



***BALSTOGĖS UNIVERSITETO FILIALO
EKONOMIKOS-INFORMATIKOS FAKULTETO
VEIKLOS VERTINIMO IŠVADOS***

***INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW REPORT OF
BRANCH OF THE UNIVERSITY OF BIALYSTOK IN
VILNIUS
FACULTY OF ECONOMICS AND COMPUTER SCIENCE***

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I hereby certify that this is the final text of the institutional review report of Branch of the University of Bialystok in Vilnius



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, following the Experts 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)

Dr. Anita Līce (Review secretary);

Prof. Dr. Peeter Normak (academic);

Prof. Dr. Habil. Piotr Grudowski (academic)'

Mr. Tomas Urbonas (social partner);

Ms. Jessica Ziegler (student).

An observer appointed by the Polish Accreditation Committee (PKA) dr hab. inż. Janusz Uriasz, Chairman of the Section for Engineering and Technical Sciences and a member of the PKA Presidium, has participated in some of the meetings during the site visit as observer.

4. As a result of external review, the Branch of the University of Bialystok in Vilnius, Faculty of Economics and Computer Science is given a negative evaluation.
5. Evaluation areas:

| Area | Assessment with points* |
|---|-------------------------|
| MANAGEMENT | 2 |
| QUALITY ASSURANCE | 2 |
| STUDIES AND RESEARCH (ART) | 1 |
| IMPACT ON REGIONAL AND NATIONAL DEVELOPMENT | 3 |

*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 drawbacks;

3 points – **good** – the area is being developed systematically, without any major drawbacks;

2 points – **satisfactory** – the area meets the minimum requirements, and there are drawbacks that must be addressed;

1 point - **unsatisfactory** – the area does not meet the minimum requirements, there are fundamental drawbacks.

6. **4** examples of good practices were found; **34** recommendations are made.

II. INTRODUCTION

2.1. Background of the review process

7. The external review of Branch of the University of Bialystok in Vilnius, Faculty of Economics and Computer Science (hereafter referred to as ‘Branch’ or ‘Faculty’) was organised by the Centre for Quality Assessment in Higher Education and carried out in 2023 by an Expert Panel of international experts (hereinafter – the Panel). It was conducted in accordance with the Procedure for the External Evaluation and Accreditation of Higher Education Institutions and Branches of Foreign Higher Education Institutions, Evaluation Areas and Indicators approved by the Minister of Education, Science and Sport of the Republic of Lithuania (hereinafter – the Procedure) on 19 of December 2019 [Order No. V-1529](#) and the Methodology for Conducting an Institutional Review in Higher Education approved by the Director of SKVC on 9 of March 2020 [Order No V-32](#) (hereinafter – the Methodology).
8. According to the Procedure, 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. At the preparatory stage of the external review, the Panel received a Self-Evaluation Report (hereinafter – SER) with 14 annexes which was comprehensive and informative. SKVC provided to the Panel additional information about the Branch, as set in the Methodology (Chapter 26), 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 the Council membership, templates for the assessment surveys, study regulations, minutes of the last meetings of the Educational Quality Assurance Team, financial data, participation in courses by staff members, evidence of stakeholder participation and access to the online information system.
10. The site visit was undertaken after a training session organised by SKVC staff and preparatory Panel meetings. The Panel visited the Branch on 7-9 November 2023 where it had meetings with a wide variety of internal and external stakeholders. A total of 76 participants participated in the meetings, 9 of them online. Some of the Branch representatives attended several meetings. The Panel would like to express its gratitude for the openness and engagement of all interview partners at the Branch and the University of Bialystok. Subsequently, the Panel met to review and agree conclusions and recommendations. The review report was finalised by correspondence and submitted to the SKVC.
11. In line with the Procedure the external review focused on four areas covered by the evaluation indicators and related criteria: **Management, Quality Assurance, Studies and Research (Art)** and **Impact on Regional and National Development**. In analysing the evidence collected, the Panel also gave due consideration to the recommendations of the previous review of 2014.
12. 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 in the national context and internationally; **very good** – 4 points – the area is rated very well in the national context and

internationally, without any drawbacks; **good** – 3 points – the area is being developed systematically, without any major drawbacks; **satisfactory** – 2 points – the area meets the minimum requirements, and there are drawbacks that must be addressed; **unsatisfactory** – 1 point – the area does not meet the minimum requirements, there are fundamental drawbacks.

13. The decision on **positive** evaluation is made when none of the evaluation areas is evaluated unsatisfactorily (1 point). The decision on **negative** evaluation is made when at least one of the evaluation areas is evaluated unsatisfactory (1 point).
14. 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.
15. The Panel did not receive any feedback on factual errors in the report. However, the Panel received the Branch's stance concerning the evaluation methodology and the explanation of how education at the Branch is related to research. A request was made to review the assessment of Area 3.3 - Studies and Research. No modifications were made to the report by the Panel, as altering the evaluation methodology is not within the Panel's mandate.
16. 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 Centre.

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.

17. 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.
18. 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 respectively 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

19. The University of Białystok (pol. *Uniwersytet w Białymstoku*, hereinafter - UwB) was established on October 1, 1997 as a result of the transformation of the Białystok branch of the University of Warsaw, which had been in operation since 1968. The UwB is made up of 9 faculties, 5 institutes, 4 interdepartmental units and the Vilnius Branch Faculty of Economics and Computer Science.
20. The UwB Vilnius Faculty was established by the decisions of the Ministry of Higher Education of the Republic of Poland, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Poland in 2006 and the Government of the Republic of Lithuania and the Ministry of Education and Science of Lithuania in 2007 with the primary aim to raise the number of people with higher education among the Polish minority in Lithuania and thus increase the professional and social potential of this minority.
21. The Branch's mission is: 'Committed to the Polish community in Lithuania by disseminating knowledge in Polish, and the creation of a platform for the exchange of ideas'. Thus, the primary goal of the Branch is to enable high school graduates who know Polish to continue their studies in that language at tertiary level.
22. The Branch has established two departments: Department of Economics and European Studies and Department of Computer Science. It offers three first-cycle study programmes (Economics, European Studies, Computer Science, all 3 years long), one second-cycle study programme (Economics, 2 years long), and a unified master's degree programme in Pre-school and early childhood pedagogy (5 years long, launched on 1 October 2023).
23. The Department of Economics and European Studies and the Department of Computer Science, employing 13 academic teachers, including 3 research and teaching staff and 10 teaching staff.
24. As of 30th September 2023, 240 students were studying at the Branch, and during its fifteen years of operation, the Branch has prepared 862 graduates, including 88 with a master's degree. Over the past five years, the number of students has remained stable but significantly lower than at the time of the previous institutional review, which was around 900.
25. The Branch currently provides studies in rented premises at 135 Kalvarijų Street and also makes use of the premises of the Polish Cultural House at 76 Naugarduko Street in Vilnius. The new branch office at Aguonų Street 22 Vilnius is scheduled for completion in the 2023/2024 academic year.
26. As of October 1, 2019, due to changes in the structure of the UwB, the UwB Faculty was transformed into the Branch of the UwB. The Dean of the Vilnius Faculty became the director of the Branch of the UwB Faculty. At the same time, the institution became a unit of UwB focused primarily on teaching. As of 2018/2019 academic year, all of the majors have been converted into practical profile studies. In 2023, the Senate took a decision to upgrade the status of the Branch equal to the one of a faculty, and as of October 1, 2023, the director became the Dean of the Branch, and vice-director became the Vice-Dean of the Branch. Nevertheless, the profile of the 'teaching-only' institution in the overall structure of the UwB remained.

27. The Branch issues diplomas from the University of Białystok. Thus, it is the only higher education institution in Lithuania that does not issue a Lithuanian diploma, but - in this case - a Polish one.

III. ANALYSIS BY EVALUATION AREAS

3.1. Management

Management area is analysed in accordance with the following indicators and criteria, set up in the Methodology.

1.1. Compliance of the higher education institution's strategic action plan with the mission, assurance of its implementation:

1.1.1. The strategic action plan is consistent with the mission of the higher education institution, legal acts regulating research and study activities and it takes into account the provisions of the national research and study policy, the European Higher Education Area and the European Research Area;

1.1.2. The parts of the strategic action plan (analysis of the current situation, priorities and aims, objectives of the activities, implementation means, resources, planned performance indicators) are appropriate and justified;

1.1.3. Regular monitoring of the implementation of the strategic action plan is carried out and the results are used to improve performance management.

Strategic action plan, aims, objectives, implementation means and performance indicators

28. Since 2015, the Branch implemented the Development Strategy of the Faculty of Economics and Informatics in Vilnius for 2015 – 2024 years which was elaborated on the basis of the Development Strategy of the University of Białystok for 2014 – 2024 and previous reviews.

