



CENTRE FOR QUALITY ASSESSMENT IN HIGHER EDUCATION

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**EVALUATION REPORT**  
**STUDY FIELD of DENTISTRY (Odontology)**  
at VILNIUS UNIVERSITY

**Expert panel:**

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

**Evaluation coordinator – Dr. Ona Šakalienė**

Report language – English

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## Study Field Data

Title of the study programme	<b><i>Dentistry</i></b>
State code	6011GX005
Type of studies	University studies
Cycle of studies	Integrated studies
Mode of study and duration (in years)	Full time (5 years)
Credit volume	300
Qualification degree and (or) professional qualification	Dental Doctor in Odontology
Language of instruction	Lithuanian, English
Minimum education required	Secondary education or equivalent
Registration date of the study programme	19 May 1997

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# I. INTRODUCTION

## 1.1. BACKGROUND OF THE EVALUATION PROCESS

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

## 1.2. EXPERT PANEL

The expert panel was assigned according to the Experts Selection Procedure as approved by the Director of SKVC on 31 December 2019, [Order No. V-149](#). The site visit to the HEI was conducted by the expert panel on *12<sup>th</sup> of September, 2022*.

1. **Dr. Kevin John Davey** (panel chairperson), Associate Dean for Learning and Teaching, Dundee Dental Hospital and School, University of Dundee (Scotland);
2. **Associate Professor Dr. Barbara Kirnbauer** (member of academic community), Associate Professor at Medical University of Graz Oral Surgery and Orthodontics Department (Austria);
3. **Prof. Dr. Rui Alberto Amaral Mendes** (member of academic community), Professor at Medical School of the University of Porto (Portugal);
4. **Mr. Bronius Einars** (representative of social partners), Deputy Director at Dental Centre "LELA" (Lithuania);
5. **Ms. Ieva Bartkevičiūtė** (students' representative), Second year student of Medicinal Chemistry postgraduate study programme at Kaunas University of Technology Faculty of Chemical Technology (Lithuania).

## 1.3. GENERAL INFORMATION

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

No.	Name of the document
1.	
2.	

#### **1.4. BACKGROUND OF DENTISTRY (ODONTOLOGY) FIELD STUDIES AT VILNIUS UNIVERSITY**

Vilnius University (VU) is one of the oldest and largest higher education institutions in Lithuania. It was founded in 1579 and consists of 15 academic units, among them 11 faculties. The Faculty of Medicine includes 4 institutes: The Institute of Biomedical Science, The Institute of Clinical Medicine, The Institute of Health Sciences and the Institute of Odontology. The latter consists of the Centre of Clinical Dentistry and the Centre of Oral and Maxillo-Facial Surgery. The *Dental* study programme is relatively young and founded in 1996. It is an integrated 5-year 300 ECTS credits study programme, organised in modules, which leads a master's degree in Health Sciences (Dental Doctor in Odontology). The final year of the study programme is characterised by a practical internship and defence of a Master thesis with the aim that graduates are able to provide oral health care to the population on the basis of actual research findings. Furthermore, the programme is offered in Lithuanian and English in parallel.

The last external evaluation of the programme was carried out in 2012 and resulted in an accreditation for 6 years.

## II. GENERAL ASSESSMENT

The *Integrated studies* of the *Dentistry* study field at Vilnius University is given a **positive** evaluation.

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

No.	Evaluation Area	Evaluation of an Area in points*
1.	Intended and achieved learning outcomes and curriculum	4
2.	Links between science (art) and studies	5
3.	Student admission and support	5
4.	Teaching and learning, student performance and graduate employment	4
5.	Teaching staff	4
6.	Learning facilities and resources	4
7.	Study quality management and public information	3
	<b>Total:</b>	29

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

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

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

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

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

### III. STUDY FIELD ANALYSIS

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

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

*3.1.1. Evaluation of the conformity of the aims and outcomes of the field and cycle study programmes to the needs of the society and/or the labour market (not applicable to HEIs operating in exile conditions)*

Institute of Dentistry at the Faculty of Medicine of Vilnius University (VU) annually assesses the needs of the labour market using different criteria - scientific and research-based analysis in correlation with the general and special study outcomes defined in the Descriptor of the Study Field of Dentistry and the requirements specified in the Lithuanian Medical Norm MN 42:2015 "Dental doctor in odontology. Rights, duties, competencies and responsibilities" (updated recently, spring 2023) (SER section 1.1 p-9). Despite the fact that Lithuania has one of the highest number of dentists per capita in the European Union, labour market needs remain very high and there is a high demand for dental specialists. The numbers of students admitted onto the programme is assessed in the light of planning documents and recommendations provided by the Ministry of Health (<https://sam.lrv.lt/en/>) and the Government Strategic Analysis Centre (STRATA, <https://strata.gov.lt/en/home/>). Approximately 50% of the students on the study programme (in English) are international students, the majority of whom do not enter the Lithuanian labour market post-graduation.

The aims and learning outcomes of the study programme are benchmarked with equivalent programmes in other national and international institutions, aided by visiting international academics, and to the Association of Dental Education in Europe (ADEE) guidance. As stated in the SER (section 1.1 p-9), the needs of the society and labour market are assessed through co-operation with various Lithuanian social partners/stakeholders and through graduate employment surveys.

It is evident from the panel meetings during the site visit and information provided in the SER, that sufficient measures are taken by VU and the Institute for Dentistry to ensure the aims and outcomes of the programme conform with the needs of the society and the labour market.

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

The VU mission, strategy and objectives are clearly stated in the SER (section 1.1 p-9) and reflect the need for well-educated graduates, with strong scientific and creative abilities, who are socially conscious and will have a positive impact on society both nationally and globally. As stated in annex 1 of the SER, the aims of the study programme are to "...prepare educated, receptive to scientific innovations, critically thinking highly qualified dentists able to work independently and in co-operation with other professional dentists and oral care specialists in various public and private structures assigned to the areas of treatment, research and education".



There is clear evidence that the aims of the study programme conform to the VU mission, strategy and objectives. Furthermore, the learning objectives of the study programme (annex 1) are well-defined and are consistent with the European requirements for dentistry. It is evident to the panel that the programme aims and outcomes conform to the VU mission, objectives and strategic plan.

