

# BRITISH ACCREDITATION COUNCIL INSPECTION REPORT

## Independent Higher Education (IHE) Reaccreditation Inspection

**INSTITUTION:** VUZF University

**ADDRESS:** 1, Gusla Str  
Sofia  
Ovcha Kupel District  
1618 Sofia  
Bulgaria

**HEAD OF INSTITUTION:** Professor Grigorii Vazov

**DATE OF INSPECTION:** 27-28 September 2017

**ACCREDITATION STATUS AT INSPECTION:** Accredited

### DECISION ON REACCREDITATION:

- Reaccreditation awarded for the full four-year period.
- Decision on reaccreditation deferred.
- Award of reaccreditation refused.

Date: 14 Dec 2017

**1. Background to the institution**

VUZF University (the University) is a private university offering bachelor's, master's and doctoral programmes. It is situated on the outskirts of Sofia in Bulgaria. Its aim is to provide high quality education that reflects contemporary practice in the areas of economics, insurance, finance, information technology and innovation management, that provides a sound basis for its graduates' employment and career progression.

In June 2017, an investment company became the major shareholder of VUZF AD, which owns the University, and a new President was appointed to reflect this. The Rector, its founder and previous major shareholder, remained, as did the academic management team, but some changes were made to the composition of the Board of Trustees, with new members replacing outgoing ones. The Board of Trustees, which is chaired by the President, has responsibility for strategy and finance. The Academic Council, which has responsibility for the academic management of the University, is chaired by the Rector.

The University was founded in 2002 by special resolution of the National Assembly. Approval was granted on the basis that the University would offer undergraduate courses in economics. In 2008, the National Agency for Assessment and Accreditation granted institutional approval for a period of six years and a year later approved all of its programmes and, in addition, permitted the University to offer courses at master's level. Institutional recognition followed one year later. In 2010 and 2011, the University entered into collaborative double-degree arrangements with the University of Sheffield. The Sheffield courses offered by VUZF are overseen by the University of Sheffield's International Faculty, City College, Thessaloníki, which also holds BAC accreditation.

**2. Brief description of the current provision**

The University offers ten of its own bachelor's programmes, 20 master's programmes and two doctoral programmes. It also offers three bachelor's and four master's programmes jointly with the University of Sheffield. Graduates of these seven programmes receive both VUZF and Sheffield awards. The Sheffield provision is delivered through its International Faculty, City College, Thessaloníki, where bachelor's students attend for their final year. Three modes of study are available, which are full-time, part-time by attendance and part-time by distance learning, with some attendance. Enrolment takes place annually and the academic year is divided into two semesters.

Total student enrolments at the time of inspection were a little over 1,000, comprising around 550 on bachelor's programmes, 430 on master's programmes and 40 part-time doctoral students. Of these, some 360 students on the bachelor's and master's programmes were studying full-time and 620 were studying part-time, including 117 distance learning students. The very large majority of students are Bulgarian. Other students are from Nigeria, Cyprus, Turkey, Albania, Ukraine and Russia, many of whom are domiciled in Bulgaria. Just over half of students are male and there are no students under 18 years of age.

Part-time by attendance students, part-time by distance learning students and full-time students are timetabled to attend at different times during the academic year. There are 27 full-time permanent teaching staff, 54 temporary part-time teaching staff, 27 administrative staff and ten ancillary staff.

**3. Inspection process**

The inspection was undertaken over two days by an inspection team comprising two inspectors and a student inspector. The University provided a considerable amount of documentation, much of it translated from Bulgarian. During the inspection the team met the President, the Rector, members of the Board of Trustees, senior management, teaching and administrative staff and students. Due to the timing of the inspection, only a small number of students, all Bulgarian, were available to meet the inspectors, but they represented bachelor's, master's and doctoral programmes. Five teaching sessions were observed. The inspectors conducted a detailed survey of the premises and facilities, including learning resources, staff accommodation, classrooms and recreational facilities. Throughout, the University engaged most constructively with the inspection process.

**4. Inspection history:**

<b>Inspection type</b>	<b>Date</b>
Full Accreditation	14-15 March 2013
Interim	31 March 2014

## PART B - JUDGEMENT AND EVIDENCE

The following judgements and comments are based upon evidence seen by the inspector(s) during the inspection and from documentation provided by the institution.