29. Due to the changes in the structure of the UwB, resulting from changes in the rules of evaluation of scholarly activity of universities operation in the Polish higher education system, as of the 2019/2020 academic year the research activity at the UwB has been concentrated in units corresponding to individual scientific disciplines. As of January 2019, academic staff employed at the Branch below the rank of professor were transferred to teaching positions, while the research activities of higher-level staff were counted as output of the relevant disciplines and faculties and departments at the UwB. As a result of these changes, the strategic objective 'Strengthening of the Faculty's significance and scientific position' has moved to the background, and the fundamental profile of the Branch's activities changed from a research and teaching unit to one focusing on teaching and cooperation with its socio-economic environment (hereinafter – Structural reform).

30. This was only formalised in June 2023, when a new strategy for 2023 – 2030 was adopted. According to the new strategy, the mission of the Branch is "Committed to the Polish community in Lithuania by disseminating knowledge in Polish and creating a platform for the exchange of views", and the specific objectives of the Branch are:

Positive impact on the higher education rates of the Polish minority in Lithuania.

Enabling staff to carry out research as part of their professional development and supporting the teaching process.

Strengthening the system of Western European values among the Polish minority in Lithuania.

Learning about, cultivating, and enriching the cultural heritage of the region.

31. The Panel concluded that the mission statement of the Branch should reflect the desire to constantly improve the educational services of a small higher education unit and develop its activities through research initiatives, increasing the level of internationalisation and commitment to the development of mutually beneficial relations between Poland and Lithuania. The branch's mission should be publicly available, included in its promotional materials and, above all, on its website.
32. The Strategy for 2023-2030 includes a comprehensive SWOT analysis, 3 strategic objectives, 15 operational objectives, and 43 sub-objectives. The elaborated SWOT analysis identified the main strengths as the launch of a Master's degree in Economics in 2014, a Bachelor's degree in European Studies in 2015, a Master's degree program in pre-school and early childhood pedagogy in 2023, flexibility in study programs, and strong cooperation with external partners, among others. The main weaknesses in the same SWOT analysis are identified as follows: an insufficient number of local lecturers, a lack of teaching facilities, no provision of further training courses, inadequate English language skills among academic and administrative staff, insufficient staff research activity and the absence of scientific achievements, a high level of bureaucracy imposed by Polish and Lithuanian authorities, and communication barriers between Branch staff and the UwB central administration, among others.
33. Considering the correspondence of the strategy to the principles of the European Higher Education Area and the European Research Area, the Panel would like to highlight two aspects. First, the principal notion of research-based higher education has been partially lost due to the higher education reform in Poland in 2018 and the Structural reform of the UwB. Secondly, the present strategy also lacks convincing references to the principle of continuous improvement and developing a quality culture as recommended in the Standards and Guidelines for quality assurance of higher education in the European Higher Education Area.

Monitoring of the implementation of the strategic action plan

34. Continuous monitoring of the strategy implementation is within the remit of Branch Dean and the Deputy Dean. The information on the implementation of each sub-goal of the Strategy for 2015-2024 was collected by the individuals and teams identified in the strategic charters as responsible for the respective goal. The results of the monitoring were reflected in annual reports from the Dean/Director and Education Quality Team. However, no synthesised document was prepared on a cyclical basis. The analysis of the implementation of the Development Strategy from 2020/2021 – 2022/2023 provided to the Panel by the Branch included only a selection of some activities and their nominal evaluation with '+' or '-'.
35. The Panel observed, from the documentation and verified during the interviews, that the lack of quantitative monitoring of the strategy implementation still persists, despite recommendations from the institutional evaluation Panel in 2014. Branch's strategy does not contain clear quantitative base or target values, neither yearly nor for the entire strategy cycle. The Branch management also did not informally establish targets. Therefore, the Branch has not been able to

establish a common understanding what constitutes “a success” relating to all key aspects of its activities - i.e. teaching, research and impact on society. The strategy also does not provide information about the implementation means; resources needed to reach strategic objectives.

36. Some progress in this area has been achieved by establishing a Strategy Monitoring and Implementation Team for the Branch in July 2023, tasked with improving the rules for the organisation and operation of the strategy monitoring system, as well as their implementation. It is planned that the Team will prepare annual reports on the implementation of the strategy, but their work has not commenced yet. The Panel suggests that the work of this Team should also encompass follow-up and improvement actions, as well as measuring their effectiveness, based on the systematic analysis of the Branch's performance data.

1.2. Effectiveness of process management of the higher education institution:

1.2.1. A clear structure for governance, decision making and distribution of responsibilities is defined;

1.2.2. Regular process management analysis is performed, preconditions for process improvement and risk management are planned;

1.2.3. Stakeholders are involved in the management process at an adequate level.

Governance structure and decision-making

37. The Branch is a small unit as it employs only 13 academic teachers on a permanent basis, 4 of whom work part-time, and 10 administrative staff, 1 of whom is employed part-time.
38. According to the Statutes of the UwB, the direct supervisor of the Branch’s employees and students is the Branch Dean. Their tasks, powers and authority are defined by the Statute of the UwB and the powers granted by the Rector. The basic duties of the Branch Dean are established by the Organisational Regulations of the UwB and include ensuring the proper administrative, financial, economic and technical functioning of the Branch. The responsibilities of the deputy Dean are determined by the Dean and include decision-making in all student affairs and the Branch in consultation with the Dean and in cooperation with the administrative staff and the UwB authorities.
39. The collective decision-making and advisory body of the Dean, according to the UwB Statutes, is the Branch Council which consists of 5 members from among the UwB community, appointed by the rector. The chairman of the branch council is the branch Dean, who is part of the branch council. The tasks of the Council include approving the development strategy, making proposals to the Senate regarding university recruitment, approving draft programmes, evaluation of the Dean’s activities and considering the Dean’s annual report before submitting it to the rector.
40. The Consultative Council, composed of staff and representatives from the socio-economic community, serves as an advisory body to the Dean. It provides a forum for the exchange of thoughts, experiences, and opinions regarding its operations, including opportunities.
41. Responsibilities among staff and decision-making bodies seem to be well distributed, and they are efficient and flexible towards different situations primarily due to the small size of the Branch and well-established informal communication.

42. When it comes to the Branch's representation at the UwB level, the Panel learned that the Branch is involved in the Senate, albeit without voting rights. Considering the Branch's role and, especially, the recent decision of the Senate to upgrade the status of the Branch to that of a faculty, the Panel recommends strengthening the Branch's presence in UwB's governance.

Process management analysis and risk management

43. The monitoring of the Branch's structure and decision-making processes are within the remit of the Dean. Risk assessment of the Branch's activities is carried out on an ongoing basis by those responsible for the respective area of activity and the Branch's management. If an employee identifies a significant risk, the management is informed, decides on appropriate action, and, if necessary, develops a plan and a time-line for its implementation. The Strategy of the Branch 2023-2030 contains a comprehensive description of risks, risk assessment and risk responses.

44. The Panel found no evidence that the Branch used a process approach in accordance with a generally accepted framework. The need to introduce process management in the HEI management system results not only from point 1.2. "Effectiveness of process management of the higher education" in the area 1 "Management" of the SKVC institutional assessment criteria, but also it is one of the pillars of commonly known and used normative quality management systems (e.g. ISO 9001, ISO 21001). Process management framework as the process, in accordance with the requirements of these systems, usually consists of:

- i. identification of key processes (e.g. in the form of a graphical process map indicating their interconnections),
- ii. assigning appropriate people (process owners) to these processes responsible for their smooth operation and achieved results,
- iii. assigning human, financial, material, information, etc. resources necessary in these processes,
- iv. defining methods for supervising these processes, assessing the obtained process results and analysing them,
- v. ongoing supervision, including assessment of the effectiveness and efficiency of identified processes,
- vi. initiating and providing appropriate resources for continuous improvement of identified processes.

45. From the evidence collected, the Panel concluded that the Branch lacks effective implementation of process management.

Stakeholder involvement in the management process

46. The Branch has a democratically elected Student Council which represents students towards the Branch authorities and implements activities aimed at integrating the Branch's academic community. The Student Council delegates students to various teams operating in the Branch such as the Departmental Teaching Teams or the Education Quality Team. However, the Panel learnt the Student Council is primarily involved in organising social events, and their involvement in the formal decision making process is rather limited. Although they maintain good communication

with the Dean's office and regularly discuss student feedback, their representation is absent in the Branch's Council. The Panel emphasises that the principles of the European Higher Education Area require the inclusion of students in the decision-making process at higher education institutions.

