Joint training in the basics of Social Sciences (such as research methodology, statistics, etc.) could help to solve this problem. Such cooperation can improve the disadvantaged position of smaller units (e.g., Economics) and contribute to the joint development of the entire social science field. Considering the age distribution of teachers, more attention should be paid to the training of replacements. The number of PhD positions should be increased. PhD students should be encouraged to write their dissertations in English. This would require more systematic support in publishing in international journals (e.g., more courses in publishing, scientific writing, large data collection, advanced data analysis, etc.), language editing support. Attention should also be paid to supporting the professional development of senior academic staff.

The overall effect of higher expectations for publication in prestigious international journals is visible. The effect of financial incentives for publication seems to be strong. This promising tool should be maintained and strengthened. In the future, not only the number of articles published in Q1, Q2, etc. journals should be considered as a performance indicator, but also the researchers who publish high impact (highly cited) papers should be recognized.

There is still untapped potential for strengthening those areas where internationally recognized senior researchers are not yet available. Two forms of knowledge transfer can be considered. Promising young researchers can be sent on study trips to other universities where research in the given field is more advanced. Another possibility is to invite internationally recognized visiting professors who could mentor the UoA staff.

The basic infrastructure is available at LSU. Although the newly acquired equipment (VR devices, eye tracking devices, biological performance measurement devices) is mostly related to biomedical research, it can also be used in social science research. Purchasing specific software for social science research and more transdisciplinary cooperation may improve research conditions for social scientists as well.

### 3. FINDINGS

#### **General Overview and Recommendations from Panel S3**

In this final section of the report, an overview of major findings is offered and recommendations to further improve performance is summarized. This general overview presents the consolidated opinions and assessments of the S3 Expert Panel specializing in the field of Education, Psychology and Sociology.

The quality rating scales used by the Expert Panel in the CEA were important for judging the fulfilment of development goals, but the experts also employed quality standards that are internationally accepted by the scientific community. Consequently, the evaluation presented in the Panel report aligns with these universally recognized standards as well as the predetermined criteria of the comparative assessment.

#### **OVERALL QUALITY OF THE RESEARCH AND ITS LEVEL OF INTERNATIONALISATION**

The UoA-s involved in the comparative assessment have all dedicated significant human and financial resources to improve performance and align their goals and objectives with the suggestions of the previous assessment exercise. Almost all units mention in their strategic plans the need for more focus and less fragmentation of research areas and topics, consolidation of the research programmes, internationalisation, and publishing in higher impact (Clarivate/Scopus) outlets. They strive and are often successful in winning funding from EU grants and (commercial) projects carried out for national stakeholders (business and state). It must be concluded that the awareness of needs for high-quality research is high.

This Panel finds the systematic and comprehensive efforts of the institutions to harmonise traditional national and institutional values with international standards commendable. The amount and quality of publications and the research grants successfully obtained have both increased, along with the (inter)national visibility and prestige of the institutions. Further improvement, however, may be hindered by administrative regulations as well as research practices that the Panel will outline in the following parts of this report.

#### ***Quality of research studies***

Research studies reported involve a wide *diversity of methodologies*, with a preference for qualitative studies. To increase relevance, the topic-oriented application of qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods research methodologies should be encouraged.

Although the limited number of publications the institutions were allowed to list for this assessment, the *journal quality of publications* is generally good. For many of the UoA-s, the time has come to move beyond Q1 journals (that belong to the top 25% of the research area) and target the top 10%. The number of foreign (mostly English) language publications has considerably increased, and if most doctoral theses will also be authored in English, the enculturation of young scholars in the professional language of publishing in Social Sciences will already begin at the start of their careers.

However, the claim about the need of cultivating the national language is also justifiable. Finding the right balance depends on the type of research to be shared: applied innovation results, for example, should reach regional and local stakeholders like policymakers, the wider professional community or even interested citizens who may prefer to read basically in Lithuanian. On the other hand, internationally relevant research results that enhance the prestige of the institutions facilitates joining and building professional networks requires results accessible in English or any other world language that is widely used by the relevant professional community as well. UoA-s seem to be well aware of the language problem and most of them found the right balance between international (mainly English, but also German, French, Russian and Spanish) and national, Lithuanian coverage of their result. Home pages of institutions, LinkedIn profiles of



staff members and official channels in social media, however, need to be curated with similar care and regularity as they are often involved in partner search.

