

*April 2026*

# Ventspils University of Applied Sciences Consolidated Institutional Assessment



**Final report**



*April 2026*

## **Ventspils University of Applied Sciences Consolidated Institutional Assessment**

### **Final report**

---



# Table of Contents

---

1	Summary of Unit-Level Performance _____	2
2	Institutional Context _____	2
3	Overall Institutional Score and Rationale _____	3
4	Recommendations _____	4
	Appendix A FTE academic and research staff at units as reported in the self-evaluation reports _____	5
	Appendix B Unit scores assigned by disciplinary Expert Groups and Institutional Score _____	6



## 1 Summary of Unit-Level Performance

---

There were three unit-level assessments of Ventspils University of Applied Sciences (VUAS).

- The Field of Humanities was the smallest of the three in terms of full-time equivalent positions. Its overall score was 'adequate' (2). While research quality was 'good' (3), its impacts both in terms of impact on the discipline and socio-economic impact were merely 'adequate'. The research environment was also 'adequate' while the Field's development potential was 'good', suggesting that there is not only room but also potential for improvement
- The Field of Social Sciences was only a little bigger than Humanities, and was rated as 'good' overall. While scientific quality and impact were 'adequate', the economic and social impacts were 'good', as were the research environment and development potential
- The Field of Natural Sciences comprises both the Faculty of Information Technologies (FIT) and the VIRAC radio telescope centre. It had about four times as many FTE staff as Humanities. Its overall rating was 'good', with 'good' scientific research quality and impact, 'adequate' economic impact and 'very good' societal impact. The research infrastructure was 'good' and the development potential 'very good'. While the field was assessed as a whole, the Expert Group observed differences in the orientation and performance of its two main components. FIT's activities are more closely aligned with the profile of a regional university of applied sciences, combining teaching responsibilities with applied research of regional relevance. In contrast, VIRAC operates more strongly within international scientific networks and contributes to globally oriented research infrastructures. As a result, the overall assessment reflects the combined performance of these two complementary but differently oriented components.

Full details of the unit's FTEs and scores are in Appendices A and B.

## 2 Institutional Context

---

VUAS is a small regional university of applied sciences. Faculty numbers in the three units submitted to the international evaluation have declined from 113 to 76 between 2019 and 2024, and the proportion of them described as researchers has fallen from 81% to 76%. In 2024, total faculty numbers were 13 in the Field of Humanities, 17 in the Field of Social Science, and 46 in the Field of Natural Sciences that includes the VIRAC radioastronomy centre.

The approach of the Ventspils University of Applied Sciences to implement the recommendations from the previous International Evaluation of Scientific Institutions Activity (2019/2020) is sound and credible. The University addressed recommendations to increase internationalisation, improve research organisation and improve societal engagement. Unfortunately, the reporting of achievements is scattered, so it remains less clear what were the gains achieved by implementing each particular recommended action. Nonetheless, there appear to have been improvements in organisation (formulated specialisation areas) and decision-making structures, international collaboration (multiple international projects, including Horizon Europe and ESA), interdisciplinarity, modernisation of infrastructure and support for doctoral candidates and early-career researchers.

VUAS' vision and mission statement is clearly focused on education and regional development, consistent with the social role of universities of applied science. A strong motivation for doing much of its research is to keep the teaching current. VUAS supports the needs of the local labour market and industry. In contrast, VIRAC is focused on providing and exploiting technical infrastructure for astronomy – not only at Ventspils but also for other users – addressing international scientific needs but also contributing to national defence.



The defined and implemented mission, vision, strategy and governance approach of the Ventspils University of Applied Sciences and its units are credible and appropriate. The University is guided by its “VUAS Strategy 2021-2027” document, developed through stakeholder consultations and feedback, best-practice reviews, and the involvement of University management, students, academic staff, advisory bodies, as well as regional and national partners. This strategy is implemented through four interconnected development areas: research, studies, good governance, and lifelong learning. The strategy development is transparent and is reacting to national and local contexts. Starting, updating and discontinuing fields appears to be managed top-down and the degree of the units' autonomy is unclear in this aspect.

VUAS is implementing two doctoral programmes, in Humanities and in Social Sciences. Natural Sciences host and employ (in the radioastronomy centre, VIRAC) doctoral students from other universities and is currently finalising a joint PhD programme in STEM fields (International Socio-technical Systems Engineering). VUAS implements an institution-wide process to manage and quality-assure doctoral training, via its doctoral school. This provides consistency in the governance of admissions, supervision standards assurance, progress assessment, and smooth running of defence procedures. The VUAS self-assessment report would have gained from a clear statement on training of students and supervisors, as well as monitoring of the relevant processes.

