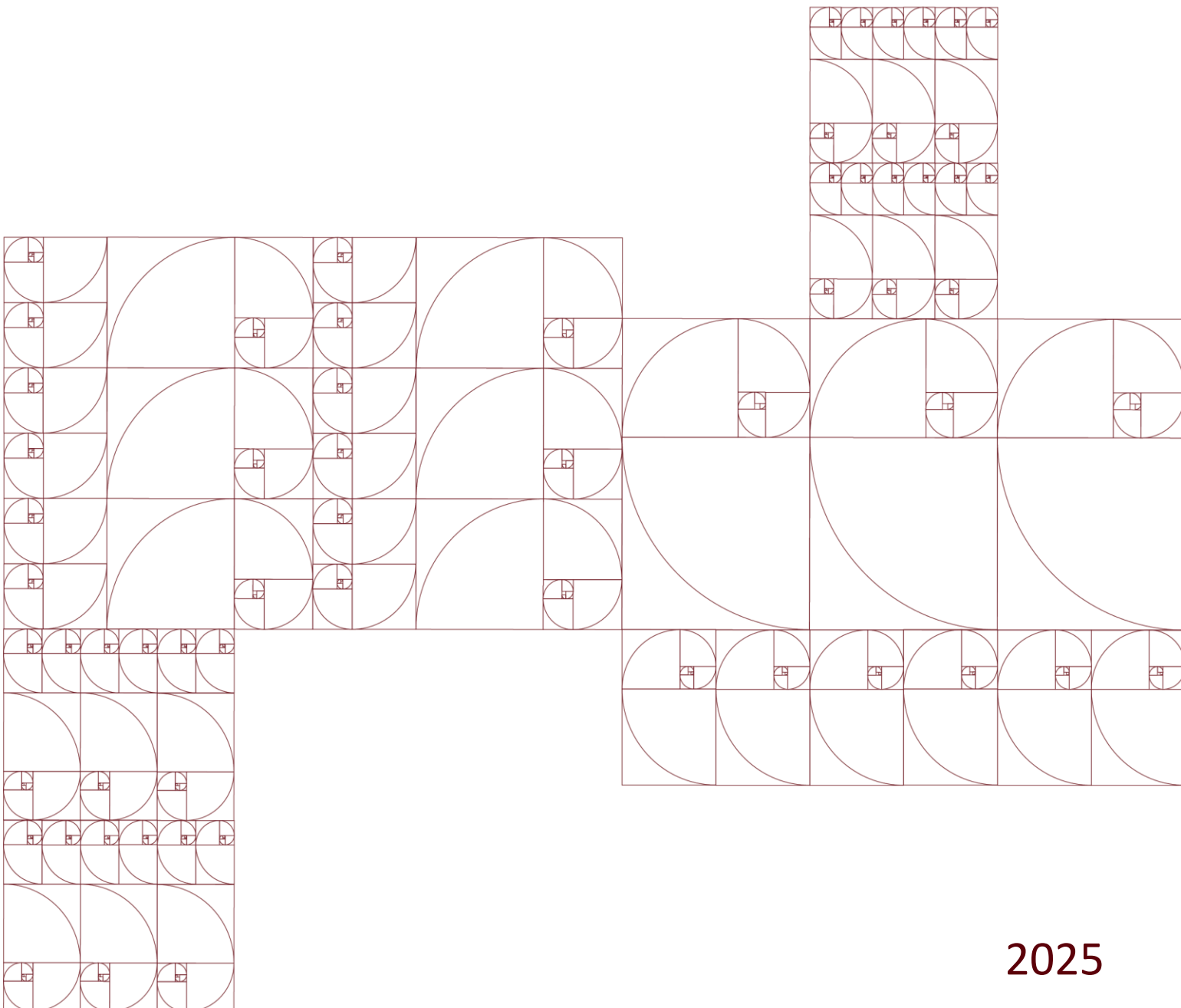




# FEEDBACK ON PROGRESS AFTER INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW



*The present report is one of the steps in the follow up, which is an integral part of an external review of higher education institutions (HEI) in Lithuania. The follow up starts after the institutional accreditation decision comes into force and is aimed at implementing recommendations received during the external review. It consists of several steps: an action plan, a follow up report, and external feedback on progress.*

*Within six months (in case of a positive external evaluation decision) or three months (in case of a negative external evaluation decision), a higher education institution prepares **an action plan** aimed at enhancement of its activities based on the findings and recommendations of the review.*

***The action plan** represents the strategic actions and decisions taken by the institution to address the recommendations and suggestions for improvement provided in the review report. **A follow up report** is prepared to reflect the progress achieved by the higher education institution in implementing the action plan.*