### ***Synergy of teaching, learning and research***

The Panel observed that *research teams are often too small* to undertake the tasks that are allocated to them. The majority of successful scientific programmes today are team-based but setting up and managing a larger research group at many of the UoA-s seems to be difficult, mainly because the lack of organisational and administrative assistance. If the ratio of researchers to teaching staff is not satisfactory and slows down further research development.

Teaching staff, who are recommended to allocate 30% of their workload to research, cannot do so because of the increasing teaching loads. Research staff often work part-time, and if their second employment does not relate to a similar field, their focus may be scattered and their contribution questionable. Foreign experts hired by Lithuanian institutions keep their jobs in their home country – an arrangement that limits their involvement in site-focused studies in Lithuania. Their inclusion in grant applications may also be problematic as their involvement may clash with the interests (and workload) at their other institution.

### ***PhD training***

PhD theses are mostly written as monographies and in Lithuanian language. In order to increase the international visibility of the UoA-s as research institutions, the Panel recommends that they encourage PhD students to write their theses in English or other widely spoken languages. This will not only make the research more accessible to a wider audience but will also increase the chances of the research being cited by international scholars. Additionally, UoA-s could establish partnerships with international universities to facilitate joint supervision of PhD students, which would further enhance the international embeddedness of research efforts of the institution.

Some UoA-s encourage the submission of *publication-based dissertations* based on accepted or publishable papers. This is an excellent practice as published papers have been quality controlled by reviewers before submission and thus bear a “seal of quality” of a prestigious journal.

PhD students are sometimes *involved in the research projects* of the UoA, mainly by their supervisors. This practice provides them with continuous mentoring and a financial base for their projects, but if and only if the project they are invited to join aligns with their own thesis work. If not, being employed as research assistant in a new and unknown field may manifest a huge increase in workload. Teaching duties may also be a welcome challenge to present knowledge or a first encounter with a new area of study requiring long hours of preparation. Stress on the workplace, personal motivation and self-awareness or self-assertion issues provide an obstacle for those young scholars, especially those far from home, who lack a protective family background or friendship circle. The role of the supervisor (a demanding professional role that needs greater acknowledgement) is crucial in the process of the PhD research. (The term “*Doktorfater*” and “*Doktormutter*” in German clearly describes this special commitment.) The quality of PhD training is crucial for keeping young professionals in the scientific community. In some institutions, the Panel gladly acknowledged institutional care for the problems of the PhD students and their mentors as well. In others, the Panel saw the life of doctoral students as one of the most problematic issues of an otherwise well-functioning university.

## **INFRASTRUCTURE AND HUMAN RESOURCES SERVING RESEARCH**

### ***Management and funding***

The number and quality of the competitive research grants won by the UoA-s is impressive, and so are the reports about their successful completion. Lithuanian researchers are out to secure funding for their ideas at home and are respected partners of international consortia.

However, research management could be better focused. In many UoA-s, the selected list of publications sometimes covers *a wide range of themes that are loosely connected to educational science, sociology or psychology*. Bearing in mind the wide variety of topics studied in this disciplinary area, and the relatively small number of research staff at most institutions, the research quality of the UoA-s could best be evaluated through publications directly related to a field of research. (For example, the contents, procedures, infrastructure and quality of teaching and learning, in- or pre-service teacher training, learning tool development and assessment etc.: areas covered by research journals of the field of education).

The *aging of the current academic staff* is seen as a threat in the medium term. At many UoA-s, the recruitment of young staff is a challenge. Although in most institutions, the number of PhD students is proportional to the size of the staff, not all of them plan to pursue an academic career. Many young professionals see the private sector (e.g., launching a start-up or joining a multinational company) as a more attractive career option. Declining student numbers have led to staff restructuring: the employment of researchers (and not tutors) who attract external funding and devote only 10% of their time to teaching. Reduced student enrolment, however, does not seem to influence the *wide variety of degree courses* and other training options offered by the institutions. If the staff / student ratio sinks, finances cannot be satisfactory.