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

The Odontology study programme is a five year full-time programme (300 ECTS credits), consisting of ten semesters, each being 30 ECTS, with approximately 49% of time being devoted to self-study. There is clear evidence in the SER (section 1.2, p-10) that the programme complies with the legal requirements of both the EU and the Republic of Lithuania (Table 1 below). Evidence is provided in the SER (p-11) that the programme complies with the guidance for calculating European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System (ECTS) credit sizes and is used to ensure even distribution of student workload across the curriculum. Therefore, the expert panel are satisfied that the study programme complies with the appropriate legal requirements.

**Table No. 1:** VU Odontology study programme compliance with the legal requirements.

<b>Criteria</b>	<b>General legal requirements</b>	<b>VU Odontology Programme</b>
Scope of the programme in ECTS	300	300
ECTS for internship	No less than 20 ECTS	20
ECTS for final thesis (project)	No less than 15 ECTS	25
Individual learning	No less than 30 % of learning	Approximately 49%

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

The programme learning outcomes and curriculum mapping, which show in which modules the learning outcomes are attained, is clearly shown in annex 1 and annex 2 respectively. Annex 3 provides detail information regarding the module learning outcomes, teaching and learning methodologies along with the assessment tools used to confirm attainment of the learning outcomes. A good range of appropriate standard assessment tools are used across the curriculum to demonstrate both academic and clinical competency (e.g. essays, multiple choice, oral exams, continuous assessment, presentations, engagement in discussions, progress tests, practice diaries, practical tests, research thesis, etc). An example provide in the SER (p-14), describes how essays are used to demonstrate student’s skills in searching scientific literature and evaluating the information found. Furthermore, to ensure patient safety prior to starting patient work, student’s practical competencies are assessed in semester three and four.

As indicated in the SER (p-13), the Study Programme Committee (SPC) annually reviews the curriculum to ensure that the learning outcomes are appropriately achieved at the

appropriated level in the programme, in line with Bloom's taxonomy, using the appropriate assessments. There is also good evidence that these measures result in good constructive alignment between the learning outcomes, teaching and learning methodologies, and the assessment tools used.

The expert panel are satisfied that the learning and teaching methodologies, and the assessment tools used are compatible with demonstrating the attainment of the learning outcomes.

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

At VU, the Odontology programme curriculum is structured around the 2+3 model. The curriculum is designed to develop students' knowledge and skills competencies through the academic years, resulting in students requiring the more complex competencies required for clinical practice at graduation. The first two years of the curriculum mainly consist of general basic science subjects, fundamental knowledge and pre-clinical skills training. Elective modules take place in semesters one to three, each being worth five ECTS credits. Students start clinical practice in semester five and over the last three years of the programme students continue to develop their fundamental clinical knowledge and skills in the various dental specialties. Preparation for the final thesis starts in semester seven and continues through to semester ten when the defence of the final master's thesis takes place. Student internships take place in semester ten. International students also have to complete modules on Lithuanian language, in order to aid communication with patients on the clinics, and they continue to develop their Lithuanian language skills throughout the programme. Details regarding the curriculum subject content is outlined in the SER (p-12 and 13) and in annexes 2 and 3.

It was evident to the expert panel during the onsite meetings, that VU has a long tradition of involving students in research and students could engage in research early in their studies, if they wished. The expert panel feel that this is a particular strength of the programme and the development of the new Faculty of Medicine Research building will continue to develop further opportunities for student research (see section 3.2 of this report).

One area the expert panel recommends for further development is in Inter-Professional Education (IPE), with Odontology students working more closely with other dental care professionals, such as dental hygienists and dental technicians, in order to promote good teamworking and leadership skills. Currently, there is no dental technology laboratory connected to the Institute of Dentistry, with laboratory work going out to external laboratories in the city centre. Some students do interact directly with the dental technicians in the external laboratories, but the new faculty research building will provide dental laboratory facilities, although not directly adjacent to the clinics.

The expert panel is satisfied that the programme is structured to ensure good academic and clinical skills development across the curriculum to ensure students graduate with the knowledge and skills required for clinical practice (academic, clinical and research).

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

There are several ways students are able to personalise their studies, including through selecting elective studies, in semesters one to three, when students can select to undertake some general university modules. Students can also select to study foreign languages, including as non-credit bearing modules outwith the Odontology programme, which may help student mobility through student exchange programmes (see section 3.3.3 of this report). It was highlighted in the expert panel's meeting with the students, that learning an additional foreign language, in addition to English, greatly enhanced the opportunities for student mobility.

As stated in section 3.1.5 of this report, students may also engage with research studies prior to starting their preparation for their master's theses. The master's theses itself also provides students with some scope in selecting the subject for their research studies.

VU has a process in place to allow the recognition of competencies acquired beyond the student's academic programme (informal and formal credit bearing modules), which allow students to develop further skills.

The expert panel acknowledges that there are good opportunities for students to personalise their studies and the VU procedures for recognising additional competencies is good educational practice.

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

Preparation for the final master's theses starts in semester seven, with modules relating to the fundamentals aspects of research, which continue through to semester nine. The master's thesis accounts for 25 ECTS credits with the final defence of the thesis taking place in semester ten. As stated in the SER (p-14) VU and the Faculty of Medicine have clear regulations regarding the preparation, content, structure and evaluation criteria for the defence of the master's thesis, which are published on the VU virtual learning environment and on the VU website. Students are encouraged to select a research topic from a subject of interest, which is aided by the staff having PhDs from a broad range of scientific disciplines. There are also good processes in place to ensure academic integrity, through the use of plagiarism checking software, and there is a clear evaluation process for the defence of the theses.

It was evident from the expert panel's discussions during the site visit that students are well prepared and supported by staff during their final theses research projects. The panel were able to see examples of the master's theses during the inspection and a list of the thesis titles and grades was provided in annex 4. The expert panel are satisfied that the standard of the master's theses are at an appropriate level and the marking is fair and consistent. The expert panel recognise that there is good compliance of the final theses with the requirements of the programme.

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

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

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

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

- Scope to increase interprofessional education (IPE) with other dental care professional students.

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

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

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

Research carried out in the field of Dentistry is part of the larger VU Faculty of Medicine. In terms of grant funding and outputs, research in dentistry contributes to a small proportion of the research output of VU. However, research activity is increasing, as shown by the increasing number of articles published in peer-reviewed publications and the extensive involvement in national and international projects, which are likely to have a positive impact on society (SER section 2.1, Tables 3 & 4 p-17, p-21 and 22). These collaborative projects involve research in several specialties of dentistry, including Orthodontics, Periodontology, Paediatric Dentistry, Endodontics and Oral Surgery.