*This **feedback on progress report** is an outcome of a peer discussion process between the higher education institution and external peers to reflect on the enhancement efforts and achievements of the higher education institution and adjust its actions, if necessary. The process has been coordinated by SKVC (the Centre for Quality Assessment in Higher Education, Lithuania).*

*The first part **feedback on the progress report** aims to answer the following questions:*

- *Are outcomes of the review appropriately addressed by the provisioned actions?*
- *Do the actions have clear links with specific outputs aimed at enhancement?*
- *Is there measurable and sufficient progress already achieved?*
- *Are there any suggestions and/or commendations in terms of actions taken and/or provisioned?*
- *Are there any potential challenges in implementing the recommendations?*

*The second part of the report aims to address the self-identified area of enhancement chosen by the institution through bench learning.*

## **Timeline of the Institutional Review**

The institutional review visit took place from 11 May to 13 May 2021

The decision on accreditation granting a 7-year accreditation came into force on: 2 September 2021

## **Timeline of the Follow Up**

Actions taken by the institution:

- The action plan has been approved by the institution on 8 October 2021
- The progress report has been approved by the institution on 21 November 2024

The panel tasked with providing feedback on progress consisted of the following experts:

- Mag. Dr. Oliver Vettori, Dean Accreditation and Quality Management & Director Program Management and Teaching and Learning, WU Vienna University of Economics and Business addressed the progress made after institutional review for each of the evaluation areas;
- Ceren Genç, Team Leader, International Students Admission, Utrecht University addressed the self-identified enhancement area of international students by sharing the experience of Utrecht University.

The external progress visit was split into two parts and took place on 14 March 2025 and 23 April 2025.

The feedback on the progress report has been prepared in March 2025 and June 2025.

## 1. Progress in the Evaluation Areas after Institutional Review

### Introduction

The documentation (the action plan as well as the progress report) received before the online meeting was well prepared, clearly structured and easy to follow. The presentation prepared by ISM University of Management and Economics (ISM) for the online meeting further helped understanding and served as a means to focus on key achievements – which seemed even more relevant, as the list of actions taken is impressive, but at the same time too comprehensive to cover in detail.

The online meeting itself was constructive, with ISM's representatives being particularly open and outspoken, but also ready to listen to any feedback. The leadership team seems to be collaborating in a meaningful way and the whole staff present gave the impression of caring about the institution's continuous improvement and of being willing to invest as much as possible in order to ensure success.

### Management

With regard to "Management" as an Evaluation Area, ISM has visibly invested a lot of time and effort. The list of improvement actions that have been initiated is impressive; for the first recommendation alone, ISM lists eight improvement actions that have been implemented and three that are planned for the future. Depending on how one counts, overall there are more than 60 individual improvement actions listed and identified. Maybe, but this is a minor quibble, there are even too many of them to keep an eye on. It also seems clear what the institution wants to achieve through the actions. Not all actions have measures of success that are causally related to them (at least not in the materials received for the review) – again, taking the first recommendation as an example there are various actions aiming at students, yet the demonstrated impact is almost entirely not in the student area, but instead count event attendants or social media followers. However, it is evident that the university as such is on an upward trajectory, which seems to be effectively supported by the new management information system. As discussed during the meeting with ISM leadership and key staff, complementing the management information with some meaningful "coordinates" derived from carefully selected benchmarks will help the leadership team to determine the university's "flight altitude" and how this relates to its strategic goals more effectively. Overall, however, progress is tangible, and also traceable in quantitative terms.

### Quality Assurance

With regard to "Quality Assurance" as an Evaluation Area, the newly developed management information system (as mentioned above) is a major development; as are efforts related to the university's initial AACSB accreditation, not least the implementation of the so-called "Assurance of Learning" scheme from AACSB's respective framework. Again, progress is palpable, and by the time this report is written, the university might have already received news about the success of their accreditation efforts. Efforts to install a KPI-driven monitoring system are laudable. As discussed during the meeting, though, it is debatable if all the indicators are really "Key" performance indicators, not least because of the sheer number of indicators, including some that might be beyond ISM's sphere of influence. ISM is on a good way, but the system would deserve some further refinement, including prioritisation of those factors that help to determine the success of initiatives. As already realised by the management team, there is a need to constantly adapt the indicators; and to differentiate between those that allow to assess if a specific initiative was/is successful and those that help

determine strategic success in a more long term perspective. Numbers can visibly go up – but if the extent to which they do so is already “good”, cannot be determined from the numbers themselves.