Insufficient state funding for Social Sciences, (for example: lack of adequate state-funded positions for PhD students), pose a significant obstacle for further improvements. Relatively low salary levels are seen as a factor that hinders young researchers trained abroad to return to Lithuania and foreign experts to apply for jobs here. Moreover, the *reduction of administrative staff seems to be counterproductive*. In some cases, as much as two-third of administrators are declared redundant because of governmental budget cuts. Having much fewer administrative personnel for the same amount of support work, time-consuming, often mechanical tasks are being allocated to highly trained academic staff. This practice may increase mobility towards better paid jobs outside academia.

The policy of *training new generations of researchers* needs more specific and concrete details on funding mechanisms and innovative schemes for young scholars' career advancement. Having specific and concrete details can save time and resources, allowing researchers to focus on developing their research and advancing their careers. Many UoA-s can enrol a limited number of PhD students, because the number of PhD places is centrally decided. However, if the funding is secured from other sources and/or students are willing to cover their studies, there are no limitations. In the current economic situation, external sources of funding are limited, and universities should support talented students to find financing option.

The incentive system to reward high-level publications should be reformed on a national level. Sabbaticals should be easier to receive. At present, *co-authorship seems to be "penalised"* (less points for a publication if there are co-authors). This practice discourages multidisciplinary research.

Compartmentalised funding is the reason why *setting up interdisciplinary study programs* on undergraduate and post-graduate level is often prevented by the strict, discipline-based categorization in Lithuanian higher education. It is practically impossible to open a degree program that will be taught (and financed) by more than one faculty, or cross-finance an academic or research program through different outlets of the same institution. The UoA-s the Panel visited are diligently applying for international grants and if successful, they can ease the strains of the underfunded area of education, psychology, and social science.

International conference participation is supported at most UoA-s. High-quality conferences are important venues for knowledge exchange and networking. The conference participation of the UoA is appropriate, although their quality could be better. Here, in the section about funding, this Panel wants to emphasize that there are vast differences among the conferences that claim to be scientific. The Panel members were pleased to see the motivation of some UoA-s to seek acceptance at the major events of their field of study:

those that are supported by large, long-standing professional organisations. These events have a high rejection rate, but their proceedings are valuable resources cited by many.

### ***Infrastructure***

Human infrastructure is a vital component of a successful teaching and research institution. In the UoA-s that were not forced to reduce administrative staff to a minimum, these professionals support grant acquisitions at national and international level. Administrative help is provided for grant applications and processing both at national and international level that helps researchers focus on a scientific project instead of its administration.

The Panel observed *considerable investment in infrastructure* at all UoA-s that resulted in significant development since the last assessment. IT infrastructure, libraries, statistical packages, software, for specialised fields, access to databases with statistical information, data archives with Social Sciences survey data, eye-trackers, EEG-, EMG-, and reaction time equipment, VR-technologies, baby labs, work simulators, play research laboratory, a “Snoezelen” room, and interactive educational games are available for innovative observation studies and competence assessment. On the other hand, some researchers complain about the lack of office space, and a need for investments in new infrastructure, such as for big (behavioural) data, robots, chatbots, augmented and virtual reality will present itself soon.

The STEM and STEAM laboratory network of Lithuania is an important achievement for scientific research, science communication and gender-related developmental work (motivating and coaching girls and young women to train for science, technology, engineering, and mathematics professions). The universities often provide open access to these facilities for researchers from the outside and thus gain new cooperation partners for their staff members.

### **SOCIO-ECONOMIC IMPACT OF RESEARCH ACTIVITIES**

*Social sensitivity* is a highlight of the Lithuanian social science community. Researchers of the UoA-s participating in the current comparative assessment carry out a wide range of consulting activities and is also in close contact with external decision makers in an expert or advisory role. Their science communication activities are locally relevant, diverse, engaging, and reliable. Researchers of smaller UoA-s around the countryside seem to be fully integrated in their immediate environment and successfully work for its betterment.