### INSPECTION AREA - GOVERNANCE, STRATEGY AND FINANCIAL MANAGEMENT

#### 1. The institution is effectively and responsibly governed

- |     |  |   |
|-----|--|---|
| 1.1 | The organisational structure, including the role and extent of authority of any owners, directors or governing body, is clearly defined, documented and understood by stakeholders.                                      | <input checked="" type="radio"/> Yes <input type="radio"/> No |
| 1.2 | The head of the institution, directors and other relevant persons are suitably qualified and experienced, understand their specific responsibilities and are effective in carrying them out.                             | <input checked="" type="radio"/> Yes <input type="radio"/> No |
| 1.3 | Policies, procedures and systems linking governance and management are well documented and effectively disseminated across the institution.  | <input checked="" type="radio"/> Yes <input type="radio"/> No |
| 1.4 | The institution engages in appropriate risk management planning, which is administered and monitored by named individuals.   | <input checked="" type="radio"/> Yes <input type="radio"/> No |
| 1.5 | The head of the institution, directors and other relevant persons are suitably qualified and experienced, understand their specific responsibilities and are effective in carrying them out.                             | <input checked="" type="radio"/> Yes <input type="radio"/> No |
| 1.6 | The governing body conducts regular risk assessment exercises in all areas of the institution's provision.   | <input checked="" type="radio"/> Yes <input type="radio"/> No |
| 1.7 | All relationships with other educational institutions and organisations are defined formally and are fully transparent, with institutions compliant with partner or parent institutions' requirements, where applicable. | <input checked="" type="radio"/> Yes <input type="radio"/> No |

**This standard is judged to be:**  Met  Partially Met  Not Met

#### Comments

There is a transparent organisational structure, with clearly defined roles which are well understood. Supporting documentation is comprehensive and widely available.

Members of the Board of Trustees, and internal postholders, are very well qualified and experienced. They work together well as a team.

Risk assessments are conducted regularly and scrutinised by senior management.

VUZF's relationship with the University of Sheffield and its International Faculty, City College Thessaloniki, are clearly documented, setting out each institution's responsibilities.

#### 2. The institution has a clear and achievable strategy

- |     |   |   |
|-----|---|---|
| 2.1 | The institution has a clear strategy for the development of its higher education provision which is supported by appropriate financial management.  | <input checked="" type="radio"/> Yes <input type="radio"/> No |
| 2.2 | There is provision for stakeholder input to inform the strategic direction of the institution.  | <input checked="" type="radio"/> Yes <input type="radio"/> No |
| 2.3 | The strategy is well communicated to all stakeholders within and outside the institution.   | <input checked="" type="radio"/> Yes <input type="radio"/> No |
| 2.4 | The governing body and senior management conduct a regular and systematic review of their own and the institution's overall performance and measure this performance against strategic targets. | <input checked="" type="radio"/> Yes <input type="radio"/> No |

**This standard is judged to be:**  Met  Partially Met  Not Met

#### Comments

There is a clear strategy for development which is underpinned by strong financial management. The strategy is informed by input from a wide spectrum of stakeholders and shared extensively.

Performance monitoring is undertaken on a continuous, rolling basis in order to facilitate prompt action where required.

### 3. Financial management is open, honest and effective

- 3.1 The institution conducts its financial matters transparently and with appropriate probity.  Yes  No
- 3.2 The institution's finances are subject to regular independent external audit.  Yes  No

**This standard is judged to be:**  Met  Partially Met  Not Met

#### Comments

In Bulgaria there is no requirement for private universities to be externally audited, although there is governmental oversight of the institution's finances. The parent company undertakes the role of external auditor. In addition, the institution's finances are scrutinised as part of its ISO accreditation. As a result, the institution's finances are subject to independent scrutiny from a range of bodies.

### INSPECTION AREA - ACADEMIC MANAGEMENT AND ADMINISTRATION

#### 4. The institution is effectively managed

- 4.1 The management structure is clearly defined, documented and understood by all stakeholders including governors, management, staff and students.  Yes  No
- 4.2 The head of the institution and other senior managers are suitably qualified and experienced, understand their specific responsibilities and are effective in carrying them out.  Yes  No
- 4.3 There are clear channels of communication between management, the governing body, staff, students and other stakeholders.  Yes  No
- 4.4 There are clearly delineated responsibilities and reporting arrangements at institutional, faculty, departmental, programme and course levels. This should include provision for academic leadership at programme and individual course level.  Yes  No
- 4.5 There is an effective committee structure with appropriate reporting lines which informs management decision-making and provides feedback to stakeholders.  Yes  No
- 4.6 Committees and other meetings have clear and appropriate terms of reference, are scheduled to meet regularly and are minuted accurately.  Yes  No
- 4.7 There is a set of comprehensive policies, regulations and procedures for staff and student conduct.  Yes  No
- 4.8 Management ensures that all information, internal and external, including publicity material, is accurate and fit-for-purpose.  Yes  No
- 4.9 A policy exists and is administered effectively regarding collection of and refund of student fees.  Yes  No
- 4.10 Management compiles reports at least annually presenting the results of the institution's reviews and incorporating action plans. Reports include analysis of year-on-year student satisfaction, retention and achievement, staff performance (including research and other forms of scholarship) and a review of resourcing issues.  Yes  No
- 4.11 Action plans are implemented and reviewed regularly, with outcomes reported to management and subsequently to the governing body.  Yes  No
- 4.12 Management monitors and reviews academic and administrative staff performance through a clearly documented and transparent appraisal system.  Yes  No