### Studies and Research (Artistic Activity)

ISM has launched several new degree programs, to, according to enrolment numbers, good success. Efforts on the internationalisation of programs are particularly laudable, with a new ERASMUS MUNDUS Master having been started, which can serve as a “showcase” for internationalisation efforts; but, even more importantly on the broader scale, mobility windows having been introduced across the undergraduate portfolio. In line with the remarks on KPI above, it might be helpful to define “sunset clauses” for existing programs to determine under what circumstances they are not serving their purpose any more; though it has to be mentioned that this issue did not come up during the meeting, so the university might already have done so.

Research-wise, the increase in output is visible, and several indicators demonstrate that this is a priority area for the university. As discussed during the meeting, it might be helpful to be clearer about the relevant institutions to compare with, though. The university seems to be outperforming other institutions on the national level, but no information was provided on how it is doing compared to any international benchmarks it might have set for itself. Given the importance of internationalisation in ISM’s strategy, thinking about actual qualitative and quantitative targets and how to “calibrate” them by ways of comparing with others might be necessary at some point.

### Impact on Regional and National Development

ISM has implemented several actions related to its national and regional impact, not least by creating a role that is responsible for pulling together the different sustainability action lines. Other actions include analyses of best practices or the definition of selected focus areas connected with specific KPI. The university has smartly decided to focus on only a few SDGs (sustainable development plans), which will help it to live up to its goals. The programs recently launched (and mentioned above) are a good example of how this works. Relevant programs in this regard include a new Bachelor in Entrepreneurship and Innovation, a Master of Science in Business Sustainability Management and a Master of Science in Global Leadership and Strategy. There is, however, a slight risk that this also means stakeholders and external assessors digging even deeper into these selected standards, so ISM might need to demonstrate how they are going to “extra lengths” in relation to these standards, compared to other institutions with a broader array of SDGs to be covered.

### Conclusion

Overall, ISM gave the impression of a highly professional and strategic institution that has taken the recommendations from the review seriously and followed up on them in a meaningful way – and even going beyond the recommendations in some cases. The overall management system of the institution appears to have reached a quite mature state and appears to be well connected with the quality assurance scheme – with some potential to further develop with regard to orienting itself in the broader international higher education landscape. Teaching-wise, the university has revised and innovated its academic program portfolio, bringing in more external partners as part of the process. Research-wise, ISM has aimed at aligning its core research area with its overall mission and strategy, complementing the work the institution has started on selected societal impact focus areas. There is a slight risk that the institution is overextending itself – and in moving forward linking improvement actions and impact indicators in a more causal way might help

the institution to identify successes and shortcomings more effectively. Summing up, though, ISM has shown great capacity for change and gave the impression of a strong quality culture driving institutional development.

## 2. Self-Identified Area of Enhancement: International Students

### Questions Posed by ISM

- *What types of scholarships have you found most effective in attracting quality international students? Are merit-based, need-based, or country-specific scholarships more impactful?*
- *From your experience how can we structure our scholarship programs to not only attract but also retain high-performing international students throughout their studies?*
- *What are your views on using standardized international tests versus creating a university-specific admission test? What are the pros and cons of each approach?*
- *If we opt for our own admission test, what strategies do you employ to ensure fairness and security in an online testing environment?*
- *What best practices have you observed for the onboarding process of international bachelor students? How can we make their transition smoother and more engaging?*
- *What support services have you found crucial for international students' success and well-being throughout their studies?*
- *From your experience, how can we better leverage technology and digital platforms to enhance our recruitment efforts and reach a wider international audience?*
- *What partnerships or collaborations with international institutions have you found most beneficial in boosting international student enrolment?*
- *From your experience, what role alumni play in your international recruitment efforts, and how do you engage them?*

### Overview

This report presents the feedback and insights collected during the meeting held with ISM's International Marketing and Admissions Team. The objective of this report is to provide data-driven insights, international benchmarking, and strategic opportunities for further development. The following reflections are based on Utrecht University Admissions' experience and are intended to address the specific questions raised by ISM.

### **Scholarships and retaining high-performing international students throughout their studies**

The most effective scholarships for attracting high-caliber international students at Utrecht University are merit-based, particularly the Utrecht Excellence Scholarship (UES). This scholarship targets the top 10% of students worldwide and offers substantial multi-year funding, including full tuition and a living stipend, which makes it highly competitive and prestigious. It serves as a strong incentive for academically outstanding candidates and significantly enhances the university's global academic reputation. While need-based scholarships like the NL Scholarship provide valuable financial support and help broaden access, their limited one-year funding makes them less impactful in the long term. Country-specific scholarships, such as the Orange Tulip Scholarship and Martijn Zwart Fund, effectively support recruitment from strategic regions and contribute to international diversity and institutional partnerships. Overall, merit-based scholarships are the most impactful in attracting quality international students, with country-specific programs playing a complementary role and need-based scholarships providing essential but secondary support.