VU has a long tradition of inter-departmental research collaboration, with many of the Odontology teaching staff having PhDs in the basic sciences (e.g. biochemistry, physics, etc). In fact, a significant amount of scientific research and publishing conducted by Odontology lecturers remains assigned to other fields of science, which may not align with the goals of the Odontology program. Hence, care must be observed to guarantee that the scientific expertise of the faculty may help fostering innovative dental research. Moreover, in order to ensure the alignment of research and education in this area, it's essential to ensure that R&D activities encapsulate a truly multidisciplinary approach, bridging between dentistry and medical subjects.

It is evident to the expert panel that there is an excellent collaborative research environment in VU, which is well supported by the University and the Faculty of Medicine. The development of the new Faculty of Medicine Research Building (opening in 2024) is expected to increase the research resources available for dental research, and may serve as a catalyser and enhancer of existing and future research collaborations.

In fact, during the meeting of the expert panel with the Senior members of the faculty, it was stated that research in Dentistry was area for further development, especially involving more links with industrial partners. There is already evidence that dental research has been expanding, with multiple national and international collaborations, with the research likely to have significant impact.

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

As indicated in the SER (p-20), one of the important factors linking research to the study programme is the students are taught by staff actively involved in research, which provides a direct route for staff to introduce their research into their teaching. Some good examples of how staff incorporate their research into teaching is provided in the SER (p-20), involving projects directly related to endodontics, periodontology and paediatric dentistry. These examples need to be replicated throughout the different areas of Dentistry and endorsed and promoted within the broader academic community. Furthermore, the fundamental aspects of research are incorporated into several of the study programme modules and student can engage with research early in their studies. As discussed further in section 3.2.3, another avenue in which students can engage in research as part of the study programme is through the final master's thesis.

It is clearly evident to the expert panel that there is a strong research culture within the Institute of Dentistry, which is routinely conveyed into the teaching on the programme. This promotes student's awareness of the latest research developments in the field and hopefully inspires students to become future dental scientists.

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

As part of the strong research culture within VU and the Dental Institute, students are able to engage with research from year 1 of their studies, if they so wish, by joining the Student Research Society (SRS). The SRS allow students to take part in research studies within the Institute of Dentistry and in other departments in VU. There are also opportunities for students to present research posters at national and international conferences. Furthermore, students become involved in searching and evaluating research literature from year 2 as part of writing essays. In preparation for the final master's thesis, students undertake modules on fundamentals of research from semester 7 onwards. Students can also apply for Lithuanian Research Council funding to undertake summer research internships with staff from the programme. As shown in the SER (Table 6 p-24), approximately 36-38% Odontology students are involved in aspects of research beyond just completion of the final master's thesis (e.g. writing research articles, giving research presentations, etc).

The institution demonstrates a strong commitment to involving students in scientific activities. Still, while it is mentioned that students have the opportunity to get involved in research activities, it is not clear how many students actively participate. The statement, "just part of them write scientific articles or present their works in conferences," indicates that not all students are equally engaged in research activities. It is therefore essential to have well-defined pathways for students to engage in research activities. In fact, encouraging students to apply for research support and participate in research conducted by teaching staff is positive, but there might be a need for more effective promotion and communication of these opportunities to ensure broader student participation.

Overall, while there are opportunities for Dentistry students to engage in research activities, there are weaknesses that need to be addressed, primarily revolving around the need for more clarity, promotion, and ensuring broader participation among students.

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

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

- The strong research environment across VU and the Faculty of Medicine which supports collaborative research .
- Good national and international research collaborations across several dental specialties.
- Good engagement of students with research, with opportunities starting from first year of the programme.
- The new Faculty of Medicine Research building should be regarded as an opportunity to enhance dental research within an interdisciplinary framework.

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

- None.

### **3.3. STUDENT ADMISSION AND SUPPORT**

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

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

Student admission is organised in a centralised manner i.e., all students provide their applications via LAMA BPO (Lithuanian Higher Institutions Association for Organising Joint Admission) in conformity to the Ministry of Education, Science and Sports of the Republic of Lithuania and VU. The system is accessible to all applicants who have reached at least secondary education and additional points are added for fitting any of the listed criteria (no more than 2.5 points). There is a certain number of state-funded and non-state-funded places and admission is determined by competition. About 20-25 candidates are accepted to study Dentistry in English every year and all of them are non-state-funded, however, the places provided are all filled.

The admission process is not restricted in any context, except for the necessity to have acquired secondary education and passing required exams. Additional points system provides a boost for exceptionally talented future students, certain Lithuanians and/or nationals of Lithuanian origin and their direct relatives, applicants who have completed military training (national aspect) and for individuals who are actively participating in volunteering.

The number of applicants has decreased over recent years suggesting Dentistry may be losing popularity, except for the programme conducted in English, which has had an increase in the number of applicants. However, the number of students admitted onto the Odontology programme has remained relatively stable. The competitive scores of the applicants continues to increase, demonstrating that the programme is attracting the highest performing students. The competitive scores for the programme in English has fluctuated slightly and indicate that individuals who have lower passing scores could enter the programme.

University's representation in various publications, projects promoting the students, study fairs, visits to schools, meetings and other events is widely publicised. In addition, information about the programme and the admissions process is clear, captivating and readily available on different websites, and complies with the University's status and virtues. The expert panel are satisfied that there are robust student selection and admission procedures and this information is widely available to applicants.

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

Education and qualification recognition procedures are conducted referring to various documents, including Lisbon Recognition Convention and the right to recognize external education is granted by the Minister of Education, Science and Sports of the Republic of Lithuania. Each case is inspected individually, and equivalence is acknowledged if there is no dispute between the main requirements of the parties. Students have the right to request recognition of prior formal or informal learning in accordance with VU procedures. Formal prior education can be recognized based on the curriculum design. Recognition of informal prior learning depends on whether the learning outcomes comply with the general and subject-specific competences required for the Odontology programme. Individuals who wish to transfer from another national or international institution to continue their study programme at VU can have up to 75% of their previous studies recognised, dependent on compliance with certain criteria (e.g. similarity in the programme content). Up to 50% of informal education can be recognized, except for final examinations or thesis, as well as other written works. Past employment, volunteering, training, internship, projects, etc. fall into the group of informal education (or self-education). Final decisions are made by the SPC.

