EUROPOS HUMANITARINIO UNIVERSITETO VEIKLOS VERTINIMO IŠVADOS

INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW REPORT OF EUROPEAN UNIVERSITY OF HUMANITIES

Grupės vadovas (-ė):
Panel chairperson:

Prof. Bastian Baumann (chair)

Vertinimo sekretorius(-ė):
Review secretary:

Prof. Dr. Anu Toots (panel secretary)

Grupės nariai (kategorija):
Panel members (category):

Prof. Turo Virtanen (academic)

Prof. Dr. Aurelija Pūraitė (academic)

Ms. Natalia Greniewska (student)

SKVC vertinimo koordinatorius(-ė)
Review coordinator at SKVC:

Ms. Daiva Buivydienė

2023

Report language – English

CONTENT

I hereby certify that this is the final text of the institutional review report of European University of Humanities.

Bastian Baumann

I. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

1. The purpose of the external review is to determine the quality of the performance of a higher education institution based on the findings of the external review, to create prerequisites for improvement of the performance of a higher education institution, to promote a culture of quality, and to inform founders, academic community and the society about the quality of higher education institutions.

2. This review report is based on the evidence given in the self-evaluation report, additional evidence requested by the panel, information provided by the Centre for Quality Assessment in Higher Education (hereinafter – Centre, SKVC) and a site visit, where meetings with a wide range of audiences were held.

3. The Panel was composed of the reviewers appointed in accordance with the Expert Selection Procedure approved by the Director of Centre for Quality Assessment in Higher Education on 31 December 2019 Order No. V-149 and included the following members:

> Prof. Bastian Baumann (panel chairperson)
>
> Prof. Dr. Anu Toots (review secretary)
>
> Prof. Turo Virtanen (academic)
>
> Prof. Dr. Aurelija Pūraitė (academic)
>
> Ms. Natalia Greniewska (student)

4. As a result of external review **of European Humanities University (EHU)** is given a **positive evaluation**.

5. Evaluation areas:

Area	Assessment with points*
MANAGEMENT	3
QUALITY ASSURANCE	2
STUDIES AND RESEARCH (ART)	2

*5 points - **excellent**– the area is rated exceptionally well in the national context and internationally;

4 points – **very good** – the area is rated very well in the national context and internationally, without any shortcomings;

3 points – **good** – the area is being developed systematically, without any substantial shortcomings;

2 points – **satisfactory** – the area meets the minimum requirements, but there   are substantial shortcomings that must be addressed;

1 point - **unsatisfactory** – the area does not meet the minimum requirements.

6. **Three** examples of good practices were found; **28** recommendations are made.

II. INTRODUCTION

2.1. Background of the review process

7. The external review of Europos Humanitarinis Universitetas (European University of Humanities) (hereafter referred to as EHU or the University) was organised by the Centre for

Quality Assessment in Higher Education and carried out in 2023 by a panel of international experts (hereinafter referred to as the panel). It was conducted in accordance with the Regulations regarding External Review of Higher Education Institutions in Exile approved by the Lithuanian Government on 12 February 2020 Resolution No. 113 (hereinafter referred to as the Resolution) and the Methodology for Conducting Institutional Review in Higher Education Institution in Exile approved by the Director of SKVC on 4 November 2020 Order No V-90 (hereinafter referred to as the Methodology).

8. According to the Resolution the external review consists of the following stages: submission of a self-evaluation report prepared by the higher education institution to the Centre; formation of an expert panel and analysis of the self-evaluation report; expert panel visit to the higher education institution; the preparation of the external review report, decision-making on the external review as well as accreditation and publication thereof; follow-up activities aimed at improving the performance of the higher education institution, taking into account the external review report.

9. Higher education institutions in exile are reviewed in accordance with 4 indicators: management, quality assurance, studies and research (art), and impact on regional and national development. The Panel reviews and assesses management, quality assurance, studies and research (art), while the impact on regional and national development is assessed by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Lithuania.

10. At the preparatory stage of the external review, the Panel received a Self-Evaluation Report (hereinafter referred to as SER) with annexes. SKVC provided to the Panel additional information about the University, as set in the Methodology (Chapter 28), including statistical data on students and staff; financial data; findings from the ex-post study field reviews, institutional reviews and evaluations of research and development activities; information on violations of academic ethics from the Office of the Ombudsperson for Academic Ethics and Procedures of the Republic of Lithuania. The Panel requested additional information, such as composition of the Governing Board, University's key performance indicators (KPIs) for 2023 and latest Annual Work Plans, Procedure for Digitalisation of Studies.

11. The site visit was undertaken after a training session organised by SKVC staff and preparatory Panel meetings. The Panel visited the University 19-21 September 2023 where it had meetings with internal and external stakeholders. Subsequently, the Panel met both in-person and virtually to review and agree conclusions and recommendations. The review report was finalised by correspondence and submitted to SKVC.

12. In line with the Resolution the external review focused on three areas covered by the evaluation indicators: **Management, Quality Assurance, Studies and Research (Art).** In analysing the evidence collected, the Panel also gave due consideration to the recommendations of the previous review conducted in 2017.

13. The review of a higher education institution assesses each of the evaluation areas with one of five ratings: **excellent** – 5 points – the area is rated exceptionally well; **very good** – 4 points – the area is rated very well without any shortcomings; **good** – 3 points – the area is being developed systematically, without any substantial shortcomings; **satisfactory** – 2 points – the area meets the minimum requirements, but there are substantial shortcomings that must be addressed; **unsatisfactory** – 1 point – the area does not meet the minimum requirements.

14. The evaluation decision is **positive** when none of the evaluation areas is evaluated unsatisfactorily (1 point). The evaluation decision is **negative** when at least one of the evaluation areas is evaluated unsatisfactory (1 point).

15. In line with the Methodology the review report, prepared by the Panel is reviewed by SKVC and sent to the higher education institution to submit comments on factual errors and the evaluations based thereon. The Panel revises the report in response to the comments from the higher education institution (if applicable) and submits it to SKVC.

16. The Panel received the EHU comments and considered them. As a result, eight changes were made to the report.

17. After the Panel considers comments from the higher education institution (if applicable) and finalises it, the report is considered by the external Commission of the Higher Education Institutions' Review (hereinafter – the Commission), set up by SKVC. On the basis of the proposal, made by the Commission, provisioned in the Commission's regulations, approved by the order of the Director of SKVC on 8 of January, 2020 order No. V-5, SKVC takes one of the decisions:

- to evaluate the performance of the higher education institution positively;
- to evaluate the performance of the higher education institution negatively.

The higher education institution shall be entitled to lodge a reasoned complaint to the Commission for Appeals formed by the Ministry of Education, Science, and Sport.

The decisions of the Centre and the Commission for Appeals may be appealed against in accordance with the procedure established by the Law on Administrative Proceedings of the Republic of Lithuania.

18. On the basis of the external review decision SKVC takes one of the following decisions on the **accreditation** of the higher education institution:

- to **accredit for a period of seven years** if performance of the higher education institution is evaluated positively;

- to **accredit for a period of three years** if performance of the higher education institution is evaluated negatively;

- to **provide no accreditation** if the repeated external review results of the higher education institution are negative.