The need to maintain teaching capacity (staff time to teach) across the broad range of areas needed to support undergraduate education tends to fragment research capacity, especially in small universities. Small scale also means there tend to be few central resources available to support research. It was not clear from the documentation provided to what extent VUAS is able to develop synergies across research that would mitigate effects of its small scale.

### 3 Overall Institutional Score and Rationale

---

Assigned overall score: **3 (good), a strong national player with some international recognition**

The Ventspils University of Applied Sciences is a strong national player with some international recognition. Two out of three units adhere to a good standard of research quality, with the average sustained at the good level. In aggregate, the three units' score is above the threshold for good performance, while across the evaluation criteria applied by the disciplinary Expert Groups, the scores are reasonably well balanced. Among the three units, the best performance is in the Field of Natural Sciences, which is also the biggest, while Humanities lag considerably behind, scoring below the threshold for good performance in the majority of the criteria. The average score is highest for the development potential. The two impact criteria (economic impact and impact on the discipline) are weakest, revealing the directions where it would be imperative to seek improvement. Given the relative sizes of the three Fields, the Natural Science Field has the strongest influence over VUAS's institutional score.

The institution-level strategy and its implementation appear fit to enable maintenance and improvement of research quality. While the strategic framework is set top-down, bottom-up contributions to forging strategy are seen as “feedback” and it is unclear to what extent are units delegated to define their own strengths and propose new thematic areas. There is appropriate recognition of the dynamic nature of strategic planning and its limitation. However, it is unclear how and how often KPIs and management process are revised and updated. Furthermore, the report does not reveal mechanisms for exchange of concepts and best practice among the units, with the aim to align with the best performers. The evaluation of the Field of Natural Science as part of the current international evaluation suggests there are opportunities to generate more synergy between FIT and VIRAC. Overall,



There appear to be opportunities for further institutional action to level up performance at the unit level.

## 4 Recommendations

---

As a small, regional university of applied science, VUAS needs to continue to balance its educational and research objectives. The three unit reports indicate there is good potential for development in research across all of VUAS and VIRAC. Outside VIRAC, a key problem is how to generate some focus on research themes in which VUAS can build critical mass and differentiate itself, largely using competitive funding, while continuing to support teaching. Current research organisation and governance support research quality and development but need to be complemented by mechanisms that identify synergies among the Fields and create thematic focus. Potential synergies between VIRAC and VUAS appear also to be under-exploited. Therefore:

- Existing efforts to support and develop the quality and impact of research should be maintained
- VUAS and VIRAC should do a bottom-up review of opportunities to develop thematic research foci across or among the research groups involved, develop and implement an action-plan for attracting the necessary funding. The review should report jointly to the rector of VUAS and the director of VIRAC on its conclusions and the process of implementation



## Appendix A FTE academic and research staff at units as reported in the self-evaluation reports

---

	FTE academic and research staff at units as reported in the self-evaluation reports																	
	2019			2020			2021			2022			2023			2024		
Unit	Academic	Research	Total	Academic	Research	Total	Academic	Research	Total	Academic	Research	Total	Academic	Research	Total	Academic	Research	Total
Field of Humanities	10.18	16.12	26.3	9.38	15.95	25.33	8.57	13.19	21.76	7.59	12.74	20.33	8.47	9.16	17.63	5.46	7.42	12.88
Field of Social Sciences	5.89	9.37	15.26	5.19	7.57	12.76	3.87	9.26	13.13	5.41	9.23	14.64	5.82	11.08	16.9	6.28	10.36	16.64
Field of Natural Sciences	5.44	65.6	71.04	4.84	57.55	62.39	5.05	54.96	60.01	6.67	45.18	51.85	6.34	44.53	50.87	7.07	39.1	46.17



## Appendix B Unit scores assigned by disciplinary Expert Groups

---

Unit	Unit scores assigned by disciplinary Expert Groups						
	Overall score	Quality of research	Impact on the discipline	Economic impact	Social impact	Research environment & infrastructure	Development potential
Field of Humanities	2	3	2	2	2	2	3
Field of Social Sciences	3	2	2	3	3	3	3
Field of Natural Sciences	3	3	3	2	4	3	4

Assigned overall score: **3 (good), a strong national player with some international recognition**