Every year a few students apply to have modules formally recognized, generally in subjects such as biochemistry and general University studies. The expert panel recognise that there are appropriate and rigorous processes in place to appropriately recognise foreign qualifications and other forms of formal and informal learning.

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

Students who have completed at least one year of their studies have the opportunity to participate in various mobility programmes, including Erasmus, Erasmus+, ISEP, Nordplus and other bilateral co-operation agreements. Students are allowed to spend up to half of their studies abroad i.e., leaving for a semester, compulsory or voluntary internship, postgraduate internship, and the Erasmus programme itself allows up to 12 months of academic mobility. Information about student mobility programmes are widely advertised in newsletters and meetings promoting exchanges, and information is readily available on the University's website (<https://www.vu.lt/tarptautiniai-ryusiai/mainu-galimybes>). Moreover, it is stated that VU belongs to ARQUS and COIMBRA networks, offering short-term international experiences. In addition, the VU Dentistry programme attracts a sizeable number of full-time international students (approximately 50% of the student intake). Unfortunately, the Covid pandemic severely restricted student mobility, however, there is evidence that there has been an increase in student mobility following the pandemic.

As stated in the SER (section 3.2, p-28 and 29) and was apparent to the expert panel during the onsite inspection, VU and the Faculty of Medicine have well organised structures in place to co-ordinate student academic mobility to a large number of international institutions. For example, students can choose to undertake partial studies in a number of countries including Poland, Czech Republic, Germany, Portugal, Spain, Hungary, Italy, Slovakia, Turkey, which are relatively easy to travel too, have relatively cheap living costs and are considered safe. Although it was apparent to the expert panel that the students have a very standard of English language skills, they stated that having a high proficiency in a second foreign language was advantageous for undertaking exchanges, as few international exchange institutions offer programmes in English. The students acknowledged there are a good range of foreign language courses readily available at VU.

An issue highlighted to the expert panel during the meeting with the students was the lack of alignment of the VU ECTS credit sizes with those in the majority of the exchange institutions, which can result in students having insufficient recognition for the studies abroad, i.e. ECTS credit number change from the multiple of five to the multiple of three. This change could encourage more students to participate in exchange programmes as the majority of international institutions have module sizes in multiples of 3 ECTS credits (i.e 3, 6, 9, 12 etc. ECTS credits). However, there is often a reluctance to participate in student exchanges due to the belief that teaching was better at VU, resulting in a relatively small numbers of student undertaking exchanges annually. The students did confirm that they were well informed about student exchanges.

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

As stated in the SER (section 3.2, p-30 to 32), VU provide an extensive range of comprehensive student support services including academic, professional development/career, social (mainly in the form of financial support – various scholarships, loans and financial help for students with disabilities), accommodation services, spiritual and counselling support. In addition, the VU offers a good range of leisure and sports facilities to promote good student physical and mental well-being. It is also clear to the expert panel, from the evidence in the SER, that there are good processes and policies in place to promote and ensure equal opportunities, diversity and non-discrimination, including addressing the needs of students with disabilities. It is also evident that VU has strong student representation (SRVU) to help address the needs of students, and there is widespread student representation a various faculty and university-level commissions, committees and working groups, including the Senate and VU Council. Various student groups, such as the Erasmus Student Network (ESN), where senior students help first year international students adapt to living and studying in Lithuania.

It was very apparent to the expert panel during the meeting with the students how positive the students were with regards to the high levels of student support services available to them, especially by the international students. The students reported the student mentorship scheme was extremely helpful in helping student progression, both academic and for research, provided by senior students within the Institute of Dentistry. For example, the students



reported that the student mentors provided important support when students start clinical practice. The Covid pandemic restricted a lot of the student support processes, for example undertaking the Integration week at the start of Year one, although it was still available to the international students. Following the pandemic, all students are now able to access the integration module, which helps students to adapt to student life, especially for international students moving to Lithuania to study.

The expert panel would like to commend the exceptional level and range of student support services and facilities available to the students. This was clearly evidenced by the information provided in the SER and during the site inspection, especially meeting between the expert panel and the students.

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

Freshmen are introduced to their studies in two steps during the early weeks of their studies: first by special camps organised by VUSR and then during the Integration Week. Integration week provides new students with specific information about the study process, aims and methods, as well as highlighting the student support services available and the sports and leisure activities. The special camps and Integration week are designed to help new students settle into academic life.

Study information is continuously disseminated to students from the central University (general study information), from the academic departments, from individual teaching staff and from student representatives. All the necessary information about the study process (e.g. assessment procedures, timetables, elective modules, student support information) is provided by the different academic units and is available on various online platforms: Faculty of Medicine website (<https://www.mf.vu.lt>, <https://www.mf.vu.lt/en>), VUSIS, MS Teams, Moodle and by email. It is stated that students are advised and consulted by SPC, teaching staff, alumni, and potential employers. Moreover, Lithuanian, and international students cooperate during their studies.

VU has a Counselling and Training Centre which provides student with psychological counselling, either face-to-face or remotely, and students are entitled to three free consultations if a critical situation arises. Students are also able to access various seminars and workshops which promote good mental health (e.g. coping with stress, self-awareness, preventing procrastination, etc).

Ample evidence was provided in the SER, which was confirmed by the students in the meeting with the expert panel, that study information is readily available to students and VU has good provision for student counselling. The expert panel are satisfied that there is sufficient study information and student counselling available to the students.

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

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

- The robust student admission processes which ensure students with high competitive scores are admitted into the programme.
- The exceptional range and quality of student support services available to the students.

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

- Lack of alignment of ECTS module credit sizes with international student exchange partner institutions.

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

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

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

Evidence is provided in the SER (section 4-1 p-33 to 38) and in the annexes (1 to 3), which demonstrate that the study programme has a well-structured curriculum designed to support the building of academic and clinical skills required by graduation. It is the responsibility of the subject teachers and the SPC to continually evaluate the content of the modules to ensure the learning outcomes are appropriately taught and assessed, and the content is appropriate for the labour market, whilst promoting research and life-long learning. As stated in the SER (section 7.1, p-55), the SPC evaluates feedback from a wide variety of stakeholders (students, graduates, staff, social partners, etc) to make adjustments to the teaching content and scheduling. For example, it was explained to the expert panel during the site visit that the medicine teaching had previously been refocussed to be more directly related to dentistry. However, following feedback from the social partners, more general medical teaching was re-introduced.