19. SKVC announces the decision on the external review together with the conclusions of the external review and the decision on the accreditation of the higher education institution on its website. The higher education institution announces the decision on the review of the higher education institution together with the external review report on its website and maintains it until the next external review.

2.2. Background information about the institution

20. The Public Institution European Humanities University (EHU) is a non-state higher education institution established in Minsk, Belarus, in 1992, with the aim to promote the integration of Belarus and the region into the European intellectual space. Due to the increasing dictatorship in

Belarus, the University was forced to close in 2004 and under the initiative of the Lithuanian Government relocated in 2005 to Vilnius. In 2019, the Lithuanian Government granted EHU the status of 'University in exile'. This status distinguishes the University from other Lithuanian higher education institutions: on the one hand, it is a Lithuanian higher education institution operating in accordance with the laws of Lithuania, but, on the other - it is a university whose main goal is to contribute to the development of academic freedom in Belarus. (SER)

21. The University has 2 academic units - Department of Social Sciences, and Department of Humanities and Arts that deliver seven Bachelor study programs and four Master study programs. There is also an Integrated study program on International and EU Law, which does not admit new students from 2022. In the area of Arts, study programs in Design and Theatre study fields are offered, in the area of Social Sciences, programs in the study fields of Political Science and Sociology are available. From 2022 EHU offers undergraduate studies in the informatics study field via EPAM School of Digital Engineering. There is one doctoral degree study programme in Philosophy, operated jointly with the Vytautas Magnus University and the Lithuanian Culture Research Institute.

22. In the academic year 2022/23, EHU enrolled 1197 students, out of them 810 full-time, 387 part-time. About 98% of students are non-EU (mainly Belarussian) citizens. The University has about 100 employees, one third of them are non-academics. Academic staff includes 76 teachers at various levels and 9 researchers. (SER)

23. EHU receives financial support from several international donors, including the European Commission, the Nordic Council of Ministers, Konrad Adenauer Foundation and more than a dozen other governments and foundations (as per Audited Financial Statements and Annual Report 2022). University campus is currently located in the Old town of Vilnius, in the premises of the late 18th century former Augustinian monastery that are granted to EHU's use by the Lithuanian Government. Due to fast expansion of the student body in recent years, EHU is seeking additional space in the city.

III. ANALYSIS BY EVALUATION AREAS

3.1. Management

Management area is analysed in accordance with the following indicators:

> *1.1. Compliance of the higher education institution's in exile strategic action plan with its mission and assurance of its implementation.*

24. EHU Strategy 2021-26 declares the mission as being a "student-centred University for promoting civil society development through Humanities and Liberal Arts for students from Belarus and the region". EHU Action Plan for 2021-2026 (AP) sets financial sustainability of the University in the centre in realising the mission, specifically by making the EHU's educational product attractive for the target audience. Relevant activities are divided in four blocks (teaching and learning; research, innovation and outreach; governance; the third mission) with an explicit emphasis of funding and quality. AP, and Annual Work Plan (AWP) 2022-23 do not mention 'student centeredness' explicitly, it is understood as matching supply and demand of study programs and learning modes, and high student satisfaction. Some other documents: quality

assurance (QA) Policies of the EHU and Employee Compass devote sections to explaining the concept. Interviews confirmed that 'student centeredness' is not unequivocally understood or prioritised among EHU staff and students. Development of Belarusian civil society was seen through EHU's third mission and here, the Panel saw remarkable commitment and ongoing activities (such as network of academic people who suffered from dictatorship; training in human rights for people in totalitarian countries, securing scholarships for Belarusian students).

25. Based on EHU strategic documents and information gathered from interviews, the Panel considers AP being partially consistent with the institution's mission. Mission does not cover all EHUs key activities (such as research), AP is focusing on finances, which also does not encompass all activities necessary for organisational development.

26. The University's Strategy 2021-2026 is oriented towards necessary developments, which would help the EHU to integrate into the European Higher Education Area and the European Research Area as well as to fully embrace national requirements for higher education institutions operating in Lithuania. Recent reforms demonstrate that EHU is taking steps to fully align all its activities with Lithuanian legal acts. However, formally students currently do not have voting rights in the GB, as they have in the other governing bodies. Whilst indications were made during the interviews to change this, no decision is yet taken to amend the respective regulations in the EHU Statute. Information from interviews indicated that EHU is seeking to strengthen the role of the Senate and transform it from the 'collegial advisory board' (EHU Statute) into a decision making body in academic affairs. Also, there is an introductory onsite session for low residence students that supports the legal regulation of Lithuania, which requires at least 10% of direct onsite studies for online study programmes.

27. In 2021, the EHU embarked upon an ambitious reform plan and an Action Plan for 2021-2026 has been prepared to support it. Based on thorough analysis on the current situation, the AP defines key challenges and objectives; annual targets are set up to academic year 2023/24. The Panel agrees that identified key challenges, such as securing EHU's financial stability and giving research a priority position in University's mission are appropriate and adequate. However, University's KPIs only partly reflect defined objectives - targets on financial sustainability are adequately set, but student satisfaction score and employee satisfaction score can be hardly regarded as sufficient in measuring University's performance in studies and research. The Strategy does not provide a clear indication, based on what principles the area KPIs are selected. For example, in the area of 'Research, innovation and policy outreach' all KPIs are on personal research output. KPIs on the 3rd mission, such as FTEs and number of programmes are not specific enough. Based on documents and interviews, the Panel's opinion is that there is a lack of association between institutional and personal KPIs. At the same time, the Panel was pleased to hear that the University has a plan to revise the system of KPIs because they are not completely satisfied with the current one.

28. For the monitoring of the AP and AWPs, a virtual Centre for the Strategic Planning and Development (CSPD) has been established. The Panel's meeting with staff members indicated that strategic plans are discussed monthly and quarterly with different parties, both academic and administrative staff who compose the CSPD. Interviews showed that the University is well aware of the new challenges brought by the changing operational environment. The formal procedure of the strategy adjustment is regulated in the EHU's Strategy. Results of the mid-term reviews (progress on strategic objectives, factors influencing their implementation and possible adjustment

strategies) are presented and analysed in annual mid-term Strategy implementation meetings; the next meeting of this kind is scheduled for 2024.

29. Besides internal coordination and monitoring, EHU relies significantly on external progress monitoring on achieving AWP objectives by reporting to the EHU Trust Fund, Governing Board, General Assembly of Part-Owners. As per documents (SER) and interviews, external monitoring with special focus on finances dominates the efforts at improving the performance management. The Panel considers this being an adequate prioritisation given the specificity of the EHU.

30. Implementation results of the strategic action plan of the academic year 2021/22 are presented in the Strategy.

31. Key strengths and weaknesses are summarised in the EHU Strategy 2021-2026; a more detailed list is provided in the AWPs. The Strategy also includes a Risk assessment together with the Risks' mitigation plan as an Annex (high risks - loss of EU funding; key staff is leaving). Additionally, there exists a University Policy of Risk Management (2019) which describes in detailed roles, responsibilities and procedures in managing risks. Semi-annual risk management reports are prepared by the Rector's office indicating the current level of particular risks, actions to be taken and the body responsible for managing the risks. These periodic risk management reports are approved by the Governing Board.