47. The Panel commends the highly effective informal communication at all levels within the Branch, which is facilitated by the institution's small size. The importance of informal communication channels for exchanging information and addressing issues and concerns was emphasised multiple times by various groups during the interviews. Examples include students communicating with their teachers, the Student Governmental Council's interactions with the Dean's office, and teachers among themselves. Generally, the staff are accessible to students and the Branch decision making is fast and flexible.
48. External stakeholders are primarily consulted through the Consultative Council, in addition to ad-hoc meetings and formal and informal contacts. An employer representative was also involved in the Self-evaluation working group. The evidence of an updated learning offering, such as the launch of the Master's degree program in Pre-school and Early Childhood Pedagogy, suggests that the needs of external stakeholders are considered and addressed.

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

1.3.1. Systematic collection and analysis of the performance data, results (including student employment and graduate career monitoring) is in place, data is used for the improvement of performance of the higher education institution;

1.3.2. Information on the performance of the higher education institution is clear, accurate and accessible to the academic community and the public, and is provided regularly to the founders and members of the legal entity.

Systematic collection, analysis and use of the performance data

49. The main types of performance data collected and analysed systematically include student opinions on their studies, teaching facilities, and library resources. The analysis of these surveys informs periodic evaluations of employees, determines class staffing for the following year, and aids in the improvement of study programs. The Branch also conducts surveys of graduates and employers, although the response rate is low.
50. For instance, in a survey of graduates conducted in the 2022/2023 academic year, over 67% of respondents confirmed that the knowledge and skills acquired during their studies were beneficial in their current jobs. While the Branch collects opinions from employers offering internships to students, this is not done systematically, and the response rate is low. The Branch is committed to enhancing the process of collecting employer opinions and recommendations.
51. At the same time, the Branch lacks a formal way to collect feedback from both academic and administrative staff with a view to improve the management system and administration of the Branch.
52. It should be noted that the scientific activity of the Branch's employees is not assessed at the Branch. However, it is assessed by people managing relevant units in the UwB. At the Branch,

the teaching activities of individual academic teachers are assessed on the basis of student surveys and the results of observations conducted by experienced academic teachers.

53. The Panel noted the limited administrative capacity for data analysis and usage, cross-referencing data and information, evident from the limited data-based evidence for strategy monitoring system and quality assurance system, to support evidence-based decisions and ability to address challenges.

Information on the performance of the higher education institution

54. Results of student surveys are available to the academic staff, and their results are integrated into the evaluation processes and subsequent measures of the quality of classes.

55. The main instrument to inform the academic community about the performance of the Branch is the Dean's reports, which are published on the website in Polish. However, considering the lack of measurable performance indicators, the information provided could be considered rather general and input-based.

56. In addition, based on the publicly available information, the Panel notes the current challenge of limited content on the Branch's website. Regulations concerning academic activities lack accessibility for stakeholders, and there is an absence of English language versions. Moreover, information regarding the Branch's governance bodies, including the Branch Council, Consultative Council, and official committees, is insufficiently provided to the public. This situation impedes transparency, awareness, and effective communication with stakeholders about the Branch's academic processes and decision-making bodies.

1.4. Effectiveness of human resource management:

1.4.1. Clear and transparent principles and procedures for the formation, management, evaluation of academic and non-academic staff are established and applied;

1.4.2. The higher education institution has sufficient academic (in-house academic staff) and non-academic staff to meet its operational objectives;

1.4.3. The qualifications of the academic and non-academic staff are appropriate for the purposes of the higher education institution;

1.4.4. Conditions are created for the academic staff to improve the knowledge and skills required for teaching and research activities;

1.4.5. Conditions are created for non-academic staff to develop competencies.

Formation, management, evaluation of academic and non-academic staff

57. New employees of the Branch are hired by the Rector upon request by the Dean. The initial employment at more than 1/2 full time equivalent (FTE) for a fixed term of more than 3 months or for an indefinite period shall be by open competition. The rules for holding competitions and the detailed requirements for academic staff members are set forth in the Statutes of the UwB. Administrative staff are recruited based on an assessment of their qualifications by the Dean who may rely on the opinion of the future supervisor of the potential employee.

58. Academic teachers who are full-time employees of the UwB are periodically evaluated according to the rules set forth in the Regulations for Periodic Evaluation of Academic Teachers of the UwB. The evaluation is carried out at least once every four years, which, in the Panel's

opinion, is considered too infrequent. Scientific, teaching, and organisational activities are evaluated, with the first area not being evaluated for teaching-only staff. The evaluation is carried out by the Faculty Evaluation Committee appointed by the Dean based on a periodic evaluation form completed by the employee, written opinion of the immediate supervisor and information on the results of supervised classes and student evaluations.

59. The Dean and deputy Dean are evaluated by the UwB Evaluation Committee. Every periodic evaluation must be approved by the Rector.
60. The Panel noted that there is no formalised periodic evaluation process developed for the Branch's administrative staff. The fulfilment of their duties is constantly monitored by their immediate supervisor and the Branch management.

Sufficient academic and non-academic staff

61. At present, the Branch employs 13 academic staff on a contract basis, two of whom do not exceed ½ FTE. Of those, 1 is a professor, 2 are associate professors, 1 is an adjunct professor, 3 are senior lecturers, 3 are lecturers, 2 are teachers and 1 is an instructor. Administrative support is provided by 10 employees, three of whom are employed for less than 3 years. The Branch has experienced quite significant employee turnover in the past five years, with 14 departures and 9 new hires, explained by financial reasons. The Panel commends the efforts of the Branch management to secure additional funding for staff remuneration in 2023 to compensate for high inflation.
62. The teaching process at the Branch is also supported by the full-time UwB employees from outside the Branch, as well as people who teach and are not employees of the UwB, for example practitioners in fields compatible with the courses offered at the Branch, graduates, people with teaching experience and relevant substantive preparation gained outside the UwB. In 2022/2023 academic year, 12 teaching staff from the Faculty of Economics and Finance, 3 from the Faculty of Mathematics, 5 from the Faculty of Law, 5 from the Institute of Computer Science, 3 from the Institute of Management of UwB taught at the Branch, as well as 10 from outside of the UwB.

Ensuring appropriate qualifications of academic and non-academic staff

63. The Panel concluded that the qualification level of the academic staff is adequate for the needs of the Branch, and especially highlights the good feedback of students, graduates and employers. The academic staff has sufficient academic qualifications, good practical experience and visible efforts to be active in research, despite the lack of institutional support. The administrative staff, however, might benefit from additional support for ensuring compliance to two legal frameworks, data analysis and usage, cross-referencing data and information. Incomplete English language skills could be mentioned as the main drawback.

Improving the knowledge and skills for the academic staff and non-academic staff

64. Over the past five years, training has been provided to all Branch employees, albeit with varying frequency, although the amount of funds allocated strictly for employee training is not formally planned and any needs in this area are met on an ad hoc basis.
65. It was evident to the Panel from the list of training activities taken by the Branch academic staff, provided to the Panel, that the Branch staff actively makes use of the training organised by the

UwB. To a lesser extent, the staff also participates in externally organised seminars and webinars, and – very rarely – external training. The training taken by staff is usually free-of-charge. Both academic and administrative staff can benefit from funding or subsidies from the Branch Dean, however, the expenditure on training for employees of the Branch so far has been very low, with a maximum of 300 euros in 2021, and none in 2018, 2019 and 2022.

66. The Branch supports their employees studying at the Branch by waiving study fees. The highest fee waiver during a 5-year period exceeded 1700 euros in 2022/2023 providing benefits for four people.

67. The Panel observed a disconnect between the training offer and the evaluation process, indicating a lack of a comprehensive system for annual performance assessment and professional development support for both academic and administrative staff at the Branch. To address this, the Panel recommends implementing individual development interviews based on yearly self-evaluations, introducing effective motivational instruments for continuous self-development, and providing a relevant offer of learning opportunities, supported by financial backing.

1.5. Efficiency of financial and learning resource management:

1.5.1. Financial resources are planned, allocated and used rationally;

1.5.2. Various financial resources for the implementation of higher education activities are attracted;

1.5.3. Learning resources for provision of studies and research (art) activities are planned and used rationally;

1.5.4. Learning resources for conducting studies and research (art) activities are appropriate, sufficient and available.

Planning of financial resources

68. The Branch operates without a separate budget, requiring approval from the UwB for all financial matters. The budget is annual and involves detailed discussions and calculations with staff members. The Panel noted the lack of long-term financial planning linked to the strategic aims of the Branch.