The relationship of these institutions with *local businesses and decision makers* up to the highest level are based on a deep understanding of mutual interests. Scholars map out current issues and monitor their solutions, offer new trajectories for policy making and their suggestions seem to find open ears. For the Lithuanian society, utilizing results of scientific research seems to be vitally important. Although not fully appreciated in terms of funding, research projects are authentic and often bear local or regional relevance apart from contributing to the “big picture” of science. It is not easy to harmonize the specific social needs of the Lithuanian context and maintaining international academic relevance.

The UoA-s seem to have a positive influence on the development of society and are respected also outside the academic community. Both the public and private sector seems to be listening when they speak. Even when their suggestions do not always become resolutions, their findings are not buried among computer files, but discussed about and referred to.

### ***Local versus international interests***

Lithuanian researchers consider this societal impact as a high priority, and several of their activities in this dimension are observable in the types and themes of grants and agreements of co-operation. *Finding the balance between local and international research interests*– the same issue discussed about the languages of

publications – is relevant also here. Many of the publications that this Panel surveyed discussed Lithuanian problems, often unrelated to European or global concerns. Some papers that claimed to be a research output sounded like an appeal about a locally important topic. Apparently, research management often succumbs to the academic freedom of choice.

In the name of liberal academic traditions, most UoA-s entitle researcher to choose their own topic of investigation without restrictions. A systematic, cumulative research agenda guiding them towards internationally relevant, large-scale, eventually longitudinal studies seems to be scarce. Apart from the wish to comply with the interests and ambitions of researchers, the reason for the lack of streamlining may be funding. Every year, new themes are outlined in the grant application documents of (inter)national agencies that provide the financial basis and thus set the agenda for academic work. They do not seem to favour sustained, longer endeavours that span several grant periods. (This trend, however, seems to be changing with the major European research support instruments. EU-funded HORIZON, for example, has been providing funds for the continuation of research to promote socially disadvantaged communities in the grants for 2020 and 2023).

More and more members of the UoA-s achieve *international recognition* and are elected to prestigious positions in scientific societies. However, best paper awards and leadership roles in associations (executive board memberships in international associations or editorial board membership or consultancy role with scientific journals) are still infrequent.

*Internationalisation of training* has begun through the employment of foreign researchers and teaching staff and the recruitment of foreign (doctoral) students. These endeavours are important as they channel European and global ideas in the curriculum of the degree programs and enrich the research culture of the institution. However, the success of hiring processes differs greatly. The Panel met dedicated foreign experts who were knowledgeable about the institution they joined and had plans for its further improvement. The Panel also watched foreign experts who “graced the venue with their presence” online and kept typing away continuously while the Panel members were there. Online presence is useful, if meaningful. The Panel hopes these busy professionals will find themselves a manageable role in the internationalisation process of the institution that invited them to join their ranks part-time.

### ***Developmental potential***

The evaluation of the development potential of the units was based on their strategic plans, the composition of the academic staff, human resource management and infrastructure. Realisation of plans are supported by an incentive system (monetary rewards, extra research time) for high-profile scientific results and publications. Several valuable initiatives have been introduced in doctoral training, including participation in international networks, projects, and conferences. The Panel appreciates the honesty and straightforwardness of the SWOT analyses the UoA-s provided.

This Panel has been convinced about the motivation and resourcefulness of the institutions to continue their development and overcome those administrative and financial difficulties that might hinder their plans. State partnership is essential in changing regulations that clearly prove inadequate (like the compartmentalisation of research areas, downgrading multi-author papers, attaching a multidisciplinary publication – and related financial benefits – to only one of the participating outlets, etc.). Overworked and underpaid – two adjectives that are often used in connection with academics - will hopefully be a memory of the past, when the next comparative assessment is organized in Lithuania.

### **RECOMMENDATIONS OF PANEL S3**

Most of the UoA-s the Panel studied have high developmental potential, but they need to address funding, personnel and research management issues and focus on interdisciplinary and transdisciplinary collaboration to achieve their goals.