32. The Panel concludes that weaknesses and risks are adequately recognised and formal procedures to mitigate them are at place. However, a complete SWOT analysis is missing, especially as strengths and opportunities are concerned. The Panel thinks that EHU's values declared in the Strategy (European values, study quality and agility) are not fully contributing to the advancement of strengths and opportunities.

1.2. Effectiveness of management of the higher education institution in exile

33. The structure of governance is defined in the Statute; it is clear, including the distribution of different bodies' responsibilities in decision-making. The highest decision-making body in the EHU is the General Assembly of Part-Owners (GAPO), which is responsible for making important decisions by a simple majority of votes. This includes the appointment of the Rector and setting the Governing Board. Interviews with various parties revealed that EHU is strongly committed to a consensus-oriented decision-making culture. This holds for both key governing bodies - Governing Board and Senate. The Senate is an elected body representing all academic units as well as students. The composition of the Governing Board reflects the EHU mission and key areas of activity; students are observers in the Governing Board. The Panel endorses this development.

34. Based on the external recommendations and internal audits, EHU has recently made several structural changes. The number of Academic Departments has been reduced to two in order to optimise human capital and financial resources. EPAM School of Digital Engineering is established to facilitate external cooperation in studies, preparations for establishing another school with similar objectives – BISEB, are underway. Furthermore, the Panel considers transformation of the Human Resource unit into a strategic body and formation of the Project Management Office in 2023 as positive developments well in line with the strategic objectives of the EHU.

35. Information from different interview panels confirmed adherence to the principles of 'flat management', which entails joint meetings of different governing bodies, significant role of informal contacts and communication, and on-demand information provision. The Panel finds that approach adequate for a small University such as EHU. An efficiency audit of EHU, performed by Ernst & Young AB in 2021 assessed "the internal control risk concerning Organisational Structure as low".

36. The process management is regularly analysed based on institutional KPIs. Strategic KPIs are 'cascaded down' to Departments that discuss their management issues and challenges in more detail. Yet, the strategic goals and objectives are presented in various documents - in University Strategy, SER, AWPs in a somewhat different manner that complicates getting adequate information fast and eventually can hamper informed involvement of employees in the process. The latter risk has been evidenced during the interviews which revealed confusion about the number and content of the KPIs among the participants.

37. Interviews during the site visit revealed that the process of compiling the SER was used to review the current management process and to design necessary changes. Among the latter were making of the Employee Compass, initiating the Seed Fund/Development Fund for research and establishment of the Project Management Office. The Panel appreciates such practice of reflexive learning.

38. SER identifies stakeholders as students, graduates and social partners. Students are involved in the management process via their representatives in governing bodies and this practice has been more firmly established in recent years. All students can participate in surveys reflecting on lecture course quality and overall satisfaction with the EHU. Interviews revealed that the University considers satisfaction surveys as an important tool of management and quality assurance. However, no due attention is paid to the methodology of surveys (sampling, response rate, validity of the instrument) which may compromise the reliability of the findings. The Panel was not fully convinced that the issues of survey instruments quality, anonymity of respondents and data protection are properly addressed. Furthermore, interviews disclosed that students miss the detailed feedback from surveys. Neglecting those issues may be a factor why response rate remains that low.

39. Alumni are involved in EHU activities by providing internship places for students, which is a good practice. However, the feedback from internships goes only to the interns and not more widely or systematically to the EHU (i.e. to the study program committees or Academic Departments). Social partners are involved in monitoring and updating of studies as members of the study programme committees and final theses' defence committees.

1.3. Publicity of information on the performance of the higher education institution in exile and its management effectiveness

40. SER does not provide explicit information on performance data collection and use. This may be explained by the fact that EHU entered into major organisational reforms after the SER was accomplished. Due to this reform specificity, the overall system of data management is not yet established, although newly established units (HR Unit, Project Management Office) have started to collect data more systematically. Regularly collected information includes graduates'

employment monitoring and is used as feedback for quality improvement of studies, academic services, and personnel management, as well as for marketing purposes. However, the efficiency of measures taken needs to be more scrupulously analysed. For example, according to the SER, feedback is used to update the study programmes, but the non-completion rate remains worryingly high. Interview participants provided different reasons for that, which suggests that admission and academic performance data are not thoroughly analysed and evidence-based understanding of the enrolment problem is missing.

41. The system of KPIs was introduced in 2021 and updated in 2023. Therefore, it is too early to assess to what extent the data on KPIs are being systematically used.

42. The University's overall performance is documented in Annual Reports, which are audited and approved by the university's highest governing bodies - the GB and GAPO. Annual reports are publicly available at the EHU website. The website has content in four languages, which makes basic information accessible to all students and other target groups regardless of their language background.

43. The University has drafted a Communication strategy (2023-2026) that lays out objectives of the external communication, main channels and indicators to measure performance. A Communication and Marketing Unit subordinated to Rector is established and the Senate is periodically consulted in the area of planning and execution of the EHU Communication strategy. The Panel welcomes this systemic and medium-term approach to the communication, although the process is at the very early stage.

44. Internal communication within the University community has improved through the intranet, based on the Moodle platform, and further optimization is ongoing. Participants of interview panels stressed the openness of the rector to all stakeholders and as result, improvement of information flows. At the same time, representatives of staff and students indicated that the information management systems require faster updating and better user-friendliness in order to advance transparency of the management processes and increase the legitimacy of decisions.

45. Due to the specific position of the EHU as a University in exile, assessment of graduates' employment and careers is more difficult than usual. According to the Survey performed by the CIVITTA and SATIO in 2021, 61% of EHU graduates work full time, which is slightly higher than for non-EHU graduates. 37% of graduates do not work in their field of study, whereas 33% do so, and 18% intend to find a job in their specialty. For political reasons, self-employment is substantially high (12%) among EHU graduates; a similar reason explains why more graduates from humanities and IT than from social sciences are employed in their field of studies (SER).

46. According to the CIVITTA Survey (2021), around 75% of EHU alumni returned to Belarus after graduation and were actively involved in NGOs that support social change and development of civil society. Since the political situation in the region is becoming more complicated, recent data on alumni employment are not available. Several alumni whom the Panel met during the site visit are working in international companies in Western Europe that indicates good employment potential of EHU's graduates.

47. Institutional Review Reports by SKVC (2014, 2017, 2019) and the Independent Auditor's Report 2021-2022 are publicly available at EHU's website in all four working languages.

48. With respect to human resource (HR) management, EHU has made considerable progress in recent years in developing principles of formation and evaluation of all staff. The principles and procedures for formation, management, evaluation and remuneration of academic and non-academic staff are clearly determined in relevant regulations and transparent. Open competitions are announced for academic and senior administrative positions; academic staff has 5-year work contracts as a rule.