Attracting various financial resources

69. The Branch is primarily financed from the subsidies from the Ministry of Education and Science of the Republic of Poland (MEiN), student fees, funds from the National Agency for Academic Exchange (NAWA) scholarship program and rental income. The subsidy of MEiN is used to cover the costs of day-to-day operations, including library resources, technological equipment etc. The funds from the NAWA are entirely allocated to student scholarships.

70. The Branch does not receive funding from Lithuanian institutions, foreign sources, or through contracts with external entities. The institution acknowledges the lack of funding from external sources, such as international projects, as a weakness. Previous attempts to develop project applications have been unsuccessful.

71. The main expenditure items are personal and non-personal salaries with derivatives, scholarships and rental of premises and municipal services. The Branch does not fund research. The scientific

activities of the staff are covered by the funds of the units of UwB responsible for research in the respective disciplines.

Rational use of resources for provision of studies and research

72. At present, the Vilnius Branch does not yet have its own headquarters in Vilnius, but rents space on three floors in a building at Kalvariju Street 135, with a total area of 910.85 m², which means that the available teaching space per student is 4.24 m².
73. Six lecture halls and two computer labs are available to students and employees. The largest lecture hall is designed for 90 people, a smaller one for 50 people, another for 40 people, and three can accommodate 30 people each. In addition, a room which is generally intended for the use by teaching staff serves, if necessary, as a seminar room accommodating 18 people. A maximum of 15 people can work in each of the computer labs. All classrooms are equipped with multimedia projectors, screens and laptops for use by the instructors.
74. The current premises pose a long-term challenge, as previously noted in the 2014 institutional review report. However, the opening of the new, modern building on a plot of land at 22 Aguonu Street (owned by the UwB) is scheduled for early 2024 and is expected to address all infrastructure challenges. UwB). The new building will have 5 floors with a total floor area of 3100 m².
75. Students and employees can use the Branch library and reading room that is situated in rooms of 90.98 m². There are 32 reading places and one computer workstation available for readers. The library currently has 5693 volumes of books and 416 issues of periodicals (4 titles are subscribed to), as well as access to electronic resources. Employees and students can also use the resources of the UwB library and the libraries of other UwB units, from which items ordered by readers are brought in on a temporary basis. During the interviews, students expressed satisfaction with the library's working hours, although not everyone used it for study purposes during breaks between lectures.

Resources for studies and research

76. With regard to resources for studies and research, the Panel would like to highlight the main challenge linked to the fact that the branch does not have its own resources for research, making it impossible for the Branch to plan and support its own research activities. Concerning the sufficiency of the resources for teaching, the Panel did not identify any concerns.
77. **In summary**, the present situation reveals deficiencies in the mission statement's clarity, failing to emphasize the unique features defining the Branch. The Strategy lacks clear quantitative indicators, and the monitoring of the strategy implementation is not well developed. The Panel noted limited administrative capacity for data analysis and cross-referencing, affecting evidence-based decision-making. The Panel observed a strategic shift at a higher education branch, moving from a research-oriented focus to teaching and collaboration after a 2019 Structural reform. Operating with a small team of 13 academic teachers and 10 administrative staff, decision-making processes are well-distributed but lack student involvement, necessitating recommendations for increased inclusion. The institution systematically collects and analyses student, graduate and employer opinions. External stakeholders are consulted through the Consultative Council.

The website does not contain sufficient information about the Branch's policies, regulations and governance institutions. The institution's formation, management, and evaluation of academic and non-academic staff involve hiring through open competition and periodic evaluations. Academic staff evaluations occur every four years, while administrative staff lack a formalised periodic evaluation process. The branch operates without a separate budget, relying on UwB approval for financial matters. Weaknesses include challenges in securing external funding. Expenditure covers salaries, scholarships, and premises rental; research is not funded. Library and premises challenges are expected to be addressed with a new building in 2024. The main challenge is the branch's lack of resources for research planning and support.

78. **Judgement:** the area meets the minimum requirements, and there are drawbacks that must be addressed, and is given two points.

79. **Recommendations for the area:**

- Review and clarify the mission statement to emphasise the identity and unique features of the Branch. Communicate the mission widely to stakeholders for increased understanding and alignment.
- Review the Branch's strategy to ensure that there are clear connections between the UwB vision, mission and strategy and the Branch vision, mission and strategy, and emphasise continuous improvement in accordance with the Standards and guidelines for quality assurance in the European Higher Education Area (ESG) principles.
- Implement a comprehensive strategy monitoring system, ensuring systematic analysis of performance data. Establish institutional KPIs linked to strategic objectives, tailored to the Branch's unique character. KPIs should be established for all key processes (education, research, and impact on society) of the Branch. Internal and external benchmarking for holistic performance evaluation could be considered.
- Ensure the follow-up, improvement actions and the measurement of their effectiveness, based on the systematic analysis of the Branch performance data.
- Ensure that stakeholders, especially students, are adequately represented in all decision-making bodies. Include a student representative in the Branch's Council.
- The Branch may wish to explore possibilities to ensure its continuous involvement in decision-making at central university level.
- Implement process awareness and formalised process management in which the processes in the branch are identified, formally controlled using adequate methods and improved by the people responsible for them.
- Establish a satisfaction survey for all groups of Branch employees and utilise its results for operational improvements.
- Strengthen the administrative capacity for data analysis and utilisation, including cross-referencing data and information.
- Ensure that all relevant information is easily available to its stakeholders, including all regulations related to the academic activities of the Branch, official councils and committees.

- Establish a comprehensive system for annual performance assessment and professional development support for both academic and administrative staff at the Branch. This includes implementing individual development interviews based on yearly self-evaluations, introducing effective motivational instruments for continuous self-development, and providing a relevant offer of learning opportunities, supported by financial backing.
- Incorporate long-term financial planning linked with strategic planning.
- Consider introducing activities to motivate employees to actively seek external funds.

80. **Good practice examples:**

- Effective informal communication channels for exchanging information and addressing issues and concerns.

3.2. *Quality Assurance*

Quality Assurance area is analysed in accordance with the following indicators and criteria, set up in the Methodology.

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

2.1.1. The higher education institution has approved and made publicly available internal quality assurance documents that are consistent with the Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area;

2.1.2. Internal quality assurance measures of planning, implementation and improvement are appropriate, applied periodically and ensure the involvement of the whole institution and stakeholders;

2.1.3. Processes for planning, implementation, monitoring, periodic evaluation and development of activities are specified;

2.1.4. Students and academic and non-academic staff of the institution receive effective support;

2.1.5. Provisions and procedures for academic integrity, tolerance and non-discrimination, appeal and ethics are specified and applied;

2.1.6. The results of the external review are used to improve the performance of the higher education institution.

Internal quality assurance documents

81. Internal quality assurance system is set out in the ‘Quality Assurance System for Education at the Branch of the UwB, Faculty of Economics and Computer Science’ (hereinafter – the Branch Quality System) which has been approved by the Branch Council in 2021. The Branch Quality System is not yet publicly available on the Branch’s website. The document delineates responsibilities for implementing the quality system, outlines the tasks of the quality assurance system, and explains the processes associated with each task. These processes encompass assessing teaching staff competence through the analysis of annual reports, planning staffing, designing and approving study programs, reviewing study programs, conducting examinations, observing classes, monitoring study conditions and organisation, providing student support,

overseeing internationalisation efforts, collecting opinions from graduates and employers, and monitoring graduates' careers.

IQA measures are appropriate, applied periodically and ensure the involvement of stakeholders

82. The Education Quality Team (EQT), consisting of academic staff and a student representative, annually compiles a report on the educational quality system, identifying strengths and weaknesses in monitored areas ensuring the periodicity of the measures. The report is approved by the Branch Council, providing transparency through publication on the Branch's website. Despite this, the EQT faces a challenge as their work lacks dedicated administrative support.
83. While the internal quality assurance system allows for the engagement of internal and external stakeholders, their involvement appears to be limited. Although students are formally part of the Education Quality Team, their participation has been negligible, with no attendance at the three meetings held in 2023. Additionally, the response rates for student surveys in the USOS system are relatively low, ranging from 7% to 15%. Similarly, the response rate from graduates (with 68 responses received in 2022/2023 from all graduates) and employers has been marginal.