**This standard is judged to be:**  Met  Partially Met  Not Met

#### Comments

The University has very well-qualified and experienced staff in positions of responsibility. They work together well as a team.

There is comprehensive data collection and analysis and a clear reporting structure, with actions monitored and followed

up promptly where necessary.

4.8 Some outdated publicity literature was presented. The process for oversight of marketing materials needs to be kept under review to prevent any future issues. The University undertook to withdraw out of date marketing materials immediately wherever possible.

Inclusion of the publication date on all publicity materials would be helpful in ensuring its currency.

Senior management reports, at least annually, on each of its main areas of operation, with particular emphasis on student satisfaction and research activity. Action plans are implemented and reviewed regularly, with outcomes reported to senior management and the Board of Trustees. The plans detail the roles and responsibilities of named individuals and the time-line to be followed. All action plans are included in the Master Plan, which is reviewed monthly at Rector's Council. Any necessary remedial actions are implemented promptly.

The performance of academic staff is reviewed according to the requirements of Bulgarian legislation. Administrative staff are first appraised three months after joining VUZF and then annually.

Academic and administrative staff not only perform effectively, but they also work well together as a team.

## 5. Academic management is effective

- |     |   |                                      |                                     |
|-----|---|--------------------------------------|-------------------------------------|
| 5.1 | There are appropriate procedures for the proposal, design and validation of programmes of study which take cognisance of the mission of the institution, national imperatives, market demand and resource issues and reflect international norms. | <input checked="" type="radio"/> Yes | <input type="radio"/> No            |
| 5.2 | Management ensures that the stated curricula are delivered as presented in the prospectus and other related documentation, and that requirements from professional or other relevant bodies are met.  | <input checked="" type="radio"/> Yes | <input type="radio"/> No            |
| 5.3 | There are regular scheduled and minuted meetings of academic staff to review academic programmes.   | <input checked="" type="radio"/> Yes | <input type="radio"/> No            |
| 5.4 | There is an appropriate policy and effective procedures exist for the acquisition of academic resources to support programmes.  | <input checked="" type="radio"/> Yes | <input type="radio"/> No            |
| 5.5 | Appraisal of academic staff includes regular classroom observation which is used for the dissemination of good practice.  | <input type="radio"/> Yes            | <input checked="" type="radio"/> No |
| 5.6 | Academic staff are supported in their continuing professional development and enabled to develop further pedagogic techniques to enhance the learning of students.  | <input checked="" type="radio"/> Yes | <input type="radio"/> No            |

**This standard is judged to be:**  Met  Partially Met  Not Met

### Comments

The University has a clear focus on ensuring the employability of its graduates. Curriculum design and teaching is informed, and delivered, by persons with considerable knowledge and experience of contemporary business practice and market demand. Many staff continue to hold senior positions in business and industry and bring their knowledge to bear in ensuring the currency of the University's programmes.

5.5 As part of their induction, new staff are invited to observe teaching that is carried out by an established member of staff so that best practice can be effectively shared. Apart from this, classroom observations of teaching staff are not undertaken routinely. Introduction of a formal process of classroom observation for all would serve to inform staff appraisal and provide an opportunity for the enhancement of teaching.

Staff are supported in their professional development through internal activities, such as sharing experience, joint activities with the University of Sheffield and City College Thessaloniki, and sponsored attendance at external conferences and other events. However, there is scope for increased emphasis on pedagogical development.