49. Based on internal evaluation of the situation as well as external reviews (2017) and Recommendations on the Structure of Working Time of Higher Education Teachers (Ministry of Education, Science and Sports), EHU has modified the workload composition of academic staff to create a better balance between teaching, research (art), and organisational activities. Interviewed staff members appreciated these changes and it was evident that they understand the principles of workload calculation. There is flexibility in composing the schedule of classes, but more flexible arrangements between teaching and research duties would be beneficial for employees' satisfaction and work motivation.

50. In recent years, EHU has made important steps in order to capacitate academic staff in doing research. The financial resources for competitive grants are available through the EHU Development Fund (former Seed Fund), and the size of the Fund has been raised from 20 000 EUR to 150 000 EUR in AY 2023/24. The application process and grant implementation are set by a Rector's order, and the interviews demonstrated that staff members are well aware of them and see regulations as fair and transparent.

51. Evaluation of the performance of the academic staff is carried out annually by the direct supervisor and based on teachers' reports on personal academic activities. The University has very recently (September 2023) revised and improved individual KPIs that serve as the basis for the performance assessment. Previously, non-formalised developmental interviews with the direct supervisor were held. The University plans to continue further elaboration of the KPI-based approach and the Panel endorses this development. To motivate doing research, a merit based research basket for academic staff is introduced. Although the annual bonuses are small in amount, the measure was highly appreciated by the staff members.

52. Over the past years, the number of academic staff has almost doubled (59 full time employees (FTE) in academic year 2019/20 versus 109 FTE in academic year 2022/23) which corresponds to the increase in student body from 743 to 1481 respectively. This suggests that the student - staff ratio has also improved. While the average student-teacher ratio is 9,7, it varies across Bachelor and Master study programs from 12,5 in Media and Communication to 4,2 in Theatre Art and Acting. While the interviews did not reveal complaints over work overload or insufficient supervision, the University should closely monitor that teacher-student ratio is kept at appropriate level, especially in the study programs with substantial share of creative and practical work. The academic staff is well balanced in terms of age and gender; the majority of staff is in the age group 40-54. Permanent teaching staff composes 54% out of total (SER). The size of administrative staff has remained stable throughout the recent years, which means that their share in the total employees has decreased. The Panel did not find grounds that smaller administrative staff has compromised efficiency of work processes or quality of activities.

53. Overall, the evidence from documents and interviews suggests that the effective student-staff ratio allows for operational realisation of the EHU's strategic objectives, including becoming a student-centred university.

54. The minimum qualification requirements for teachers and researchers working at EHU were set in 2021. 74 % of full time teachers have a PhD or hold the title of a recognized artist (20 professors, 24 associated professors, 10 PhD lecturers, 20 lecturers, 2 assistant lecturers). Almost 60 percent of faculty are Belarusian, which reflects well the 'University in exile' status and supports implementing the mission of the EHU (i.e. contributing to the democratic Belarus).

55. Academic staff have the possibility to improve their knowledge and skills. The University has set internal procedures for introductory training for newly hired academic staff; in line with the University's strategic objectives to enhance digital teaching and learning, methodological and technical support is offered to academic staff in preparation of remotely taught study subjects. EHU provides language courses for staff, although these are non-compulsory and depend on individual needs and choices of the employees. Overall, documents and interviews revealed that professional development is organised on a voluntary basis rather than in systemic and overreaching manner that learns lessons from the existing situation and matches them to strategic objectives. The Panel was not convinced that performance assessment outcomes and the professional development support are directly linked. While this voluntary and individual approach has certain benefits, at institutional level it also has shortcomings. As SER reveals, the number of employees who have improved their competences is rather small and not increasing (17 persons in 2022/23) (SER). Outgoing staff mobility is also extremely low (4 persons in academic year 2022/23), and dominantly to the Eastern European countries. Although COVID pandemic may be one reason for declining mobility, the area demands closer attention by the EHU management. Interviews revealed difficulties for outgoing academic mobility due to Lithuanian residence permit policy; therefore, EHU might consider intensifying incoming academic mobility to support professional development of in-house staff. Currently, the numbers of incoming teaching staff and researchers are similarly very low (4 and 9 respectively). Interviews disclosed lack of training in soft skills (especially in interpersonal communication) and in fundraising skills (although such training is to be introduced from academic year 2023/24). The Panel sees both these skills as particularly important in fulfilling EHU's mission and strategic objectives.

56. Professional development of non-academic staff is organised in a manner similar to that of academic staff. Opportunities to learn languages or improve the digital skills are provided but the systemic monitoring (or enforcement) of effective participation are not established.

1.5. Efficiency of financial and learning resource management:

57. The EHU has developed efficient systems and routines for financial management and control. Budgeting policy is rather centralised/top-down; academic departments can apply for funding in case of special projects or activities.

58. An audit called by SIDA (2021) has not revealed any deviances from internal policies. For the two most recent audits, no weaknesses have been identified by the external auditors. The finance staff appears to have relevant experience to implement mitigating actions should any issues be identified in the future.

59. Due to its specific position and mission, securing enough financial resources is a key priority of the EHU. The total amount of donors' contributions makes up to 70-75% of the university's annual budget, while the remaining amount is covered by student tuition (SER). The Panel is convinced that the University management fully understands the complexity of the issue and takes active steps in securing stable financing (adaptation of a new financing model; expanding and diversifying the donors' base). In order to efficiently and cohesively manage donor contributions, the Multi-Donor Trust Fund (MDTF) was established at the beginning of 2022. According to the Panel's opinion, the Trust Fund model is a benefit because it exempts University from purely technical and bookkeeping workload.

60. The student body of EHU has sharply increased in two last years which increases the sustainability of the institution, but puts limited space capacity sharply on the agenda. Existing premises of the EHU in the 18th century former Augustinian monastery clearly do not satisfy current and future needs of the University. Besides limited quadrant metres, the buildings are affected by external moisture and require constant repair and renovation. Building costs are high and exceed expenditures to IT more than twice (SER). To address challenges of limited space, the University has rented additional premises for classrooms and dormitories in the city. Yet, further steps are needed here. For example, currently there are no rooms where students can meet the teachers for private consultations, and where students can carry on their extracurricular activities and socialise.

61. Learning resources for provision of studies and research activities are consciously planned and used rationally. For larger purchases national public procurement procedure is applied. The site visit confirmed that media and art labs are equipped with modern technology and administrative staff has clear vision on how to keep it updated and develop further. Library is well equipped with hard copies and access to academic electronic databases; librarians are committed to meet all current needs, and offer professional support for students and staff in literature search. The Panel encourages academic staff to make more active use of library's possibilities both in their research and teaching.

62. Learning resources for conducting studies and art activities are available and appropriate in terms of labs, equipment, and access to international research databases through the University library. Library has textbooks in Russian, English and Belorussian. Most of the course literature is in English even when the lectures are in Russian/Belorussian. Because of the political situation, the updated literature in Belorussian is hard to get. Recent positive developments include a theatre stage, the Media Centre (MediaHub), Apple class, TV and radio studios, spaces for independent and preparatory work for students which they can book for free outside the class hours. The Panel appreciates the clear link between these investments and development/launch of the study programs. Lack of physical space is one of the major concerns, voiced also by students whom the Panel met at interviews. Overall, EHU is doing relatively well considering the limited resources that it has, and it could certainly do better if more financial resources were made available.