The educational environment of the programme has a modern student-oriented approach, with students being actively involved in learning through activities which promote discussion, critical thinking, problem solving skills, collaborative working, reflection and creativity. This is achieved through face-to-face teaching sessions (lectures, seminars, pre-clinical and clinical teaching sessions, etc) and by self-study (literature searches, academic writing tasks and completing assignments). As stated in section 3.1.4 of this report, a range of appropriate assessment tools are used to promote learning and to provide evidence that the students have attained the learning outcomes (appendix 2 and 3). The learning outcomes are not only profession-oriented, but dedicated to the education of a confident, reflective, responsible, and skilled professionals, capable of life-long learning and adapting to future changes in their working environment.

It was apparent at the expert panel meeting with the students, that they value the academic and clinical teaching, the support and feedback they receive from staff. The students reported that they get access to a broad range of patients (ages, complex medical histories, etc), but it can be a challenge to achieve some of their clinical procedural requirements, however, they are achievable. The students reported that they have access to good quality clinical equipment and facilities, although there can be some shortages of dental materials (e.g. certain shades of composites), and they appreciate the close working relationships with staff due to the small clinical groups. During the inspection of the clinical facilities, the expert panel were able to confirm that the clinical facilities were very modern and well maintained. Furthermore, it was clear that there is a close and supportive working relationship between the staff and students. The students also get experience of working with implants and have some access to using the intra-oral scanners.

There were no major weaknesses identified. It was apparent during the expert panel onsite visit, however, there was the lack of mixing of the Lithuanian and International students, especially on the clinics where mixed groups would help the International students to communicate with patients, especially those who don't speak English. Furthermore, this would promote cultural diversity. Staff did confirm that having more mixed student clinical groups was already under consideration and the expert panel would support this development.

The expert panel asked about how the Covid pandemic impacted on the programme during several of the onsite meetings. It was apparent that staff felt well supported by VU to make the rapid transition to online teaching and assessment during the lockdown period. Teaching during lockdown was focussed on theoretical teaching in order to allow students to gain as much clinical experience as possible when clinical sessions resumed in the summer of 2020 (SER section 4.1, p-34). The students reported that were content with the online teaching they received during the Covid lockdown and are happy to continue with hybrid learning, as they can readily get access to the teaching staff on the clinics, if they have any questions. In order to ensure academic integrity of the online assessments during the lockdown, which were mainly open-book exams, VU invested in remote proctoring and plagiarism software. As the student's clinical experience was severely reduced over the Covid period, due to fewer patient consultants and the need for students to work in smaller groups, additional clinical internships were arranged for the final year students.

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

As outlined in the SER (section 4.1 p-35), VU have specific regulations to support the needs of students with various disabilities, including access to specialist equipment (i.e. for mobility, visual or hearing impairments) and to enable individualised adjustments to be made to study arrangements (e.g. a more flexible study schedule, changes to assessment processes, etc). The university also has scholarships for students from disadvantaged families, Belarus, and Ukraine. Students can temporarily withdraw from their studies, for up to one year, for significant reasons (e.g. ill health, pregnancy, etc).

The panel are satisfied that VU has satisfactory arrangements to ensure students with disabilities and from socially vulnerable groups get the support they need to study, and that academic leave is available in specific circumstances to allow continuity of learning. These measures promote integration, understanding, empathy, trust and tolerance.

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

As indicated in the SER (section 4.2 p-36) student progress is monitored at module level, specifically by subject teachers, and at the level of the students' year cohort and at programme level. Student progress is monitored at year cohort level by the Study Administration Department and at the level of the programme by the SPC. There are clear and robust processes which monitor trends in assessment outcomes, which allow early detection of student liable to drop out of the programme, so additional support can be put in place to prevent this. Furthermore, the SPC monitors whether there are any alterations in average study results, the number of students continuing their studies, takes into account student feedback and implements immediate actions (e.g. changes to teaching).

As indicated in the SER (section 4.2 p37 and 38), students receive regular feedback (individual or group) in various formats throughout the programme. Typically students receive feedback using a range of forms designed for different types of activities, verbal feedback during face-to-face discussions and written comments following assessments (e.g. on the Virtual Learning Environment, emails, etc). Formative assessment feedback and cumulative assessment scores are also used by teaching staff and students to track individual progress. Both the students and staff groups reported to the panel that feedback dialogue with students was generally easy to achieve due to the small student groups. However, the students reported that detailed individual feedback following certain assessments was limited due to the use of closed question banks, however, students who fail are provided with prompt detailed feedback and additional support is provided to prepare them for the resit. Furthermore, the students reported that they find the feedback they receive on clinics to be very supportive and effective in helping with their future learning.

Overall, it is clear to the panel that there are detailed processes in place which allow monitoring of student progress (individual students and at year cohort levels) and students receive regular and effective feedback which has a positive impact on their learning.

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

VU monitors the employment and graduate career pathways using subjective surveys at one, three and five years after graduation. The survey at one year assesses employability, the survey at year three assess how well graduates have established themselves into clinical practice and the survey at five years examines graduate's career choices and satisfaction. Objective survey data is provided by the Lithuanian state information systems and department registers. Typically both the state and VU surveys show there is over 95% employment rate for graduates at one year after graduation.

As expected, it is more challenging to gather data regarding employment rates and career pathways several years following graduation, especially regarding international students who tend to return to their home countries. Work should continue to further improve data on graduate employment and career tracking beyond three year post graduation.

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

As indicated in the SER (section 4.2, p-39), VU has a number of policy documents which ensure academic integrity, tolerance and diversity & equality of opportunities. These include the Academic Ethics Code of VU which defines academic misconduct (plagiarism and other forms of academic dishonesty). VU uses detection software to detect plagiarism and there is a VU Student Representative Programme "Sąžiningai" (which translates as "Honesty") which promotes academic integrity. For example, VUSR student representatives from other study fields can observe assessments to help staff to ensure academic integrity is upheld. As stated in section 3.4.1 of this report, VU continued to ensure academic integrity for the online assessments taken during the Covid lockdown by providing remote proctoring and plagiarism software.

Potential violations of the academic integrity, tolerance and non-discrimination are assessed by the Central Academic Ethics Commission of VU using a number of clearly defined university policy documents. There have been two recent cases of academic misconduct, one case was upheld while the other was dismissed.