Processes for planning, implementation, monitoring, periodic evaluation, and development of activities

84. Several systematically implemented instruments are in place to gather information on the quality of education, including student, graduate, and employer surveys, observations of classes, and reports submitted by the teaching staff. The procedures, deadlines, and responsibilities for these processes are outlined in the Branch's Quality Assurance System document. The assessment of teaching staff competence and professional qualification development is based on electronic reports which teaching staff must submit on an annual basis. The basis for the evaluation of teaching is the observations of classes and student surveys. The student surveys also provide the basis for the assessment of education and organisation of studies. Monitoring of the careers of Branch's graduates is based on the survey carried out by the Careers and Promotion office of the Branch.
85. Yet, the Panel concluded that the internal quality assurance system is not comprehensive enough. By this, it means that not all areas of operation are covered consistently, including management, administration, governance, research, and the third mission or catering to national and regional needs. Feedback from academic and administrative staff is not collected systematically, relying predominantly on informal contacts. The data collected to ensure evidence-based decision-making are rather limited, with primary sources being student admission, retention rates, and student questionnaires. A review of the quality assurance system's effectiveness has not been conducted, and the linkage between the quality assurance system and strategic planning is not evident. The Panel also observed during the interviews that not always internal and external stakeholders were aware of whether the feedback was considered, and steps taken.

Students, academic and non-academic staff receive effective support

86. The Branch offers scholarships from the Rector and the National Academic Exchange Agency program, along with social assistance in the form of scholarships and allowances. Information on available support is accessible on the Branch and UwB websites, delivered via email, and through

social networks. Special assistance for students with specific needs follows UwB rules and is coordinated by the relevant unit. First-year students are briefed on available support during initial meetings with management and administrative staff. Interviews revealed that currently, there are fewer than 10 students with special needs at the Branch, none of whom has requested financial support, citing reliance on state assistance.

87. The following academic support is available to students: compensatory classes in Polish and mathematics, consultations with academic teachers, and three student research clubs. Students can also benefit from free support from a psychologist, an offer of training courses and workshops prepared by the UwB Careers Office, and a wide range of open lectures with representatives of the socio-economic community organised by the Careers and Promotion Office.
88. While the Branch does not offer part-time studies, students have the flexibility to pursue a semester or a year of studies in an individual format. Additionally, classes can be completed at different times than scheduled in the academic calendar. In exceptional cases, classes with the agreement of the Branch Dean may be conducted remotely through the eduPortal platform. Thus far, there hasn't been significant interest in individual study formats. Interviews revealed that students are generally satisfied with the flexibility offered and the ability to coordinate necessary changes in the academic calendar with the staff. The main weakness highlighted was occasionally poorly arranged study plans, leading to gaps between lectures, primarily due to facility constraints and lecturer availability. The Faculty is encouraged to enhance the planning of lecture schedules, particularly with the upcoming move to new premises.
89. However, the completion rate of studies is notably low, with a 42% average drop-out rate after the first year in 2021/2022, and even higher in the preceding three study years. The completion rate of students commencing their studies in 2020 and completing studies on time in 2023 ranged from 18% in Economics I and Computer Science to 31% in Economics II. The average completion rates in the last academic years range from 22% in 2022 and 40% in 2021. The Branch attributes this to its 'open door policy,' aiming to provide an opportunity for as many young people as possible to experience studies while maintaining high standards. Other factors cited include the COVID-19 pandemic, work commitments, social background, emigration, misjudged study choices, and comparatively more affordable studies leading to less commitment. The Panel recommends investigating the root causes of dropouts and implementing remedies, such as providing clearer information about study fields and expected workloads, offering more compensatory classes, and establishing student support groups or mentoring programs.
90. Regarding dropout reduction strategies, the panel observed a tendency to blame students for insufficient effort and a normalisation of the overall situation. However, the Panel recommends that the Branch take more proactive measures to address this problem, given its direct negative impact on the Branch target group.
91. When it comes to the support for academic and non-academic staff, the Panel observed a general satisfaction level among both groups of employees.

Provisions and procedures for academic integrity, tolerance and non-discrimination, appeal and ethics

92. The procedures for academic integrity are specified in the Rules of Study of UwB. The supervisor is obliged to check the thesis before the diploma examination using the Uniform Anti-

Plagiarism System (JSA). Where the student is suspected of plagiarism, the Dean notifies the Rector. The Rector shall withhold the procedure for the defence of the thesis and refer the matter to the Student Disciplinary Ombudsman for clarification.

93. The Rules of Study state that decisions made by the Dean regarding individual student matters can be appealed to the Rector, whose decisions are considered final. The Branch has not encountered any appeals cases, primarily due to its effectiveness in resolving issues informally. The Panel recommends a thorough exploration of the reasons behind this trend, ensuring students are well-informed about their right to submit appeals, and establishing a process that fosters a sense of security for students.
94. Regulations and procedures regarding academic integrity, tolerance and non-discrimination, ethics are established by the Rector and apply to all units of the University. Students are informed about their rights, including their right to appeal and opportunities to address issues through the Student Council, during the induction meeting at the Branch. The Panel discovered during interviews that there have been no cases of appeals at the Branch thus far. This absence was attributed to the highly individual approach adopted at the Branch and the ability to address student concerns informally.

The use of the results of the external review

95. The Branch underwent a previous institutional review by the SKVC in 2014. Some recommendations, such as aligning programs with the needs of the labour market, enhancing risk assessment, and improving the process of self-reflection and the self-evaluation report development, have been implemented. The internal quality assurance system, albeit focusing solely on teaching, has been established. Efforts to secure new premises are expected to conclude in 2024 with the completion of the new building.
96. Several recommendations remain relevant, including the development of specific goals and performance indicators, monitoring strategy implementation, fostering internationalisation in studies and research, and promoting lifelong learning. Despite recommendations in 2014, the research capacity of the Branch has declined.
97. **In summary**, the quality assurance system at the Branch faces limitations due to the absence of dedicated administrative support. The current Education Quality Team, consisting of academics and a student, performs well considering their additional full-time responsibilities. However, the lack of administrative staff hinders their ability to analyse data comprehensively and address root causes effectively. The quality assurance system has not been reviewed for its effectiveness, and the tools, mainly reliant on questionnaires, should be expanded to cover all aspects, including research and the third mission. A more systematic approach is recommended, encompassing a broader scope and closing the feedback loop, while also improving communication about action taken to enhance response rates. Establishing a culture of quality and integrating QA with strategic planning is crucial for overall improvement.
98. **Judgement:** the area meets the minimum requirements, and there are drawbacks that must be addressed, and is given two points.
99. **Recommendations for the area:**

- Improve public information on the website. Publish Branch Quality System and relevant regulations. Publish information about the Branch’s Council, all official committees and relevant administrative staff, including their tasks, committee membership (if applicable) and contact details on the website. Share introductory information on the website, compiling all first semester details.
- Revise the quality assurance system to encompass all operations comprehensively, emphasising formalisation of processes and the primary aim to establish a culture of quality within the Branch. Ensure it covers all areas consistently, including management, administration, governance, research, and the 3rd mission. Ensure the follow-up, improvement actions and the measurement of their effectiveness, based on the systematic analysis of the Branch performance data.
- Expand quality assurance monitoring tools to obtain feedback from all groups to be used for improvement, including both academic and administrative staff.
- Enhance the administrative capacity to effectively support quality assurance functions and the work of the Education Quality Team.
- Conduct a comprehensive review of the quality assurance system's effectiveness.
- Ensure better linkage between the quality assurance system and strategic planning. Underpin the quality assurance system with appropriate data management for evidence-based decisions.
- Implement a systematic approach for follow-up and loop closure and improve communication of outcomes and actions taken.
- Research the root causes of drop-out and implement respective remedies which might include better information before the studies about study fields and expected workload, more compensatory classes, offering shorter (first cycle) study programmes, establishing student support groups or mentoring.
- Define in writing the minimum qualification requirements for administrative staff in the internal regulation.

100. **Good practice examples:**

- Ensuring transparency by publishing the annual reports of the Education Quality Team on the website.

3.3. Studies and Research (Art)

Studies and Research (Art) area is analysed in accordance with the following indicators and criteria, set up in the Methodology.

