

## Vytautas Magnus University *Quality Manual* abstract

Vytautas Magnus University (hereinafter referred to as “VMU” or “University”) is recognised and appreciated in the global society as an outstanding University that develops *artes liberales* principles-based, high-quality studies, research and art, cherishes and continues mature traditions and plays a special role not only in the intellectual and cultural space of Lithuania, but also of the entire Baltic region and Europe. In 2019, after the merger of VMU, Lithuanian University of Educational Sciences and Aleksandras Stulginskis University, VMU became the most wide-ranging University in the country, thus further strengthening its interdisciplinary potential for studies, research and artistic activities.

Regarding internal changes and aiming to enhance the alignment of the activities of the University with Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area (ESG), a comprehensive review of VMU quality system took place in the period of 2020–2021. The aim of this review was to update the Quality and Environmental Management System that had been under implementation and development at the University since 2013, ensuring the continuity of the conceptual ideas of the quality system. The review and update of VMU quality system was supported by the following key provisions:

- The concept of the quality system continues to be oriented towards the fulfilment of the priority objectives and legal requirements of higher education, as well as meeting the expectations of stakeholders of the University (members of the community, graduates, employers and other stakeholders).
- Emphasis is placed on the coherence between the quality system and ESG requirements, and consistency with these requirements is more clearly justified.
- The process approach is further applied; quality assurance system is treated as an integrated system of processes, and it is based on a four-stage cycle – planning, implementing, evaluating, and improving.
- The importance of the principles of environmental management is maintained by integrating them into VMU Strategic Plan for 2021–2027 and highlighting the importance of environmental sustainability with the aim of contributing to the European Green Deal, circular economy and other initiatives as well as to the substantiation of ideas by research and their implementation in Lithuania.

The aim of the *Quality Manual* is to develop a quality culture at the University in a targeted, purposeful and consistent manner by systematically presenting the concept, principles, responsibilities and processes of quality assurance as well as related documents and quality indicators. The *Quality Manual* covers quality assurance of studies, learning, research and artistic activities, and doctoral studies. This document is intended for VMU community members, and it is stored in the internal information system while its abstract is available for all interested parties at VMU website.

The *Quality Manual* discusses the mission, vision, and strategy of the University; introduces the concept and principles of quality assurance, specifies the ways of the involvement of stakeholders; reviews the distribution of responsibilities in quality assurance activities; describes the processes of the three groups (strategic, core, and supporting processes) by providing the aim, a brief description, participants of the process, VMU legal acts regulating the process, detailed processes and their participants, and indicators demonstrating the implementation of the process.

The concept of VMU quality assurance includes all quality enhancement activities. This is a purposeful and targeted planning, implementation, evaluation, and improvement of studies and learning, research and art as well as doctoral studies in order to achieve compliance with the priorities of higher education, legal requirements and the needs of stakeholders. Quality assurance of the University is guided by the University’s, national and international priorities of studies, research and artistic activities, legal requirements, opinions and proposals of stakeholders, recommendations of external evaluators, and examples of good practices. Quality assurance of the University is oriented towards the development of quality culture, where compliance of activities with the highest quality requirements is a common interest and aspiration of the entire VMU community; activities are constantly monitored, information is analysed, and changes are responsibly introduced.

VMU quality assurance is based on the Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area (ESG). Links between ESG and VMU processes ensuring the quality of studies, learning activities, research and artistic activities as well as doctoral studies are specified in Table 1.

TABLE 1. LINKS BETWEEN ESG AND VMU QUALITY ASSURANCE

ESG INTERNAL QUALITY ASSURANCE AREAS	VMU PROCESSES ENSURING THE QUALITY OF STUDIES, LEARNING ACTIVITIES, RESEARCH AND ARTISTIC ACTIVITIES, DOCTORAL STUDIES
Policy for quality assurance	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>○ Strategic quality management.</li><li>○ Determination of the directions of studies and learning activities.</li><li>○ Determination of the priority directions of research and art of the University, planning the development of doctoral studies.</li><li>○ Management of international cooperation.</li></ul>
Design and approval of programmes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>○ Design of new study programmes and learning programmes.</li></ul>
Student-centred learning, teaching and assessment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>○ Organisation and provision of studies and learning activities.</li><li>○ Admission of doctoral students, organisation and provision of doctoral studies, management of the completion of doctoral studies.</li></ul>