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

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

As outlined in the SER (section 4.2 p-39) there are clear regulations and processes for lodging appeals against exam results and examination procedures. Although the decision of the Appeals Commission for exam results is final, students can further appeal issues relating to examination procedures to the VU Dispute Resolution Committee.

It is clear to the expert panel that there are clear and appropriate policies and procedures in place for the effective examination of appeals and complaints relating to the programme study processes.

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

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

- There is a strong student-centred educational environment fostered by having a good caring working relationship between the staff and students.
- There detailed processes in place to monitor student progress.

- The management of the Odontology programme during and following the Covid pandemic which ensured the students' education was able to continue.
- There are robust policies and procedures in place to promote academic integrity, ethics, tolerance and non-discrimination.

**(2) Weaknesses:**

- There is a deficiency in the graduate career monitor data beyond one year after graduation.

### 3.5. TEACHING STAFF

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

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

Evidence provided in the SER (section 5.1 p-40 to 43) show nearly half of the teaching staff to be either professors or associate professors, and there is a well-balanced mixture between junior and senior staff. There is a good teacher to student ratio of around 1:1.2, which has remained stable over recent years. The gender profile of the staff reflects the high number of female graduates and it was confirmed during the onsite inspection that there is good childcare provision at VU, which promotes female staff career progression. Young professionals (e.g. postgraduate students) are employed as junior assistants, until they complete their doctoral studies, when there is an option to extend their contracts. The expert panel supports the involvement of postgraduate students in teaching on the programme as this provides additional support for teaching, provides role models for the students and gives the postgraduate students valuable teaching experience, which may encourage them to become future clinical academics.

In order to maintain the quality of the staff provision an evaluation (attestation) is carried out every five years to ensure every member of staff meets and maintains the qualifications, training requirements and duties required for their post. For example, teaching staff are required to complete ongoing educational training courses provided by VU in order to maintain and develop their pedagogical competencies. It was confirmed during the expert panel site visit that staff can readily access VU continuing professional development courses and new staff must complete a VU educational training programme. Student feedback on individual staff teaching is also used during the evaluation process. As stated in the SER (section 5.1 p-42), all teaching staff on the programme have high levels of English language proficiency (levels B2 and C1), which allows all staff to be involved in the teaching of the Odontology programme in English. Although full-time employment is promoted by the University, most clinical teachers work part-time (typically 0.5 FTE) in the Institute of Dentistry as they are also practising clinicians in external public or private dental clinics. This arrangement maintains the clinical skills of the teaching staff and provides insight into the current requirements of clinical practice.

It was evident during the expert panel site visit that there are good levels of well-qualified and highly motivated teaching staff, who seek to continually improve their competencies. It was evident the students were extremely satisfied with the teaching on the programme and there is a respectful and caring learning environment. The expert panel are satisfied that there are sufficient numbers of staff and they are appropriately qualified to deliver the learning outcomes.

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

As stated in the SER (p-43 and 44), VU offers several opportunities for staff to increase internationalisation and academic competencies through various mobility programmes, such as ERASMUS+, NORDPLIUS and ISEP, as well as attending international conferences. There is clear evidence in the SER and during the expert panel site visit, that staff are encouraged to engage with academic mobility and there is financial and administrative support to do so. Although staff do undertake academic mobility, it can be difficult for staff to get dedicated time to undertake exchanges, especially as a lot of staff have part-time contracts. There has also been a small number of staff who have visited the Institute of Dentistry to deliver lectures. Furthermore, the Covid pandemic significantly restricted academic mobility both to and from VU.

The expert panel recognises the impact of the Covid pandemic on academic mobility, but recommend that work continues to promote exchanges, including more visiting academic to the institution. This will aid staff continuing professional development, encourage students to undertake academic mobility, and promote more educational and scientific collaborations.

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

In 2017 VU has run a joint pedagogical qualification development programme, which is available for all teaching staff members and is co-ordinated by The Centre for Educational Competences. There are a large range of course available (as outlined in the SER, p-44 and 45), which are free of charge and attendance is based on individual preferences, with particular interest in innovative teaching methods. During the Covid pandemic staff received additional training support to aid the transition of online and hybrid teaching using various IT platforms (e.g. MS Teams, Moodle, etc). Following the Covid pandemic, the study programme teachers have been encouraged to continue to use IT platforms in their teaching and it was evident during the expert panel meeting with the students, that they value having additional online resources.

Regarding the development research competencies, research staff are actively encouraged to attend and participate at national and international conferences, and have memberships of various international associations. Teaching staff are also encouraged to be involved in interdisciplinary research projects. In order to promote more internal research collaborations, VU hold annual scientific meetings. The opening of the new Medical Faculty Research Centre will have a substantial positive impact on further academic development of the staff and a closer co-operation with industry.

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

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

- The availability of educational training programmes to develop staff pedagogical competencies.
- The high numbers of clinical teachers who maintain their clinical skills and knowledge by working part-time in public and private dental practices.
- The support provided by VU to aid the staff transition to online teaching and assessment during the Covid pandemic.

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

- The relative low levels of academic staff exchange visits to VU following Covid.

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

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

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

Basic science teaching (e.g. anatomy, microbiology, physiology, histology, etc) takes place in Faculty of Medicine, which contain a large number of teaching rooms and laboratories, and has a small but well-equipped medical library. The facilities are well-equipped and maintained. Students also have access to other extensive and modern VU library facilities, which provide a broad range of physical and online educational resources, including access to e-books and online databases, both in Lithuanian and in English. Wifi access is readily available throughout the VU, allowing students to access the VU online library resources. During the site visit, the expert panel were able to confirm that there was a good selection of hardcopies of dental-related textbooks in both the Medical Faculty library and in the Institute for Dentistry.

The Institute of Dentistry is well-equipped for pre-clinical and clinical small group teaching and is housed within a single building. There is evidence in the SER (section 6.1 p-46) that there has been substantial modernisation of the teaching facilities, which was confirmed by the expert panel during the onsite inspection e.g. purchase of hybrid simulators to enhance pre-clinical training and enhance students' preparation for carryout patient care. Also, the teaching clinics are modern and well-equipped with high quality and new dental chairs, and there is access to digital diagnostic and planning tools e.g. Digital x-ray and intra-oral scanners. However, there are no dental laboratory facilities on-site restricting students experience with working with dental technicians, especially student dental technicians, which restricts interprofessional teamworking for students. The development of a dental technical laboratory within the new Medical Faculty Research building, although not immediately adjacent to the clinics, will certainly help to enable this.