3.1. The level of research (art), compatibility of studies and research (art) and its compliance with the strategic aims of activities:

3.1.1. The study and research (art) activities carried out and their results are consistent with the mission and strategic aims of the higher education institution;

3.1.2. *The level of research (art) activities is sufficient for the ongoing studies of the higher education institution;*

3.1.3. *Studies are based on research (art);*

3.1.4. *Consistent recognition of foreign qualifications, partial studies and prior non-formal and informal learning is performed.*

Study and research activities consistent with the mission and strategic aims

101. The study offer is consistent with the strategic aim of positively impacting the higher education rate of the Polish minority in Lithuania. It is relevant and professionally oriented, with integrated internships to facilitate the transfer of education to the labour market. The recently launched study program in pre-school and early childhood pedagogy directly addresses the needs of the Polish school sector in Lithuania. The Panel observed a high level of satisfaction among employers and alumni with the quality of studies provided at the Branch. Therefore, the study activities are consistent with the mission of the Branch.
102. Due to the Structural reform at the UwB (see paragraph #29), the Branch became the teaching-only unit of the UwB. Consequently, all curriculum has been updated towards giving students primarily practical and social skills and less theoretical knowledge. Academic staff employed at the Branch below the rank of professor were transferred to teaching positions as of January 1, 2019, while the research activities of higher-level staff are counted as part of the output of the relevant faculties and departments at the UwB. The updated strategy sets the following objective with regards to the research – to ‘enable employees to conduct research as part of their professional development and in support of the teaching process’.
103. The Panel learnt during the interviews that due to the Structural reform, the Branch does not have any funding at its disposal to conduct its own research activities. Only staff at the professor level have an obligation to conduct research as specified within their work contracts (3 out of 13). Their outputs are not attributed to the Branch. Others, even if they, in practice, publish articles and participate in scientific conferences, are not systematically supported by either the Branch or UwB. In the Panel’s point of view, scarce research activity is also one of the reasons why the Branch’s international cooperation is extremely scarce, and therefore the Branch’s activities do not fully meet the strategic aims, one of which foresees broad international cooperation.

Studies are based on research

104. According to the vision, the Branch offers “quality education based on good academic practices, research results and developing partnerships with the socio-economic environment”. Despite learning about research examples aligned with the Branch’s interests and teaching staff involvement in doctoral studies, the Panel concluded that, when viewed as a separate higher education institution in Lithuania, due to the Branch’s mandate at the UwB level, the Branch lacks systematic research activities. This includes planning priority topics, ensuring resources, supporting staff, involving students, and promoting research-based education. Not only that, the expert team’s conversations with the Branch staff revealed that the institution lacked a unified understanding of what research based studies consists of.
105. The UwB has regulated administrative procedures for approving study programs and their changes. However, the Branch lacks explicit administrative protocols aimed at ensuring the

quality of their content and regular review processes, thereby ensuring the involvement of diverse relevant parties in curriculum development. It is advised to devise and implement appropriate structures or mechanisms to incorporate stakeholder input into program reviews, for example, by forming a permanent Council separately for each study program or study field (possibly together with the corresponding study program on the main campus), including representatives of employers, partners, students, alumni and some key researchers, and appointing a head of the Council who is responsible for the quality of the educational program. The Council's task would be to propose recommendations for further improvement of the study program based on relevant strategic documents, surveys of all stakeholders, international trends in the development of the academic field and the needs of society.

106. During the interviews, the students emphasised that the presentations of the top specialists of the companies, who talked about the development trends and employment possibilities, have been particularly valuable. The Panel noted that there seem to be opportunities for more such presentations, as the social partners also expressed their willingness to do so.

The level of research activities is sufficient

107. Although the Branch has an educational profile and does not carry out research work, full-time staff and those employed in other forms publish the results of their individual work that is related to their professional interests or the subjects taught to students. The average number of publications per lecturer per year in the period 2018-2023 range from 0.79 in 2023 (total number of publications per year - 22) to 2.34 in 2020 (total number of publications – 82). The European Studies and Law Department has been the most active in terms of producing publications, with a total number of publications in the period of 2018-2023 – 160 publications.

108. These figures include all teachers who taught at the Branch, including those who worked outside the Branch. In the list of the most important articles published by the Branch staff in 2018-2023, there were only 16 publications, of which only three were in English. Moreover, only two academic staff have a *Google Scholar* account, making the vast majority of staff invisible to the international academic community. At the same time, in the meeting of the Panel with social partners, they saw cooperation in research and development as one of the most important areas of cooperation with the Branch in the future.

109. The Panel commends staff efforts to maintain research activity despite a lack of institutional support. It notes a deterioration in the current research situation compared to the 2014 institutional review, with the recommendations from that review remaining unimplemented and relevant.

Recognition of foreign qualifications, partial studies and prior learning

110. The UwB Rules of Study describe the procedures for recognizing qualifications, partial studies, and prior non-formal and informal learning. The Dean makes decisions on the conditions, time, and method for making up differences in the program, if needed, with support from teachers in the respective fields. In the case of foreigners, at the request of the Dean, the administrative decision is made by the UwB Rector.

111. The provisions for recognition of prior non-formal and informal learning are regulated by the Resolution no. 2541 of the Senate of the UwB of 13 September 2019. The procedure requires the candidate to submit an application with evidence. The confirmation of learning outcomes is

carried out by a Commission for the Confirmation of Learning Outcomes, as appointed by the Rector. Until this point, the Branch hasn't had any such cases.

3.2. Internationality of studies, research (art):

3.2.1. The higher education institution has a strategy for internationalisation of research (art) and study activities (including indicators of internationalisation), means for its implementation, and measurements of the effectiveness of these activities are performed (not applicable to colleges unless provided for in its strategic documents);

3.2.2. The higher education institution integrates aspects of internationalisation into the content of studies and research (art) activities.

Strategy for internationalisation of research and study activities

112. The Branch's Strategy 2023-2030 includes the operational objective 'Internationalisation of the education process' under the strategic objective 'High-quality education'. It encompasses the following sub-objectives:

- i. Expanding educational offerings in foreign languages;
- ii. Increasing the activity of the Branch students in taking advantage of relevant programmes and agreements with foreign universities;
- iii. Increase the interest of foreign students in doing part of their studies at the Branch.

113. The strategy also features a sub-objective to develop international internship and placement programs for students, increase the mobility of academic staff, and seek opportunities for staff to carry out joint research projects with national and international partners.

114. However, the strategy does not specify any quantitative goals or indicators that the Branch aims to achieve during the period of its implementation. The objectives are expected to be met within current resources, and there is no provision for measuring the effectiveness of these activities.

115. Currently, the Branch is in the early stages of internationalisation development. The scale of international exchange is very limited, with only 12 students studying abroad since 2018, and there have been no incoming students on mobility programs. In the last five years, some students, in addition to European Studies students who have an opportunity for internships at the European Parliament, have completed work placements abroad under the Erasmus+ program.

116. Regarding staff mobility, only five people visited two universities—Immanuel Kant Baltic Federal University and the University of Ostrava. Lecturers from UwB teaching in Vilnius were more actively involved in international exchanges, with more than 10 visits in 2018/2019 and an average of four international visits per year. Since 2018, seven foreign university teachers have visited the Branch to deliver lectures.

117. Despite being a long-term participant in the Erasmus+ program, the Branch currently has agreements with only two foreign universities for student and staff exchanges. While students and faculty can also leverage cooperation opportunities through UwB, which has bilateral agreements with 95 partner universities, interviews suggest that applying to UwB is more challenging and time-consuming for students compared to applying to the Branch.

Aspects of internationalisation in the content of studies and research activities

118. The Branch makes efforts to integrate internationalisation into the content of studies, such as organising some lectures by foreign speakers and implementing a study course on presentation techniques in English for IT students. A list of classes in English has been created, but these would be open to local students only in the case of incoming Erasmus+ students. These courses have not been offered till now as no foreign students have come to study in the Branch. The Branch also offers the opportunity for students to prepare their diploma theses in a foreign language, an option utilised by four students: one in the 2018/2019 academic year and three in 2022/2023.
119. The level of research internationalisation is low. There is some activity related to organising international scientific conferences, including co-organizing two regular international scientific conferences (five times since 2018) and several other international conferences. However, the Branch has not participated in any international grants related to research or developmental activities.
120. The Panel observed that several important prerequisites for internationalisation were not fulfilled. For example, on the English-language website of the Branch there is no information provided about the study programmes. A significant weakness of the Branch, as admitted in the SWOT analysis in the Strategy and as evidenced from the interviews, is insufficient English language skills among academics and administration. For this reason, all meetings of the Panel, with the exception of students, took place through an interpreter.
121. Based on the collective observations regarding the information provided by the Branch, the documentation published on the website, the evaluation of the publication list and the list of organised events, as well as during the interviews, the Panel concluded that the Branch cannot be considered as a part of the international academic community. Furthermore, the Branch is in the early stage of development regarding embedding internationalisation in the content of studies and research.
122. **In summary**, the Panel's assessment, based on various sources, indicates that the current structures of the Branch lack mechanisms to effectively integrate stakeholder input into program reviews, limiting comprehensive programme assessments. The Branch lacks a clear understanding and strategy for research activities, leading to an absence of specific goals, dedicated funding, and a coherent linkage between education and research, hindering the institution's scholarly advancement. Inadequate support from UwB impedes the enhancement of the Branch's research capabilities, evident in the limited encouragement for joint publications, collaboration with other UwB faculties, and inadequate expertise in identifying and developing projects. The Panel also concludes that the Branch is not yet integrated into the international community. It is in the early stages of developing internationalisation in both studies and research. The main weaknesses include unclear goals, limited mobility for students and staff, language-related barriers, and the lack of international projects. The current network of institutional partnerships requires expansion to foster international collaborations. Addressing these issues is vital to enhance the university's global competitiveness and participation in the international higher education community.
123. **Judgement:** the area does not meet the minimum requirements, there are fundamental drawbacks, and is given one point.
124. **Recommendations for the area:**