### ***Career development and human resource management***

*Aging staff and difficulties to recruit new researchers and tutors*, the major challenge for many UoA-s, might be a warning: the field is not attractive for young or experienced talent. As this is basically a funding issue related to policy decisions, the UoA-s may not be able to improve workplace attractiveness through regrouping their modest resources and restructuring professional roles alone. Increased and flexible state support is needed as well.

*Decreasing administrative staff* may not be the solution for more stable financing. In fact, administrators may be helpful in completing and managing grants, and thus they contribute to the financial stability of an institution. When a highly qualified scholar finds herself at the copying machine or, having no assistance, is forced to code hundreds of survey sheets, not only motivation is lost, but also talent. Administrators may support research projects through their organisational and management skills and thus optimize the workload of researchers.

### ***Interdisciplinary research for staff cohesion and visibility***

More interdisciplinary research projects result in increased staff cohesion and visibility. Therefore, the Panel encourages the teams in the institution with several fields of Social Sciences in their portfolios to support this practice. By pooling resources and expertise from different fields, interdisciplinary research can be more efficient and cost-effective than single-discipline research.

*Collaboration between researchers from different fields* can also lead to new ideas and insights that would not have been possible within the confines of a single discipline. By bringing together diverse perspectives and expertise, interdisciplinary research can spark creative solutions and innovative approaches to longstanding problems.

*The division of research fields* may also need reconsideration. For example, the division of economics and management is due to the classification of research fields approved in Lithuania. Our recommendation is to reconsider this division and encourage researchers working in the field of management and economics to cooperate in the future. It may also be advisable to unite these two fields as a single strategic research field to avoid fragmentation.

### ***Open Science***

The Panels recommend that the institutions build on encouraging examples like CLARIN-LT to embrace Open Science, including the curation of FAIR data according to generally recognised norms and protocols. This quality of science management must be valued through the institutional rewards system.

### ***Supporting the life and work of PhD students***

PhD students should be more actively *involved in the research projects* of the UoA and initiated in the network of the professional field. Witnessing the phases of the preparation of a research grant proposal, its processing, eventual reconceptualization and realisation is an invaluable experience for a young scholar. However, this involvement should be regulated so as not to lead to overburdening and early burnout.

*Psychological assistance* for problems related to PhD studies should be provided for students and supervisors as well. In the former case, the sources of stress may be eliminated by practical measures (more accessible and higher stipends, cheap student housing, well-defined and never surpassed workload). However, there will always be cases when long-term psychotherapy may be offered. For supervisors and mentors,

methodological assistance may involve an introduction to coaching practices as well as psychological assistance in scaffolding but not overprotecting the students in their care.

*Young women in science* need extra attention to handle their psychological barriers due to profession-based prejudices. Their chances for a career when raising children should be supported. Flexible deadlines for submissions of deliverables and examinations, and extensions of study periods for pregnancies and for mothers of small children are needed for them to pursue their PhD studies successfully.

### ***International professional connections***

#### ***Internationalisation of staff***

International ranking of the university may be strengthened both by the employment of foreign scholars and the recruitment of PhD students from abroad. These developments may also increase the multicultural nature of research at the institution through the diversity of research topics.

Differences in salaries between *a home-grown and an “imported” researcher* is a situation that is difficult to manage. Securing the continuous supply of talented and qualified researchers seems to be a major problem that high-level research institutions must face all over the world. Attracting international doctoral students, post-docs, and researchers may be possible only through competitive salaries and benefits, as research infrastructure and inspiring communities of teaching and research are already present at most of the Lithuanian universities this Panel visited.

#### ***Publishing research results***

As it was emphasized before, the language of publications poses a question of priorities. Therefore, the *publication strategy* of an institution should involve the planning of genres and languages of results to be shared. Research papers, conference communications, chapters in volumes of studies and media pieces in English and Lithuanian (and other relevant languages) should be planned already at the beginning of a research program. International visibility requires continuous authoring in English and should include home pages and social media channels when relevant. The responsibility for developing the professional language in Lithuanian should also be taken into consideration at all levels of science communication.

In many UoA-s, publications are unevenly distributed among researchers. Therefore, *mentoring in advanced academic authorship and language editing services* should be made available for staff members. Wide-range access to (inter)national databases should be more intensively exploited in publications.