The expert panel are able to confirm, from the evidence in the SER and from the onsite visit, that there are excellent physical and online facilities available to ensure effective learning and teaching. There is clear evidence that the facilities are well maintained and there are financial resources to continue to modernise the facilities. The expert panel would encourage the development of more interprofessional learning involving dental nurses, dental hygienists and dental technicians.

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

As outlined in the SER (section 6.2 p-53) and during the expert panel discussions with the Senior Faculty and SER Development Group, it was evident that VU and the Faculty of Medicine have strategic planning processes to continually upgrade the learning and teaching facilities. This is evident by the recent modernisation of the facilities in the Institute of Dentistry (section 3.6.1 of this report). The new Faculty of Medicine Science Centre will not only significantly enhance collaborative dental research opportunities, but also provide a simulation centre, a clinical dental technical laboratory and access to modern teaching rooms.

The expert panel confirm that there is clear evidence of continued planning and upgrading of the learning and teaching, and research facilities, which has a positive impact on the odontology study programme.

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

#### *(1) Strengths:*

- The high quality of the modern clinical and pre-clinical facilities in the Institute of Dentistry.
- Excellent library facilities available at VU.
- The opening of the Faculty of Medicine Research building will enhance the research opportunities for students as well as providing access to a new simulation centre and dental technology laboratory.

#### *(2) Weaknesses:*

None

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

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

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

As outlined in the SER (section 7.1 p-55 and 56), the internal quality assurance system of Vilnius University fosters a quality culture aligned with institutional values and the University's mission, in accordance with European Higher Education Area standards and guidelines (<http://www.enqa.eu/index.php/home/esg/>), thus ensuring a standardized approach to quality assurance. Robust monitoring and analysis of study data, including student feedback, learning outcomes, and other relevant information is in place. Encouragement of internal

dialogue for continuous quality improvement, involving students, lecturers, employers, and social partners, which feed into program improvements.

It is the responsibility of the Institute of Dentistry SPC to monitor the quality of the Odontology programme and make changes to continually enhance learning and teaching, and assessment, based on the Regulations of the VU SPC. The programme SPC memberships consists of programme staff and representatives from the social partners and student body. The Institute of Dentistry SPC reports to the Council of the Faculty of Medicine. The SPC uses a broad range of data and feedback (e.g. from staff, students, graduates, social partners, etc) to evaluate the programme.

Although the system emphasises student involvement, there is room for improvement regarding student's engagement and feedback collection, in order to ensure tailored surveys and secure consistent participation rates.

In the SER (p-55) and during the expert panel onsite meetings, several examples were given where feedback has been used to make changes to the content and scheduling of the programme. For example, following feedback from students and staff the module "Society and Oral Health" was moved from semester 3 to semester 2. Also, following feedback from the social partners, medical training has been broadened again to include more general medicine instead of being focused on dental aspects of medicine.

Nonetheless, a comprehensive evaluation of the system's impact on teaching, learning, and overall program quality is essential, to guarantee that weaknesses are properly addressed. Good examples must be replicated and embedded into the institution's internal quality culture.

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

The system appears adaptable and allows for tailoring feedback collection and quality improvement measures accordingly. It relies heavily on various surveys to gather feedback from different stakeholders, including students, lecturers, graduates, and other relevant parties. Details of the types of surveys of the various stakeholders (students, graduates, social partners, etc) are provided in the SER (p-56 and 57). This comprehensive approach ensures a broad perspective on the quality of studies. Feedback is collected periodically throughout the academic year and after graduation, enabling continuous monitoring and improvement of study programs. This helps in addressing emerging quality issues promptly.

There is also wide student representation on various Institute of Dentistry, Faculty of Medicine and University-level committees readily allowing students to have a voice and contribute to the ongoing developments of the studies. For example, there are student representatives on the Institute of Dentistry SPC. Likewise, there is representatives of the social partners on the SPC. It was also pointed out to the expert panel, that the majority of the clinical teachers also work in external clinics, often where students have internships, which provides another source of feedback on the quality of the studies.

As previously stated in section 3.7.1 of this report, there have been several examples given where changes have been made to the programme following feedback from students and other stakeholders. Good examples must be replicated and embedded into the institution's internal quality culture. Likewise, a comprehensive evaluation of the system's impact on teaching,

learning, and overall program quality is essential, to guarantee that weaknesses are properly addressed.

It's also pivotal to assess the effectiveness and impact of the system in the enhancement of the quality of education in order to ensure that adequate resources are allocated to implement the improvements identified through feedback. A lack of resources could hinder the effectiveness of quality assurance measures.

Furthermore, the system seems to rely heavily on surveys as the primary method for collecting feedback. While surveys are valuable, a more diverse set of feedback mechanisms, including qualitative methods like focus groups or interviews, can provide richer insights into the quality of studies.

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

As evidenced in the SER (p-56 and 57) and previously discussed in section 3.7.2 of this report, there are multiple sources of data and feedback collected, by both the University and at programme-level, as part of the evaluation of the effectiveness of the study programme. The results of the assessment of studies are made public on various University platforms, promoting transparency in the quality assurance process. All survey results are published on the VU information system, which is accessible to senior VU, Medical Faculty and Institute of Dentistry leads, as well as the chair of the SPC and the teachers. The results of the general VU satisfaction survey is published on the VU intranet. The outcomes of these surveys are discussed at various committees, such as the SPC. This transparency is essential for accountability and continuous improvement.

It is clear to the expert panel that there is widespread collection and analysis of the data gathered on the performance of the programmes, with the data being appropriately disseminated for evaluation at various committees, such as the SPC.

Overall, the internal quality system is strong in terms of data collection, stakeholder involvement, and transparency. However, it could benefit from more effective feedback integration and a diverse set of feedback mechanisms to ensure a well-rounded evaluation of study quality.

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

Vilnius University actively engages its students in the quality assurance process, using various surveys and feedback mechanisms. Students participate in decision-making at multiple levels within VU, contributing to the improvement of study programs. Students have the opportunity to express their opinions anonymously and openly, ensuring that their voices are heard regarding the quality of study programs and specific subjects.