63. **In summary,** EHU is a unique institution due to its legacy, status and mission. However, this also leads to the issues of identity. On the one hand, EHU is seen as a 'political project' that supports democratisation of Belarus, but on the other - its transformation to the full scale research university is taking place. Clarification of University's identity (including its mission) is an urgency and neglecting it may lead to organisational crisis. Thus, the core question of management is, how to combine the 'political project'- approach and 'full university'- approach?

The structure of governance is well balanced and adequate to the strategic goals of the University. Several recent actions, such as establishment of the Trust Fund, involving students' representatives in all governing bodies, establishing a Development/Seed Fund for research, and open communication from the Rector have improved the efficiency and legitimacy of the management. Some promising steps are just launched, but need further elaboration. In 2023, EHU introduced a KPI-based approach, but existing KPIs are not fully consistent with the EHU strategy. Furthermore, personal and institutional KPIs are not differentiated or linked to each other in fully transparent ways. Finally, there is no common understanding about the recently launched system of KPIs and its functioning among the employees. The Panel was pleased to see that EHU's management understands the need to elaborate the existing system.

Committed staff are a major asset of the University, yet need to further build their capacity. The organisation seems eager and willing to implement the recommendations presented to achieve the operational goals. Non-formalised procedures and an open to criticism mindset serve as good premises to engage all staff into development of the University.

64. **Judgement**: the area is being developed systematically, without any substantial shortcomings and is given 3 points.

65. **Recommendations for the area (Management):**

• Review and revise the mission statement with a view to clarifying identity and ensuring it accurately sets out the unique characteristics and ambitions of EHU and thus, can be used as an effective strategic guide.

• Review the system of KPIs to distinguish institutional KPIs and project / activity milestones, and personal performance targets.

• Revise institutional KPIs to clearly link them to envisaged impact and strategic objectives over the entire strategy cycle.

• Ensure a direct link between performance assessment outcomes and the professional development support.

• Strengthen the role of the Senate in academic decision making as it is prescribed by law of Lithuania, and to change Statute accordingly

• Continue increasing application of fundamental values such as democratic governance, transparency, responsiveness and non-discrimination.

• Continue diversification of funds to ensure long-term financial sustainability and ability of EHU to continue its activities.

• Ensure sufficient infrastructural capacity for growth.

66. **Good practice examples:**

• The Trust Fund as an institutional tool for budget administration is working very well, it helps to keep management of finances transparent, to consolidate donations, and to lessen administrative burden for the university.

• Research basket, a performance based salary component for academic staff is a good instrument to motivate and strengthen the research activities in the University.

• External evaluation of staff's project applications to the Development Fund is a good tool to increase the legitimacy of the application process and to enhance the quality of future applications.

3.2. Quality Assurance

Quality Assurance area is analysed in accordance with the following indicators:

> *2.1. Implementation and effectiveness of the internal quality assurance system:*

67. The quality assurance system relies on the internal documents, such as 'Development of the concept and implementation of the quality management system at EHU' and 'Quality Assurance Manual'. A thorough review of the quality assurance system takes place every three years, the most recent one, in 2021- 2023. As result of this, a revised EHU 'Quality Assurance Policy' was adopted by the Senate and approved by the Rector's Order in May 2023.

68. According to SER, the QA system "covers all stages of the University's academic process: planning, implementation, usage, evaluation and quality improvement". However, the Panel finds that this is fully not so. Most importantly - the effective QA system covers only the study process (except the internship) whereas research policy (structure, processes and performance indicators), administration and the 3rd mission are left out. This is reflected also in the institutional structure of the QA - instead of having a separate QA department there is a quality coordinator allocated in the Academic support centre, which deals with study matters.

69. Interviews revealed that quality monitoring is understood to be a shared responsibility of all units and staff members. The Panel admits that this option may be adequate for a small institution and is in line with the EHU's principles of flat management and non-formalised communication. Yet, the University must constantly observe that quality issues are receiving due attention and there is a common understanding of what the internal QA entails. Interviews demonstrated remarkable confusion in the latter issues (for example - equalling QA to the monitoring of KPIs; not making distinction between external and internal QA). The QA Policy document states 'quality culture' as a foundation of the QA system, but based on interviews, employees are not familiar with the concept and couldn't react to it in any consistent way; similarly, the link between University's strategy and QA was not fully comprehended.

70. In internal QA, the University relies overwhelmingly on feedback surveys. Student evaluation of teaching (SET) surveys are conducted twice a year by the Academic Support Centre. Additionally, a survey on students' satisfaction with the university is conducted annually. There is also an annual staff satisfaction survey. However, there is a lack of detailed analysis of data from these surveys that would lead to consistent conclusions and implementation. SER does not include feedback results of the last 5 years.

71. The process of internal quality monitoring and periodic assessment is in place. Academic departments present to the Senate annual evaluation reports on quality of study programs that include student feedback survey results and analyse strengths and weaknesses of study programs. Performance in studies is addressed also at meetings between academic staff and the heads of departments, and regularly monitored in the study programme committees, which also include external stakeholders and students.

72. Results of the SET surveyed are discussed with individual teachers and head of department, and measures to improve the performance are envisaged in the six months' time frame. In critical cases, when the feedback results have not improved in two years, the work contract with the teacher will be terminated. The Panel was informed about a couple of such cases.

73. Analysis of documents (SER, survey instruments) disclosed several concerns regarding the reliability of survey results. First, the response rate for student surveys is very low (16-17% in three last academic years). Although the University has acknowledged the problem and discussed it in the Senate, the measures taken so far (shortening the questionnaire, providing small gifts, etc) have not been efficient. Second, the response rate of staff surveys is high (70%), but employees have no information about the impact of the surveys. During interviews some other concerns were voiced by the staff and students. SET surveys are performed before the exam, which makes students feel uncomfortable filling the questionnaire; despite the use of international survey software, some respondents feel that their anonymity might not always be possible to maintain. Thus, while acknowledging EHU's policy of collecting feedback via surveys, the Panel strongly urges to put more efforts on increasing the quality of survey instruments, designing other mechanisms for feedback collection (e.g., student representatives conveying the results of focus group discussions organised by students themselves), and on securing the proper data protection.

74. Students receive a broad range of support, such as counselling, scholarships, psychological services, leisure facilities, practical aspects of student life like dormitories and visas, etc. Support is provided by the Academic Support Centre and the Student Service; also, each study program has a mentor/support person.

75. The University has signed a contract with a private medical clinic (Fama Bona) to provide free medical care for the students, most of whom are non-EU citizens. The Panel was pleased to learn that there is a psychologist available for students to help coping with mental issues that are especially urgent due to the war in Ukraine and worsening political situation in Belarus. The University may consider extending psychological counselling also to the academic staff.

76. Students with special needs are noticed and supported in their studies, including by a personal support person. As a positive initiative, the Panel learned that EHU is using their social networks to advertise EHU for Belarussian parents with disabled children who encounter difficulties in being accepted into HEIs in Belarus due to their disabilities.