In the Netherlands, all students, including international scholarship recipients, are required to earn a minimum number of ECTS credits in their first year to continue their studies. Depending on the program, this requirement is typically either the full 60 ECTS or at least two-thirds of it. Failing to meet this threshold not only affects their academic standing but may also result in the termination of their residence permit, as it is a condition tied to Dutch immigration regulations.

To help students meet these expectations and stay on track, universities actively monitor study progress and offer tailored support. At Utrecht University, for example, international students are provided access to student deans, academic advisors, and psychosocial services. These support structures are in place for all students and are essential in helping students navigate academic or personal difficulties that could impact their performance.

By combining merit-based scholarships with clear academic requirements and a comprehensive support system, universities can ensure that talented international students are not only attracted to the institution but are also well-supported to succeed and complete their studies. We recommend that scholarship programs explicitly integrate these elements to maximize both recruitment and retention outcomes.

From Utrecht University Admissions' perspective—and reflecting broader Dutch practice—the decision between standardized international exams and university-specific admission tests depends largely on objectives and context. The Dutch system places high value on the VWO diploma (pre-university education) or recognized international equivalents such as the International Baccalaureate (IB), A-Levels, or European Baccalaureate. These qualifications serve as reliable, standardized benchmarks for academic readiness and are central to the admissions process. Relying on these recognized credentials ensures fairness, consistency, and efficiency in evaluating applicants from diverse backgrounds.

### ***Admissions and International Exams***

At Utrecht University, this approach aligns with national standards and allows admissions teams to process applications transparently and effectively. However, for selective programs—such as University College Utrecht—additional criteria like motivation letters, interviews, or program-specific components are used to assess student fit and non-academic qualities. In this way, Utrecht favors a hybrid model: standardized international exams establish academic eligibility, while supplementary assessments provide deeper insight into a student's motivation and suitability. This balance helps attract well-prepared students while ensuring the admissions process remains accessible, scalable, and aligned with institutional goals.

### ***What strategies do you employ to ensure fairness and security in an online testing environment?***

At Utrecht University, while university primary admissions criteria are based on nationally and internationally recognized diplomas (such as VWO, IB, and A-Levels), it makes use of university-approved subject-specific exams in certain cases—particularly in mathematics. For example, applicants who do not meet the required mathematics level for specific programs (such as Economics or Science degrees) may be asked to complete a Boswell-Bèta exam or the Online Mathematics Placement Test (OMPT). These standardized assessments are administered externally but accepted by Utrecht University as valid and secure measures of subject knowledge.

To ensure fairness and security in the online testing environment, several strategies are employed. These include:

*External Proctoring Services:* Exams such as OMPT are conducted with strict online proctoring protocols, including identity verification, screen monitoring, and environment checks.

*Standardized Content and Evaluation:* Exams are designed and administered by reputable external providers to ensure consistent difficulty levels, objective grading, and alignment with Dutch academic standards.

*Clear Communication:* Students are informed in advance about testing conditions, preparation materials, and technical requirements, ensuring transparency and equal opportunity.

*Access to Retakes and Support:* Applicants who experience technical issues or who narrowly miss the required score may, in certain cases, be offered the opportunity to retake the exam or receive academic advising.

Using this model allows Utrecht University to maintain high academic standards while offering a flexible and fair pathway for applicants who may come from diverse educational systems. If a university considers developing its own admission test, adopting similar third-party proctoring tools, standardized test design practices, and student support systems is essential to ensure fairness, reliability, and security in an online environment.

### ***Boswell-Bèta Exam***

The Boswell-Bèta program offers VWO-level access exams in subjects including Mathematics A and B. It's widely accepted by Dutch universities—including Utrecht University—for applicants needing to demonstrate subject-level readiness.

🔗 Official link: James Boswell Access Exams [ople.uva.nl/14boswell-beta.nl/14boswell-beta.nl/14](https://ople.uva.nl/14boswell-beta.nl/14boswell-beta.nl/14)

### ***Online Mathematics Placement Test (OMPT)***

The OMPT is an online, proctored mathematics admissions test administered via the Sowiso platform and used by Utrecht University and other Dutch institutions. It's secure, flexible, and provides detailed score breakdowns.