As previously stated, there are a large number of student surveys conducted by the Institute of Dentistry and by VU, as well as having student representatives on various committees (e.g. SPC). The outcome of recent VU student feedback surveys show high levels of student satisfaction with the Odontology programme (87%) and with the quality of the teaching (82%). This satisfaction was reflected during the expert panel meeting with the students, however, the

students reported that the VU survey was too general for their needs, so they had developed a focus group to provide more focussed student feedback about the programme.

Feedback from students has been reported to be actively used to improve the quality of study programs, leading to changes in course content, teaching methods, and structure. The feedback loop from students to faculty is strong. Evidence has been provided both in the SER (p-58) and to the expert panel during the site visit those changes have been made to the Odontology programme following student feedback. Further examples include reducing the study hours for non-dentistry subjects and requesting that lectures should be recorded and placed onto the virtual learning environment.

The expert panel recognise that there is good communication between the teaching staff and the students, which promotes both formal and informal student feedback, and that changes have been made to the Odontology programme following student feedback.

However, programme staff should work with the student body to overcome concerns about the VU survey being too general for Odontology programme. Moreover, although surveys of final-year students are conducted, they may not fully capture the long-term impact of the study programs on graduates' careers and lives. Alumni participation in surveys is very low, which limits the insights into long-term outcomes and the effectiveness of study programs.

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

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

- Well developed policies and procedures for ensuring quality assurance of the programme resulting in continued enhancements.
- Good student representation on VU and Institute of Dentistry committees.

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

- The system relies heavily on surveys.
- Lack of diversity regarding the feedback mechanisms.
- Develop more detailed programme-level feedback.

## IV. EXAMPLES OF EXCELLENCE

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

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

The research opportunities for students throughout the Odontology curriculum is exceptional and is likely to be further enhanced by the new research facilities available in the Faculty of Medicine Research building, which is due to open in 2024.

## V. RECOMMENDATIONS

Evaluation Area	Recommendations for the Evaluation Area (study cycle)
Intended and achieved learning outcomes and curriculum	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Continue to develop Interprofessional Education (IPE) involving other dental care professional students.</li> </ul>
Links between science (art) and studies	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• None.</li> </ul>
Student admission and support	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Consider changing the ECTS credit sizes to be multiples of 3 ECTS to align with international exchange partner institutions, to encourage more students engagement with student mobility.</li> </ul>
Teaching and learning, student performance and graduate employment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Improve data collection on graduate career activity following graduation.</li> </ul>
Teaching staff	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Continue to promote academic mobility following the Covid pandemic.</li> </ul>
Learning facilities and resources	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• None.</li> </ul>
Study quality management and public information	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Develop more detailed programme-level feedback which is more specific to the Odontology programme (in addition to the VU survey).</li> </ul>

Note: if the study field is going to be given negative evaluation (non-accreditation) instead of RECOMMENDATIONS main **arguments for negative evaluation** (non-accreditation) must be provided together with a **list of “must do” actions** in order to assure that students admitted before study field’s non-accreditation will gain knowledge and skills at least on a minimum level.

## VI. SUMMARY

Firstly, on behalf of the expert panel, I would like to thank the VU Institute of Dentistry, their university colleagues and the students for their valuable hard work in preparing the SER and for their open discussions with the expert panel during the onsite visit. Overall, the study field has performed to a very good or excellent standard across the seven aspects of the SKVC evaluation criteria, however, the expert panel have made a number of recommendations, which would further enhance the study field programme.

The programme has a well-structured and balanced curriculum, and there is constructive alignment of the learning outcomes with the teaching and assessment processes. It was evident that the programme is appropriately benchmarked to national and European requirements. It is clear that the SPC evaluates the programme and continues to make changes, following feedback from various stakeholders, in order to further improve the students' educational experience and to ensure the programme continues to provide graduates fit for the needs of the labour market. A significant enhancement to the curriculum would be to further develop Interprofessional Education (IPE), especially in the clinical context, with other dental healthcare professionals (e.g. dental hygiene and dental technology students), which would enhance leadership and teamworking skills important in modern clinical practice.

VU and the Institute of Dentistry have a strong and well-supported research environment for staff and students, with well-established internal and external (national and international) research collaborations. Although there is evidence that research related to dentistry is increasing, there is a need to ensure that dental staffs' research is more aligned to innovative dental research across the dental specialties. The development of the new Faculty of Medicine Research building may provide excellent opportunities to further develop dental research, both through interdisciplinary approaches that bridge different areas of Medicine and Dentistry, as well as by enhancing further collaboration with industry. There are good opportunities for students to engage in research throughout the curriculum, aided by the Student Research Society, and students are well supported in their preparations for their final master's thesis. However, there is potential to further promote student research to broaden participation by students.

The student admission processes are robust and transparent, and information regarding the University is widely available. Overall, the programme accepts a relatively stable number of high calibre students onto the Dentistry programme and there is a clear system of recognition of formal and informal qualifications, which helps to broaden the skills of future specialists. VU has an extensive range of support and counselling services available to the students, which is commendable. However, student academic mobility could be further enhanced by better alignment of ECTS credit sizes with partner institutions.

Regarding teaching staff, it has to be highlighted that there is a well-balanced mixture of highly motivated young and senior teachers, with a gender profile which reflects the female dominance of the graduates. VU provides good support to its staff, such as having good childcare

provision, which especially helps female teachers' career development. The close and caring working relationship between the staff and students has helped to create a good student-centred educational environment. There are detailed and robust processes in place to monitor student progress and to ensure academic integrity, ethics and non-discrimination. The students have access to high quality pre-clinical, clinical and library facilities. The staff are well-qualified and VU provides good educational staff development programmes to further enhance student teaching. However, there is scope to increase the number of visiting academics to VU, to further enhance staff's educational and research competencies, and develop more integration of the international students on clinics with the Lithuanian students to aid patient communication and cultural understanding.

VU has well developed policies and procedures for quality assuring the programme, including having good student representation on committees, and there was good evidence of changes being made to the programme following feedback from students and stakeholders. However, there is scope to develop end of programme student feedback, which is more specific to dentistry, and to improve feedback from alumni, including graduate career monitoring.

VU and the Institute of Dentistry should be commended for the management of the study field programme during the challenges arising during and following the Covid pandemic.

Overall, the evaluation process has demonstrated the strength of the Dentistry programme, although the expert panel have recommendations to help further enhance the programme going forwards.

**Expert panel chairperson signature:**

**Dr. Kevin John Davey**