77. In the interviews, students showed satisfaction with the support they get in their studies and practical life issues. However, there is one area of major concern that reflects inefficiency of student support. That is the worryingly high student dropout rate (Bachelor - 32% in average; Master - 29% in average) (SER). The Panel received different suggestions concerning the reason (too high tuition fees, misuse of EHU/studies to migrate into EU, wrong career choice, difficulties in crossing the BEL-LTU border) which suggests that in-depth analysis and evidence-based measures are not yet there. Although the dropout rate varies substantially across the study programs (from 9% in Visual Design (Bachelor, High residence) to 67% in Law (Bachelor, Low residence), there is no analysis of dropout reasons by the study programs.

78. Staff members are provided with IT equipment for communication and pedagogical work, regular training and personal consultations are held regarding the use of IT tools and software. The Employee compass (2023), a unified manual that introduces all EHU's areas of operation in user

friendly language, certainly helps staff members to understand ongoing processes and increases their feeling of belonging.

79. The University has established provisions and procedures for academic integrity and ethics. These include The Code of Ethics (2021), Equal Opportunities and Gender Equality Policy and its Action Plan (2021). Implementation of academic ethics is overseen by the Academic Ethics Commission, which also includes student and teachers' representatives. A document provided to the Panel shows that in 2019-2023, the Committee handled 13 cases of academic fraud, dishonesty and plagiarism, in four cases the issue was beyond the competence of the Committee and therefore not considered. This limited statistic suggests that EHU may consider expansion of the competences of the Ethics Committee or, establishing a new body that will handle cases of harassment and discrimination.

80. Various meetings demonstrated that there are concerns among both staff and students about discriminatory and harassing behaviour in EHU and the situation is only vaguely regulated. During interviews it was reflected that there were controversial cases related to harassment, however those cases were not presented and analysed in the SER.

81. Students are generally aware of the possibility to appeal to the Student Union, which mediates the issue to the Administration. It was mentioned during the meeting that while students can submit complaints to teachers, teachers do not have the mechanism to protect their rights. Interviews also demonstrated that the understanding and awareness about the discrimination varies highly among the staff - some are not seeing any problems at all ("we are not going to make more regulations in order to get more complaints") whereas some admit real existence of discrimination. The Panel endorses attention that EHU is paying to the issues of discrimination (inclusion of the entire set of relevant items in staff satisfaction survey), but far more focus on analysis of data and actions, based on those data, are needed. Also, the university should both work on building a positive atmosphere within and between the different groups and facilitate integration of the EHU staff and students into Lithuanian culture and society.

82. The results of the external review are thoroughly analysed to improve the performance of the higher education institution as evidenced in the SER. In overall, progress is more visible in some areas than in others. As per recommendation of institutional review 2017, EHU has introduced measurable performance indicators and is making steps in linking them explicitly to the strategic objectives. Compared to previous evaluation, students are today more actively engaged University's governance, in study programs development and quality improvement through their representation in study programme committees, and Senate. Interviews allow the Panel to conclude that more comprehensive analysis precedes actions and reform plans as suggested.

83. The previous external evaluation was carried out according to the different methodology, where QA was not separately evaluated. Therefore, it is not possible to evaluate the implementation of recommendations. However, the Panel finds that limiting the effective QA system to the study area only, is not sufficient.

84. **In summary**, the University is at the point of transition to the next stage in developing its comprehensive QA system. There are some ingredients of QA in place that work effectively. A detailed set of instruments in QA has been composed for the study dimension (coordinated by the Quality coordinator and Academic Support Centre). However, an overall QA framework that encompasses all aspects of quality is missing. Moreover, the QA system needs further

institutionalisation, formalisation and systematisation. QA is currently mainly understood as a compliance of documents to legal regulation and formal requirements whereas the internal conceptualisation of 'quality culture', mentioned in many strategic documents is still to be executed.

85. **Judgment:** the area quality assurance meets the minimum requirements, but there are substantial shortcomings that must be addressed and is given 2 points.

86. **Recommendations for the area:**

• Develop a comprehensive QA framework that covers all areas of EHU activities - management, governance, administration, studies, research, and the3rd mission.

• Regularly review the effectiveness of the QA system with a view to enlarging tools and formal reports.

• Increase the capacity of data analysis and usage, including cross-referencing of data and information.

• Carry out in-depth analyses in areas of major concerns, such as high drop-out rates.

• Develop a system of internal and external benchmarking of key success metrics.

• Ensure better linkage between QA outcomes and strategic planning.

• Review the system of academic ethics, discrimination, and gender equality to ensure it effectively addresses occurring cases; raise the awareness of the EHU community on discrimination issues and equal treatment.

• Develop an action plan for implementation of the institutional 'quality culture'.

• Improve (internal) communication of QA outcomes and actions taken.

• Explore possibilities to further involve social partners in key QA processes.

3.3. Studies and Research (Art)

Studies and Research (Art) area is analysed in accordance with the following indicators:

> *3.1. Compatibility of studies and research (art) and its compliance with the strategic aims of activities*

87. Strategic documents describe EHU as an international student-centred university attracting civically-minded students from Belarus and the region, and distinguished by commitment to European values and Liberal Arts. During the interviews, participants in different panels appreciated soft skills and liberal attitudes that they have gained in EHU. Interpretation of student-centeredness was varying - some interviewees mentioned that students can have a say in teaching methods and topics, some found that study courses gave them the courage to ask questions and think independently. So, although there is no systemic understanding among the EHU community of what the 'student centred university' entails (as pointed out in par. 24 current Report), different positive practices do exist.

88. Similar confusion was evident about the concept of 'Liberal Arts' (LA), where interview participants linked the LA principle to having obligatory and optional courses or struggled providing any answer at all. Graduates interpreted the LA approach as the ability to adjust to the

new requirements at the labour market. The leadership of the University (Rector, Governing Board) strongly adhere to LA and see it as one of the unique strengths of the EHU.

89. In research, the University received a negative score in the previous evaluation and since then, several positive developments have taken place. Research production is much more emphasised and measured; support systems, including the new system of staff workload and financial incentives are established and the fundamental principles of conducting research (artistic) activities at the University are defined by the Regulations on Organization and Procedures of Research (Artistic) Activities (2021). These initiatives have resulted in an increase of targeted research funding four times in 2023 compared to 2018 (362,000 EUR to 93,000 EUR); the amount and quality of artworks and scientific publications has increased (although not so steadily in social sciences) (SER). The Panel endorses these achievements that confirm compatibility of studies and research at the EHU, and encourages the University to extend this ambition also to the field of Informatics. The first Bachelor program in Informatics was launched in Fall 2022 and it has nearly 300 students now. Scientific production in Informatics and Informatics engineering, at the same time, is almost non-existing (SER does not present any figures at all, Full List of research (art) activities includes two Web-of-Science items in Informatics). This scientific direction needs utmost attention in order to keep the quality of studies at an adequate level.