🔗 Official link: OMPT – Online Admissions Tests for Mathematics [eur.nl+9omptest.org+9](https://eur.nl+9omptest.org+9)

### ***Onboarding process of international bachelor students:***

#### *Structured Early Engagement*

Combine pre-arrival webinars and checklists (e.g., visa steps, insurance) with an engaging Welcome Week—featuring mentor-led small groups to both guide and connect students from day one .

#### *Integrated Academic & Social Orientation*

Incorporate academic expectations and integrity (e.g., UU Code of Conduct) alongside social icebreakers and city orientation. Students get guided into the Dutch academic culture and peer networks simultaneously [students.uu.nl+15uu.nl+15vu.nl+15reddit.com+1uu.nl+1](https://students.uu.nl+15uu.nl+15vu.nl+15reddit.com+1uu.nl+1).

#### *Central Hub for Practical Formalities*

Emulate Utrecht and Twente by hosting a one-stop onboarding market: a single event where students arrange registration, housing, insurance, banking, and healthcare—all while meeting supportive staff and peers [eur.nlutwente.nl](https://eur.nlutwente.nl).

### *Ongoing Mentoring & Checkpoints*

Extend support beyond Welcome Week with regular check-ins—academic advisors or student deans can follow up on students' adaptation, academic demands, and emotional well-being throughout the year.

By structuring onboarding in layered phases—*pre-arrival, first-week immersion, formalities hub, and follow-up support*—and ensuring cohesive collaboration between admissions and marketing, universities can significantly smooth the transition for international bachelor students. These best practices foster belonging, academic integration, and retention—making the experience more engaging and successful.

### ***Digital Platforms & Technology for Recruitment***

#### *- Virtual Events & Summer Schools*

Utrecht Summer School attracts ~3,000 global students via a mix of in-person and **online courses**, supported by digital orientation and social programmes—showcasing academic and cultural life remotely.

#### *- Dynamic Social & Content Marketing*

Utrecht's Faculties (e.g. Geosciences) use dedicated communications and marketing teams to drive targeted campaigns via social media, newsletters, and student-student video stories [uu.nl](https://uu.nl).

#### *- Webinars & Online Open Days*

Masters programmes like New Media & Digital Culture host online open days with Q&A, faculty panels, and virtual campus tours to engage global audiences [digimarconutrecht.com+4uu.nl+4students.uu.nl+4](https://digimarconutrecht.com+4uu.nl+4students.uu.nl+4).

#### *- Data-Driven Platforms*

Dutch universities partner with platforms like Studyportal—a major lead source—leveraging analytics to personalize digital ads and outreach .

### ***Alumni***

At Utrecht University, alumni play a valuable and strategic role in our international recruitment efforts. Alumni from a wide range of countries are actively engaged by inviting them to participate in pre-admission outreach events as well as country-specific pre-departure sessions. Their presence adds authenticity and relatability to administration messaging, as prospective students often find it reassuring to hear first-hand experiences from someone who shares their cultural or educational background. In addition to serving as ambassadors, many of the university alumni contribute financially to the university's internationalization efforts. A strong example is the Utrecht Excellence Scholarship, where more than 50% of the funding comes directly from alumni donations. This not only highlights their continued commitment to the university's mission but also creates a meaningful cycle of support—where former international students help the next generation

### ***Suggestions***

Given ISM's international scope, report feedback consistently begins with the importance of aligning admissions and marketing functions. These two areas must work in close collaboration to effectively attract and retain international students. It is crucial that ISM positions itself not in isolation, but as part of a broader, country-level effort. International students contribute significantly not only academically and culturally, but also economically to the institutions they attend. However, recruiting and supporting them also requires

significant budgetary investment, including the hiring of international academic staff and the provision of high-quality student services to ensure their success.

ISM is certainly on the right path not only with its internationalization efforts, but also through its pursuit of the AACSB accreditation, which reinforces its global standing. However, success also depends on targeting the right markets, building a strong student pipeline, and encouraging students to pursue further studies beyond the bachelor's level. Participation in international conferences is a valuable branding tool— ISM represented at such events, but there is also a need for tailored, market specific marketing strategies to be more effective in key regions.

Another important element is integration. Encouraging international students to engage with the local culture and language is essential for long-term success—something that has been a challenge in countries like the Netherlands. Factors such as cultural clustering and international student-heavy classrooms have, in some cases, limited deeper integration. For instance, at Utrecht University, while recruiting top international students has been a priority, this has at times unintentionally led to a divide with domestic students who may avoid competition or feel less connected academically. This highlights the importance of designing blended classrooms, language support, and integration policies that foster inclusivity and mutual engagement between local and international students.

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