*Co-authorships* should be considered an evident way of scientific work and not downgraded through scores divided among co-authors of a publication. This practice should be seriously reconsidered because it prevents certain topics to be researched and published in a fair and ethical manner (not excluding from the list of authors, for example, young scholars whose contribution was essential). In natural science and medicine, for example, many papers have more than 10 (sometimes even more than 50) co-authors, as the nature of a research topic requires the coordinated efforts of many institutions and individuals. In Social Sciences, international surveys, comparative studies of skills and abilities or effects of educational methods on certain competence areas are impossible without the continuous efforts of individuals who provide necessary and recognisable contribution.

Distributing the points among the authors diminishes interdisciplinary collaboration and can have a negative effect also on international research networking as scientists are penalized for publishing together with others. Research activities are multicultural and interdisciplinary, in line with EU research calls that prefer the diversity of epistemological, conceptual, and methodological viewpoints, and these often require the involvement of specialists of different fields as co-authors. The Panel strongly recommends the revision of the practice of deducing points from authors of co-authored papers.

To ensure the highest quality of publications, the UoA-s should prioritize *selecting journals that are widely respected* and recognized for their adherence to best practices of editorship. They should avoid the so-called “*predatory*” journals that charge high article processing fees and apply lower standards that poses credibility concerns. Their high processing fees include swift publication, but such papers are generally disregarded by the scientific community.

The UoA-s should actively seek *participation at international conferences* of respected scientific organisations and when funding is scarce, those staff members should be supported who are accepted by them. These events generally have higher quality requirements and rejection rates are also higher. Visibility and referencing of proceedings and networking options, however, make it worth the preparatory efforts and costs.

“*Predatory conferences*” organised at lucrative venues and offering tempting social programs should also be avoided. They appear to be scientific conferences but do not provide proper selection criteria and editorial control over presentations. Their proceedings are generally disregarded by the scientific community (bulky, full-text volumes as participants must pay to be included and are always included, disregarding quality, if the fee is paid).

For further development of research excellence, it is recommended that staff members of the UoA-s take an active role in journals as *reviewers or editors* and seek election as *members of academic or administrative boards of professional associations* or their special interest groups (SIGs). Several international societies have SIGs for young researchers (an example: the JURE group of EARLI, the European Association of Research on Learning and Instruction).

#### ***Funding: easier access, more flexible grants***

The organization and realization of research projects may be supported by faster access to funds from the Research Council that should be asked to support *not only fundamental, but also applied research*. In Education, such projects may have a direct impact on the work of the schools and further increase the social impact of the UoA, supporting the core mission of the university.

It is advisable to continue *investments in technologies and lab equipment*, since working with equipment and technologies can help researchers not only to conduct experiments and develop new ideas more efficiently, but also may attract attention from industry and other public entities. Universities with state-of-the-art equipment and technologies are more competitive in attracting top-tier researchers and students. This can increase the quality and impact of research, as well as the overall reputation of the UoA-s.

The Panel encourages further *strengthening of partnerships with industry and the public sector*. Collaboration with industry will give access to real-world problems and resources, as well as potential funding sources. Such a cooperation is also a learning experience on how to manage partnerships or how to engage with industry and the public sector. A recurring challenge of the Lithuanian research community is to implement public policy solutions and innovations based on research results through cohesive collaboration of science, business, and social welfare stakeholders.

*Open communication* could be another goal to invest in. Regular communication can help identify new opportunities for collaboration, ensure that both parties are meeting their goals, and address any issues or challenges that arise.

Among the obstacles outlined in the SWOT documents, potential *staff shortage* due to retirement and shrinking MA programs that might result in less PhD candidates seem to be the most difficult problems to overcome as these largely depend on available funds, not just institutional ambitions.

To address the challenges related to insufficient state funding for Social Sciences, the Panel recommends that the UoA-s actively engages in *advocacy efforts* to raise awareness among policy makers and the wider public about the importance of social science research for society. Institutions of UoA-s active in the same area could also seek opportunities to collaborate with other academic institutions and research organizations to increase the leverage of its advocacy efforts.

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