- Devise and implement appropriate structures or mechanisms to incorporate stakeholder input into program reviews, for example, by forming a permanent Council separately for each study program or study field.
- As an institution established in Lithuania, the Branch should plan and undertake appropriate research activities. To support this, the Branch should establish a common understanding of the concept of the linkage between education and research, formulate a research and development strategy and goals specific to the Branch and allocate dedicated funding for research activities.
- Strengthen UwB support to boost the research capacity of the Branch by encouraging joint publications, integrating academic staff from the Branch into collaborative projects with other UwB faculties, and improving the ability to identify and write projects.
- Develop a clear understanding of nature and establish measurable goals for internationalisation. Initiate activities that secure prerequisites for the effective functioning of internationalisation, encompassing 1) Foreign language proficiency of students and employees, 2) UwB's support for the Branch's ambition to be recognized internationally, and 3) Ensuring the presence of management with the capability to acquire resources - especially financial and human resources - at the Branch.
- Expand the network of institutional partnerships to foster international collaborations.
- Establish a system to evaluate the effectiveness of internationalisation activities.
- Sustain the integration of internationalisation into both curriculum and research activities.
- Proactively participate in developing project proposals in collaboration with UwB and other partner universities. Seek active support from UwB to enhance capacity in this field and fortify capabilities.
- Consider exploring the possibility of recruiting a top scientist with project management capabilities who can establish a research group operating at an international level. This individual could introduce essential research instruments such as regular research seminars, collaborative research efforts, joint publications, and the allocation of necessary resources.

3.4. Impact on Regional and National Development

Impact on Regional and National Development area is analysed in accordance with the following indicators and criteria, set up in the Methodology.

4.1. Effectiveness of the impact on regional and national development:

4.1.1. The higher education institution carries out an analysis of national and (or) regional demands, identifies the needs to be met and foresees the potential impact on national and (or) regional development;

4.1.2. The monitoring, analysis and evaluation of the effectiveness of the measures on national and (or) regional development are performed.

National and regional demands, needs to be met and the potential impact

125. The Branch's strategic objective is to positively impact the higher education rate of the Polish minority in Lithuania. To achieve this goal, the Branch utilises statistical data on the number of graduates from Polish schools in Lithuania and collaborates with representatives of the Polish community, Polish schools, Mykolas Romeris University, local and national governments, as well as entrepreneurs and companies operating in the Lithuanian market.
126. Relations with the Polish community and the alumni network are effectively maintained, serving various purposes such as gathering information about community needs, facilitating student internship opportunities, attracting lecturers, and organising joint events and seminars. The Panel learned during interviews that concrete steps have been taken to formalise some relationships that were previously informal. For instance, there are plans to conclude a cooperation agreement with the Polish and Lithuanian Chamber of Commerce. Additionally, efforts are underway to establish an alumni association, with recent invitations sent to the network of alumni.
127. The Branch takes into consideration the needs of the Polish community in the development of its study programs. A notable example is the initiative to create a pedagogical specialisation, stemming from informal discussions between the current authorities of the Branch and representatives of the Polish community in Vilnius. This initiative involved consultations with the Association of Teachers of Polish Schools in Lithuania, "Macierz Szkolna," and members of the Consultative Council.
128. To ensure the relevance of the new specialisation, the Branch engaged a group of teachers from Polish kindergartens and schools. This group actively participated in adapting the curriculum of the pre-school and early childhood pedagogy specialisation to meet the needs and formal requirements of education in Lithuania. The specialisation was successfully launched in the academic year 2023/2024, with 41 students admitted. Presently, consultations are underway with 'Macierz Szkolna' regarding the potential launch of subject teacher education.
129. A Consultative Council, comprising representatives from the labour market and the community, ensures regular consultations and systemic involvement of external stakeholders. This Council is consulted on various matters, including the curriculum of study programs, draft strategy, the situation in Polish secondary schools, and new developments in the labour market. As an illustration, the Consultative Council recently reviewed the modernization plans for the IT study programs and recommended a change in the mode of professional practice.
130. The Branch has a well-established collaboration with Mykolas Romeris University (MRU) in Vilnius, formalised by a cooperation agreement signed in 2021. This partnership is rooted in mutually beneficial relationships and primarily involves joint efforts in implementing a pre-school and early childhood pedagogy study course. The collaboration includes MRU staff teaching at the Branch, pre-school early childhood pedagogy students gaining additional modules and a social pedagogy qualification at MRU, and students from other courses completing subject blocks at MRU to obtain teaching qualifications. The interview process revealed that institutions highly value the regular exchange of knowledge and experience, strengthening the capacity of both sides, and they plan to extend their collaboration into research endeavours.
131. The Branch also collaborates with other external partners on teaching activities. This includes universities whose staff teach at the Branch, such as Vytautas Magnus University, Kaunas University of Technology, and Vilnius University of Technology. Through these collaborations,

the Branch gains valuable experience and exchanges best practices curriculum development, subject content, and education quality.

132. The Panel identified this area as the primary strength of the Branch, particularly concerning the needs of its main target group—the Polish community in the Vilnius region. The Branch's existence has a positive impact on the higher education rates and subsequent employability of the Polish community. It is recognized as a vital element in fortifying Polish culture in Lithuania. The Panel noted a relatively high level of satisfaction among employers and graduates regarding the preparedness of students for the labour market, with positive experiences reported in traineeships. The net performance score from alumni, with whom the Panel conducted interviews, stood at 8.5, indicating their willingness to endorse the Branch to their contacts.
133. The Panel was impressed by the level of engagement and interest from external partners. Moreover, these partners would appreciate even higher activity from the Branch to better serve their needs. Organising informative seminars, collaborative projects, research collaborations, community service initiatives, partnerships with local businesses and government, and strengthening alumni relations were among the mentioned suggestions. The Panel also observed that external partners were not fully aware of the opportunity to engage in the development of study program content.

The monitoring, analysis and evaluation of the effectiveness of the measures

134. With regards to the monitoring, analysis, and evaluations of the effectiveness of the measures, the Panel learnt during the interviews that the primary indicator of success for the Branch is its ability to recruit students, which reflects the overall prestige of the educational institution and its alignment with the needs of the local community, as well as positive feedback from involved parties. Indeed, the Branch has maintained a relatively stable intake of students over the last five study years, despite demographic declines and a reduction in the number of graduates from Polish schools.
135. However, the small number of feedback gained through employer questionnaires, as well as the lack of a formal instrument to consult a wider community of external stakeholders apart from those involved in the Consultative Council, indicates the need for a more systematic approach to seeking feedback from external partners. The Branch is encouraged to strengthen connections with its stakeholders, establish a feedback loop through effective monitoring and evaluation systems, and align study programs and research initiatives with national and regional development goals based on the insights gained.

4.2. Assurance of conditions for lifelong learning:

- 4.2.1. The higher education institution monitors and analyses the need for lifelong learning;*
4.2.2. The higher education institution anticipates the diversity of forms and conditions of lifelong learning and ensures their implementation;
4.2.3. The higher education institution performs the evaluation of assurance of conditions for lifelong learning.

136. The Branch offers continuous study opportunities at EQF 6 and 7 levels. Considering limited offers at the Master's level, students have an option to continue their studies at UwB. However,

the Branch currently does not have an adult population as the target group, neither a lifelong learning strategy or even intentions to establish the lifelong learning offer for adults.