90. Information received from various interview panels revealed that researchers enjoy large individual freedom in choosing their topics. Research output is primarily based on individual activities (conference presentations, publications). The Panel appreciates individual academic freedom and at the same time, encourages the University to take a more ambitious and team-based approach in thinking strategically, what are the main topics/directions of research that align with the mission of the EHU and how to strengthen them. According to SER, "main interests of research (artistic) activities are focused on the problems of scientific research in Belarus and the region", but this statement is not supported by concrete research themes and/or research groups that advance particular studies. In interviews, neither the management nor the academic staff could point to any problems in academic freedom, although the EHU emphasises the need for strategic direction of research.

91. The Panel saw various efforts by the EHU in defining the target groups in Belarus and in matching study programs and research to real needs of Belarusian society. Political situation complicates these efforts, since official information is hard to get and EHU relies on their networks and informal contacts. In addition to that, EHU's dependence on donors' funding affects the thinking on study programs where decisions are often guided by the market popularity of the study programs instead of long term perspectives of development of Belarus. For example, the most popular study programs are Visual Design (Bachelor), and Media and Communication (Bachelor), but the Panel did not receive convincing evidence how these programs contribute to the democratisation of Belarus and the region.

92. SER states that "The University grounds its academic activities on the principle of the unity between studies and research (art) activity". In order to implement this principle, in the hiring process a comprehensive check of the research profile of teachers is carried out to make sure the compatibility of applicants to the study program content. Overall, documents indicate that premises for integrating research and studies are introduced, but due to low level of research in the University and very recent introduction of described measures it is too early to assess the efficiency of these changes.

93. The cooperation with external partners has previously been "very much ad hoc", as noted by the interviewees. Recent years have brought efforts to evaluate the added value of existing and potential partners for EHU's development. For studies, data on Erasmus mobility are considered, for research projects, the Project Office is running a preliminary screening of the partners. In perspective, EHU is willing to undertake only those projects that are in line with the strategy of the EHU. The Panel commends this objective.

94. EHU enrols students into 12 programs in 8 study fields. In the five-year period, enrolment has increased almost in all study programs, except two Bachelor programs. The programs with decreasing number of students have been analysed and relevant decisions taken. Law programs have been revised and the number of students enrolled on a new Bachelor program exceeds the enrolment of former programs. High residency Bachelor programs and Master programs are growing faster than low residency programs (SER). In the academic year 2022/23 almost all students are studying full time, which is a radical change compared to previous academic years (information about EHU provided by SKVC). All this allows concluding that EHU has managed to mitigate one of the serious former risks - that of low number of students.

95. In the case of EHU, it is not possible to comparatively analyse admission scores, because the University does not use the Lithuanian national admission system LAMA BPO. According to SER, average grades provided in the certificates and other previous education documents of the applicants have been high. Starting from 2021, EHU has set the rule that candidates with an average grade lower than 7 for bachelor studies and lower than 8 for master studies are not admitted.

96. Graduation rates have improved by 20% points since 2018, reaching 60% at average in 2022. Only one BA program shows steady decline. (SER) Based on these data, the Panel is not concerned about graduation rates. The dropout is a much bigger problem

97. Almost 99% of EHU students have obtained their previous education outside Lithuania and need to prove their eligibility for university studies. Therefore, a clear system of recognising foreign qualifications is necessary. As evidenced in SER, EHU has such a system in place. From 2021 the University obtained a permission to conduct the candidates' academic qualification recognition procedure at the university instead of SKVC which, according to the University's assessment, has positively affected the admission competition (i.e. they can process the documents faster and receive more applications).

98. EHU already has, and is updating regulations for the recognition of competences acquired through non-formal, informal, and self-directed learning.

99. Graduates survey is regarded by the EHU as an important tool to get feedback on the quality of studies. However, the regularity of surveys and the response rates, which are crucial to estimate the reliability of responses, are calling for closer attention. Interviews confirmed the doubt that surveys are carried out randomly rather than with proper attention to the methodology. As seen from SER survey participants were very positive about their studies and skills obtained in the EHU, but overwhelmingly positive results should always be treated with caution.

100. Besides surveys, EHU uses various tools to keep contact with the alumni (Facebook group, Committee of alumni, mentorship program to guide current students, internship places; workshops). Here again, the Panel saw quite many scattered activities but no evidence on systemic

engagement of alumni in order to use their potential to strengthen implementation of University's strategic objectives.

101. Distance learning composes an important part of EHUs activities and development due to its uniqueness as a University in exile. This is important for students and staff who experience travel restrictions due to the political situation in and around Belarus. The Panel was pleased to see that the Procedure for digitalization of studies (2018) that secures the quality of online and blended courses is adopted. Low Residence studies are conducted in a blended mode, combining students' arrival at the university for classes and exam sessions and distance contact work. Moodle is used as a learning environment and also more widely, to disseminate various administrative information to the students and staff.

102. Individual study plans are possible and subject to a particular EHU regulation. Students with disabilities are taken care of, including the individual study plan option, personal support and adjustments in the learning environment.

3.2. Internationality of studies, research (art)

103. In time of external evaluation, EHU did not yet have a strategy for internationalisation of research (art) and study activities. However, the process is launched and the University has compiled an internationalisation strategy Guidelines which will be expanded into a full EHU-International Strategy document in May 2024. This process is subordinated to the holistic strategic review process. Guidelines include studies, research (arts) and the 3rd mission, and describe main directions and partners of international cooperation. No indicators to measure performance are set in the Guidelines. SER lists seven quantitative indicators to measure internationality of the University. This statistic is a useful starting point, but should be complemented by indicators on quality and added value of activities. The Panel encourages University to elaborate on them.

104. Since the University's internationalisation strategy is in the making, analysis of the current situation remains in the SER rather superficial ("The majority of the study programs have their aspect of internationalisation" (SER). The internationalisation Guidelines provide information about the future plans, which the Panel finds well aligned with the EHU's mission, current potential and needs, and endorses the University to allocate necessary human and financial resources to its realisation.

105. As evidenced by SER, international engagement of EHU in the international academic organisations and networks has substantially extended and intensified since 2020. One of the main partners is Open Society University Network (OSUN), which provides multiple opportunities for students to participate in virtual and physical courses; in 2020-2022 EHU participated in more than 20 OSUN events (SER). In 2020, EHU became a full member of Erasmus Student Network that further widens the mobility options.

106. Engagement of EHU in international research programs, such as EU Horizon remains at very minimal level (1 project per year) and has not improved since 2018. The University has been more successful in receiving funding for social/educational projects (SER). Taking the profile of grants, their added value has been mainly in advancing the 3rd mission of the University and disseminating democratic values among project participants and students more widely.

107. According to SER, the majority of the EHU study programs are prepared and / or implemented with national (Lithuanian), regional (Belarusian) and foreign (European, American or Russian) academic institutions, higher education institutions or other social and economic partners. Other forms of cooperation include organising international conferences at the EHU, inviting foreign researchers to the editorial boards of EHU journals and co-producing research publications. There is a visible positive trend in cooperative activities - the share of foreign editorial board members reaches 31-53% in three journals published by the EHU. The number of publications co-authored with foreign researchers has also increased but composes still only 11% of total (SER).

108. The mobility, including the selection of candidates and implementation of studies, is explained in relevant EHU regulations. All students are eligible to apply, the selection criteria are clear and fair. Students in need can apply for additional scholarship in case of going to Erasmus+ mobility. Based on site interviews, the Panel was convinced that students are well aware of the mobility options and regulations.