ESG INTERNAL QUALITY ASSURANCE AREAS	VMU PROCESSES ENSURING THE QUALITY OF STUDIES, LEARNING ACTIVITIES, RESEARCH AND ARTISTIC ACTIVITIES, DOCTORAL STUDIES
Student admission, progression, recognition and certification	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Admission of students and unclassified students.</li> <li>○ Organisation and provisions of studies and learning activities.</li> <li>○ Management of the completion of studies and learning programmes.</li> <li>○ Admission of doctoral students, organisation and provision of doctoral studies, management of the completion of doctoral studies.</li> </ul>
Teaching staff	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Organisation and provision of studies and learning activities.</li> <li>○ Conducting research and artistic activities.</li> <li>○ Management of human resources.</li> </ul>
Learning resources and student support	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Organisation and provision of studies and learning activities.</li> <li>○ Management of non-academic support.</li> <li>○ Management of physical, information, and financial resources.</li> </ul>
Information management	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Internal evaluation of studies and learning programmes.</li> <li>○ Internal evaluation of research and artistic activities, doctoral studies.</li> <li>○ Management of international cooperation.</li> <li>○ Marketing and communication management.</li> </ul>
Public information	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Detailed processes of all processes, which include publicising of information.</li> <li>○ Marketing and communication management.</li> </ul>
On-going monitoring and periodic review of programmes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Internal evaluation of studies and learning programmes.</li> <li>○ Internal evaluation of research and artistic activities, doctoral studies.</li> <li>○ Planning, implementation, and monitoring of the improvement of studies and learning programmes.</li> <li>○ Planning, implementation, and monitoring of the improvement of research and artistic activities, doctoral studies.</li> </ul>
Cyclical external quality assurance	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Involvement in the external evaluation of studies.</li> <li>○ Involvement in the external evaluation of research and artistic activities, doctoral studies.</li> </ul>

At VMU, the processes that ensure the quality of studies, learning activities, research and artistic activities as well as doctoral studies consist of 4 stages of quality enhancement – *planning, implementation, evaluation, and improvement* (PDCA – plan, do, check, act). This PDCA model is designed for continuous and systematic quality development. A spiral approach is used to achieve continuous quality assurance: after the improvement, new actions focused on quality enhancement of strategic, core, and supporting processes are planned again (Fig. 1). The development of both the quality system as a whole and its individual processes must comply with the 4-stage principles; this contributes to the implementation of the relevant application of the process approach leading to quality assurance.

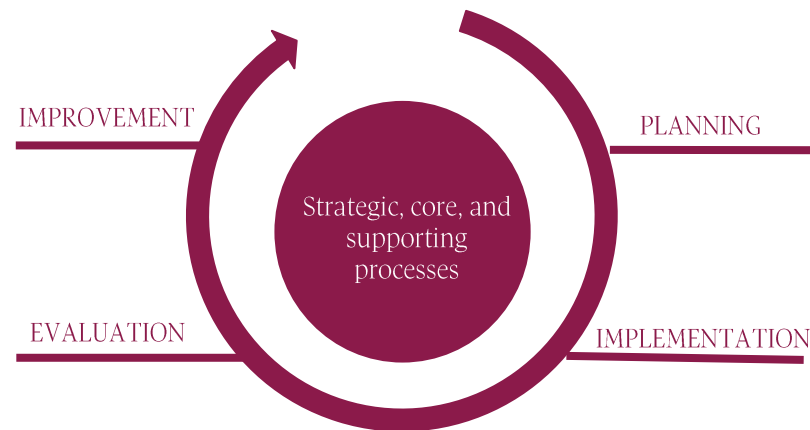


FIG. 1. PDCA MODEL IN VMU QUALITY ASSURANCE

In the development of quality assurance, the principles of openness to development, collegiality, academic ethics, responsibility, and publicity are applied (Fig. 2):

- **OPENNESS TO DEVELOPMENT** is expressed in terms of opportunities to grow, improve and provide for new study, research and art ideas, application and development of innovative methods, response to the needs of society, renewal of study and learning programmes, participation in inter-institutional, national and international cooperation programmes.
- The principle of **COLLEGIALITY** is based on professional, cooperative relationships and trust in each other. The sharing of good practices and the search for common solutions are fostered, and the participation of various stakeholders in quality assurance is ensured.
- The principle of **ACADEMIC ETHICS** involves establishing and following the norms of professional ethics and humane behaviour of the members of the University community (students and staff) and external stakeholders for the purpose of quality assurance.
- The principle of **RESPONSIBILITY** is expressed in the obligation of each person to ensure the quality of studies, learning activities, research and art activities as well as doctoral studies, taking into account their areas of responsibility and accepting general responsibility for the quality of the University.

- The principle of **PUBLICITY** demonstrates the availability of information about activities, decisions and results of the University to internal and external stakeholders; the dissemination of information is comprehensive, timely and transparent.



FIG. 2. VMU QUALITY ASSURANCE PRINCIPLES

Quality assurance involves stakeholders – individuals, groups of individuals or organisations/institutions interested in the activities of the University, who can influence these activities and who take responsibility for them according to the areas they represent. Identifying and balancing the requirements of stakeholders as well as being able to satisfy such requirements determine the quality of the studies and learning activities, research and artistic activities as well as doctoral studies at the University.

In order to ensure effective quality enhancement, the responsibilities of VMU community are established and defined in VMU Statute and other internal legal acts of the University – operational regulations, job descriptions, etc. The distribution of responsibilities for quality assurance is specified in the process descriptions provided in the *Quality Manual*. The implementation of the processes is ensured by their coordinators: the main coordinators, i.e., top-level University managers (Rector, Vice-Rectors and Director of Administration) and coordinating non-academic units that contribute to the planning, implementation, evaluation, and improvement of specific processes – strategic, core, and supporting processes. Coordinators involve other relevant participants – individuals or units – to effectively participate in the detailed processes and to achieve the intended indicators. The annual indicators listed in the *Quality Manual* integrate the indicators of VMU Strategic Plan for 2021–2027 and other key indicators monitored by the University.

The full version of the *Quality Manual* could be found at the University internal information system.

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