137. Despite attributing the low activity of the Lithuanian population in terms of lifelong learning as the primary reason, the Panel observed a notable interest among alumni during interviews. Alumni expressed a high interest in the Branch's offering of short upskilling courses, including those focused on digital skills, business skills, data analysis, financial analysis, and preparation courses for obtaining certificates. Considering the institution's profile, the Panel believes there is untapped potential to contribute significantly to upskilling the Branch's target group.
138. Although there is no regular adult learning program developed at the Branch, the Panel learned during interviews about several ad-hoc short educational events organized in collaboration with stakeholders. For instance, the Polish and Lithuanian Chamber of Commerce maintains regular contact with the Branch to organize joint events and provide students with training on career prospects. Additionally, a lecture on the Polish market for Lithuanian companies was organized in collaboration with the Chamber. Furthermore, the Embassy of the Republic of Poland in Vilnius facilitated two 3-hour lectures for Polish and Lithuanian companies about transnational business, involving Branch lecturers. Further events are anticipated, and some have already commenced organization. These instances underscore the external partners' appreciation of the expertise available at the Branch, signalling potential for expanded collaborations.
139. **In summary**, the Branch has a positive impact on the higher education rate and employability of the Polish minority in Lithuania, fostering collaborations with various stakeholders, including the Polish community, Polish schools, business and government entities. Notable initiatives include the development of pedagogical specialisations and a successful partnership with Mykolas Romeris University. This emphasis on the Polish community is recognized as a primary strength. The Panel suggests a more systematic approach to seeking feedback from external partners, strengthening and formalising connections with stakeholders, establishing a feedback loop, and aligning programs with national and regional development goals. Despite challenges in lifelong learning, there is potential for the Branch to cater to adult learners through short upskilling courses based on observed alumni interest.
140. **Judgement:** the area is being developed systematically, without any major drawbacks and is given 3 points.
141. **Recommendations for the area:**
- Increase Branch activity in relation to its third mission, focusing on organising seminars in cooperation with the regional and business community, collaborative projects, study and research collaborations, and enhancing alumni relations by establishing the Alumni association to better meet the needs of external partners. Implement programs where students and faculty work directly with local communities on development projects.
 - Continue engagement with local and national stakeholders to better understand regional and national needs. Additionally, establish a comprehensive feedback loop, incorporating regular surveys and impact studies, to monitor and evaluate study program effectiveness for regional and national development. Systematically involve external partners in the review and development of study programs, fostering collaboration for improved program content.

- Develop a range of flexible learning opportunities: introduce a variety of courses and programs tailored to lifelong learners, including evening and weekend classes, online courses, short-term workshops, and certificate programs. These should cater to diverse needs, such as career advancement, skill development, personal enrichment, and addressing specific regional skills gaps.

142. **Good practice examples:**

- Students are actively involved in regional reach-out activities, visiting Polish schools and providing information about study opportunities at the Branch.
- Collaborative discussions with the Polish community, consultations with educational organisations, and active involvement of local teachers led to the successful launch of a pre-school and early childhood pedagogy specialisation in the 2023/2024 academic year.

IV. EXAMPLES OF GOOD PRACTICE

The Panel identifies the following examples of good practice in:

Management:

- Effective informal communication channels for exchanging information and addressing issues and concerns.

Quality Assurance:

- Ensuring transparency by publishing the annual reports of the Education Quality Team on the website.

Impact on Regional and National Development:

- Students are actively involved in regional reach-out activities, visiting Polish schools and providing information about study opportunities at the Branch.
- Collaborative discussions with the Polish community, consultations with educational organisations, and active involvement of local teachers led to the successful launch of a pre-school and early childhood pedagogy specialisation in the 2023/2024 academic year.

V. RECOMMENDATIONS FOR ENHANCEMENT

The Panel's recommendations for further enhancement are:

Management:

- Review and clarify the mission statement to emphasise the identity and unique features of the Branch. Communicate the mission widely to stakeholders for increased understanding and alignment.
- Review the Branch's strategy to ensure that there are clear connections between the UwB vision, mission and strategy and the Branch vision, mission and strategy, and emphasise continuous improvement in accordance with the Standards and guidelines for quality assurance in the European Higher Education Area (ESG) principles.

- Implement a comprehensive strategy monitoring system, ensuring systematic analysis of performance data. Establish institutional KPIs linked to strategic objectives, tailored to the Branch's unique character. KPIs should be established for all key processes (education, research, and impact on society) of the Branch. Internal and external benchmarking for holistic performance evaluation could be considered.
- Ensure the follow-up, improvement actions and the measurement of their effectiveness, based on the systematic analysis of the Branch performance data.
- Ensure that stakeholders, especially students, are adequately represented in all decision-making bodies. Include a student representative in the Branch's Council.
- The Branch may wish to explore possibilities to ensure its continuous involvement in decision-making at central university level.
- Implement process awareness and formalised process management in which the processes in the branch are identified, formally controlled using adequate methods and improved by the people responsible for them.
- Establish a satisfaction survey for all groups of Branch employees and utilise its results for operational improvements.
- Strengthen the administrative capacity for data analysis and utilisation, including cross-referencing data and information.
- Ensure that all relevant information is easily available to its stakeholders, including all regulations related to the academic activities of the Branch, official councils and committees.
- Establish a comprehensive system for annual performance assessment and professional development support for both academic and administrative staff at the Branch. This includes implementing individual development interviews based on yearly self-evaluations, introducing effective motivational instruments for continuous self-development, and providing a relevant offer of learning opportunities, supported by financial backing.
- Incorporate long-term financial planning linked with strategic planning.
- Consider introducing activities to motivate employees to actively seek external funds.

Quality Assurance:

- Improve public information on the website. Publish Branch Quality System and relevant regulations. Publish information about the Branch's Council and all official committees, including their tasks, membership and contact details on the website. Share introductory information on the website, compiling all first semester details.
- Revise the quality assurance system to encompass all operations comprehensively, emphasising formalisation of processes and the primary aim to establish a culture of quality within the Branch. Ensure it covers all areas consistently, including management, administration, governance, research, and the 3rd mission. Ensure the follow-up, improvement actions and the measurement of their effectiveness, based on the systematic analysis of the Branch performance data.
- Expand quality assurance monitoring tools to obtain feedback from all groups to be used for improvement, including both academic and administrative staff.

- Enhance the administrative capacity to effectively support quality assurance functions and the work of the Education Quality Team.
- Conduct a comprehensive review of the quality assurance system's effectiveness.
- Ensure better linkage between the quality assurance system and strategic planning. Underpin the quality assurance system with appropriate data management for evidence-based decisions.
- Implement a systematic approach for follow-up and loop closure and improve communication of outcomes and actions taken.
- Research the root causes of drop-out and implement respective remedies which might include better information before the studies about study fields and expected workload, more compensatory classes, offering shorter (first cycle) study programmes, establishing student support groups or mentoring.
- Define in writing the minimum qualification requirements for administrative staff in the internal regulation.

Studies and Research (art)

- Devise and implement appropriate structures or mechanisms to incorporate stakeholder input into programme reviews, for example, by forming a permanent Council separately for each study programme or study field.
- As an institution established in Lithuania, the Branch should plan and undertake appropriate research activities. To support this, the Branch should establish a common understanding of the concept of the linkage between education and research, formulate a research and development strategy and goals specific to the Branch and allocate dedicated funding for research activities.
- Strengthen UwB support to boost the research capacity of the Branch by encouraging joint publications, integrating academic staff from the Branch into collaborative projects with other UwB faculties, and improving the ability to identify and write projects.
- Develop a clear understanding of nature and establish measurable goals for internationalisation. Initiate activities that secure prerequisites for the effective functioning of internationalisation, encompassing 1) Foreign language proficiency of students and employees, 2) UwB's support for the Branch's ambition to be recognized internationally, and 3) Ensuring the presence of management with the capability to acquire resources - especially financial and human resources - at the Branch.
- Expand the network of institutional partnerships to foster international collaborations.
- Establish a system to evaluate the effectiveness of internationalisation activities.
- Sustain the integration of internationalisation into both curriculum and research activities.
- Proactively participate in developing project proposals in collaboration with UwB and other partner universities. Seek active support from UwB to enhance capacity in this field and fortify capabilities.
- Consider exploring the possibility of recruiting a top scientist with project management capabilities who can establish a research group operating at an international level. This

individual could introduce essential research instruments such as regular research seminars, collaborative research efforts, joint publications, and the allocation of necessary resources.

Impact on Regional and National Development:

- Increase Branch activity in relation to its third mission, focusing on organising seminars in cooperation with the regional and business community, collaborative projects, study and research collaborations, and enhancing alumni relations by establishing the Alumni association to better meet the needs of external partners. Implement programs where students and faculty work directly with local communities on development projects.
- Continue engagement with local and national stakeholders to better understand regional and national needs. Additionally, establish a comprehensive feedback loop, incorporating regular surveys and impact studies, to monitor and evaluate study program effectiveness for regional and national development. Systematically involve external partners in the review and development of study programs, fostering collaboration for improved program content.
- Develop a range of flexible learning opportunities: introduce a variety of courses and programs tailored to lifelong learners, including evening and weekend classes, online courses, short-term workshops, and certificate programs. These should cater to diverse needs, such as career advancement, skill development, personal enrichment, and addressing specific regional skills gaps.

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