109. All credits collected by the EHU students at the host institution are counted and recognized towards their degree automatically after receiving confirmation from the academic program curator. Students' mobility for traineeship as well as the results achieved are reflected in the Diploma Supplement. Despite clear and well established formal procedures, the data show higher dropout for students who went to mobility. Therefore, the Panel suggests analysing more closely whether existing regulations adequately address reality, and whether some additional counselling or individualisation of study plans is required.

110. The university has more than 70 inter-institutional Erasmus+ program partners and 10 cooperation agreements with universities (SER) which shows plenty of opportunities for student mobility. Though, the effective numbers of outgoing mobility remain at a low level of 4-6% of the total student body. The University admits that the mobility differs substantially across the study programs but does not provide a deeper analysis in this respect, except noting that "low residence students may encounter extra obstacles when engaging in exchange programs, such as lacking a residency permit in Lithuania or living outside the country". (SER)

111. Incoming mobility accounts for about 25 students annually and has remained rather stable in the last five years (except the negative impact of COVID). Incoming mobility seems to be impacted by the language of tuition at a particular study program. Programs in Russian attract students from former CIS countries where Russian is widely spoken, whereas programs in English receive exchange students from Western Europe. This unique position between the West and East gives EHU promising opportunities to attract substantially more international students and to implement its mission as a hub of democratic values and interventions. However, making use of this opportunity needs deeper strategic analysis and action planning than the Panel could currently observe. As an interesting fact - the data in SER indicate that the most popular study programs differ completely for incoming and outgoing students.

112. The University has a variety of non-governmental organisations (NGO) both abroad and in Belarus, However, the Panel's meetings and provided documents did not demonstrate that the communication between the NGOs and EHU is strategic, i.e. associated with study program development and research capacity building. The Panel encourages the University to analyse potential of their non-academic partners in applying for international /EU RDI grants.

113. The Panel did not find substantial evidence, in what way knowledge and experiences from academic mobility are immersed into teaching, research or administrative activities.

114. **In summary**, studies and research conducted at EHU are compatible with the University's mission and strategy. The University has put efforts to increase attractiveness of studies and to establish a regulatory framework for research. Although strategic and regulatory documents demonstrate adherence to the key principles of studies such as 'student centeredness' and 'Liberal Arts', the EHU community does not have a shared understanding of what these principles entail in practice. In research, progress is visible in measuring individual research output. Linking of individual research activities to the development objectives of the University is not seen as an urgency, and therefore cooperative research activities (such as teams' building, grant applications, strategic partnership with non-academic organisations, inclusion of alumni in developing RDI policy) are not systematically carried out or planned. The level of international mobility and working partnerships is somewhat more challenging for the EHU due its position as the 'university in exile', but this cannot excuse lack of strategic analysis on mobility and partnerships.

115. **Judgement**: the area (Studies and Research) meets the minimum requirements, but there are substantial shortcomings that must be addressed and is given 2 points.

116. **Recommendations for the area:**

• Develop an approach for student-centred pedagogy and build capacity for its implementation.

• Ensure a shared understanding of the concept 'Liberal Arts' and its systematic implementation in teaching practices.

• Develop an appropriate strategy to research activities considering the plans to update the mission of the EHU and its internal needs to grow.

• Continue increasing focus on research activities and outputs; raise research ambitions.

• Establish criteria to assess how internships meet respective learning outcomes of study programs.

• Extend and intensify international collaboration and project participation; Introduce practices that support the increase of the number of research groups, including those with researchers from foreign countries and with international funding.

• Increase financial and methodological support for research grant writing.

• Involve social partners more actively in research grant applications and implementation.

• Ensure that the social partners' contribution to the development of education, research and the third mission is supported by effective collection and usage of their feedback.

• Analyse in-depth academic mobility data and trends, and assess the added value of these activities.

IV. EXAMPLES OF GOOD PRACTICE

The Panel identifies the following examples of good practice in:

Management:

1. The Trust Fund as an institutional tool for budget administration is working very well, it helps to keep management of finances transparent, to consolidate donations, and to lessen administrative burden for the university.

2. Research basket, a performance based salary component for academic staff is a good instrument to motivate and strengthen the research activities in the University.

3. External evaluation of staff's project applications to the Development Fund is a good tool to increase the legitimacy of the application process and to enhance the quality of future applications.

V. RECOMMENDATIONS FOR ENHANCEMENT

The Panel's recommendations for further enhancement are:

Management:

1. Review and revise the mission statement with a view to clarifying identity and ensuring it accurately sets out the unique characteristics and ambitions of EHU and thus, can be used as an effective strategic guide.

2. Review the system of KPIs to distinguish institutional KPIs and project / activity milestones, and personal performance targets.

3. Revise institutional KPIs to clearly link them to envisaged impact and strategic objectives over the entire strategy cycle.

4. Ensure a direct link between performance assessment outcomes and the professional development support.

5. Strengthen the role of the Senate in academic decision making as it is prescribed by law of Lithuania, and to change Statute accordingly

6. Continue increasing application of fundamental values such as democratic governance, transparency, responsiveness and non-discrimination.

7. Continue diversification of funds to ensure long-term financial sustainability and ability of EHU to continue its activities.

8. Ensure sufficient infrastructural capacity for growth.

Quality Assurance:

1. Develop a comprehensive QA framework that covers all areas of EHU activities - management, governance, administration, studies, research, and the3rd mission.

2. Regularly review the effectiveness of the QA system with a view to enlarging tools and formal reports.

3. Increase the capacity of data analysis and usage, including cross-referencing of data and information.

4. Carry out in-depth analyses in areas of major concerns, such as high drop-out rates.

5. Develop a system of internal and external benchmarking of key success metrics.

6. Ensure better linkage between QA outcomes and strategic planning.

7. Review the system of academic ethics, discrimination, and gender equality to ensure it effectively addresses occurring cases; raise the awareness of the EHU community on discrimination issues and equal treatment.

8. Develop an action plan for implementation of the institutional 'quality culture'.

9. Improve (internal) communication of QA outcomes and actions taken.

10. Explore possibilities to further involve social partners in key QA processes.

Studies and Research (art):

1. Develop an approach for student-centred pedagogy and build capacity for its implementation.

2. Ensure a shared understanding of the concept 'Liberal Arts' and its systematic implementation in teaching practices.

3. Develop an appropriate strategy to research activities considering the plans to update the mission of the EHU and its internal needs to grow.

4. Continue increasing focus on research activities and outputs; raise research ambitions.

5. Establish criteria to assess how internships meet respective learning outcomes of study programs.

6. Extend and intensify international collaboration and project participation; Introduce practices that support the increase of the number of research groups, including those with researchers from foreign countries and with international funding.

7. Increase financial and methodological support for research grant writing.

8. Involve social partners more actively in research grant applications and implementation.

9. Ensure that the social partners' contribution to the development of education, research and the third mission is supported by effective collection and usage of their feedback.

10. Analyse in-depth academic mobility data and trends, and assess the added value of these activities.