6. **The institution is effectively administered**

- |     |   |   |
|-----|---|---|
| 6.1 | Administrators are suitably qualified and experienced and understand their specific responsibilities and duties.  | <input checked="" type="radio"/> Yes <input type="radio"/> No |
| 6.2 | The size of the administrative team is sufficient to ensure the effective day-to-day running of the institution.  | <input checked="" type="radio"/> Yes <input type="radio"/> No |
| 6.3 | The administrative support available to the management is clearly defined, documented and understood and appropriately focused to support its activities. | <input checked="" type="radio"/> Yes <input type="radio"/> No |
| 6.4 | Policies, procedures and systems are well documented and disseminated effectively across the institution.   | <input checked="" type="radio"/> Yes <input type="radio"/> No |
| 6.5 | Data collection and collation systems are effective and accurate.   | <input checked="" type="radio"/> Yes <input type="radio"/> No |
| 6.6 | Classes are timetabled and rooms allocated appropriately for the courses offered.   | <input checked="" type="radio"/> Yes <input type="radio"/> No |
| 6.7 | Comprehensive administrative records are organised and stored efficiently, easily accessed and used effectively.  | <input checked="" type="radio"/> Yes <input type="radio"/> No |

**This standard is judged to be:**  Met  Partially Met  Not Met

**Comments**

Administrative staff are suitably qualified and well supported in their roles. They are knowledgeable and have a good rapport with managerial and academic staff, and with students.

The organisation chart sets out very clearly the University's reporting arrangements. These are recorded in detail in the University's Statutes and Regulations, with which staff are conversant.

The University uses two electronic administrative systems. While these are effective, the University intends to update them and work towards greater integration of the systems. To this end, a new data management system, to connect personal student data with the online learning platform more effectively, is being developed.

7. **The institution employs appropriately qualified and experienced managerial and administrative staff**

- |     |  |   |
|-----|--|---|
| 7.1 | There are appropriate policies and effective procedures for the recruitment and continuing employment of suitably qualified and experienced staff. | <input checked="" type="radio"/> Yes <input type="radio"/> No |
| 7.2 | There are effective procedures for the induction of all staff.   | <input checked="" type="radio"/> Yes <input type="radio"/> No |
| 7.3 | There is a transparent and well-documented appraisal system for all staff.   | <input checked="" type="radio"/> Yes <input type="radio"/> No |
| 7.4 | There are clear and appropriate job specifications for all staff.  | <input checked="" type="radio"/> Yes <input type="radio"/> No |
| 7.5 | All staff are treated fairly and according to a published equality and diversity policy.   | <input checked="" type="radio"/> Yes <input type="radio"/> No |
| 7.6 | The institution has a clear policy regarding the handling of legal issues relating to the employment of staff.                                     | <input checked="" type="radio"/> Yes <input type="radio"/> No |
| 7.7 | Staff have access to a complaints and appeals procedure.   | <input checked="" type="radio"/> Yes <input type="radio"/> No |
| 7.8 | Opportunities are provided for the continuing professional development of administrative and managerial staff.                                     | <input checked="" type="radio"/> Yes <input type="radio"/> No |

**This standard is judged to be:**  Met  Partially Met  Not Met

**Comments**

Management staff are very well-qualified and highly experienced. Many maintain senior roles in industry and this has a positive impact on their approach to management of the University.

Administrative staff are well-suited to their roles and can avail themselves of development opportunities for which support is available.

Although there is no standalone, specific, equality and diversity policy, fair and transparent processes exist to ensure staff are treated fairly at all times. Notwithstanding this, it would be helpful to bring this material together, to provide a formal, standalone, policy on Equality and Diversity, and ensure its widespread distribution.

## INSPECTION AREA - TEACHING, LEARNING AND ASSESSMENT

### 8. Academic staff are appropriately qualified and effective in facilitating student learning

- |      |  |                                      |                                     |                          |
|------|--|--------------------------------------|-------------------------------------|--------------------------|
| 8.1  | Academic staff are appropriately qualified in terms of subject knowledge, pedagogic and communicative skills, and experienced for the courses to which they are allocated.   | <input checked="" type="radio"/> Yes | <input type="radio"/> No            |                          |
| 8.2  | The programmes and their constituent courses are delivered and assessed in ways that enable students to succeed by developing the knowledge and skills which will be required for final examinations or assessments. | <input checked="" type="radio"/> Yes | <input type="radio"/> No            |                          |
| 8.3  | Learning outcomes for all programmes are articulated and are publicly available.   | <input checked="" type="radio"/> Yes | <input type="radio"/> No            |                          |
| 8.4  | Academic staff are effective in recognising individual learning needs and preferred learning styles and adapting their delivery to meet these.   | <input checked="" type="radio"/> Yes | <input type="radio"/> No            |                          |
| 8.5  | Academic staff ensure the active participation of all students in class activities.  | <input checked="" type="radio"/> Yes | <input type="radio"/> No            |                          |
| 8.6  | Academic staff use a mixture of large and small group and individual activities, to encourage and support students' learning.  | <input checked="" type="radio"/> Yes | <input type="radio"/> No            |                          |
| 8.7  | Academic staff supply students with access to any additional learning materials as appropriate to support student learning.  | <input checked="" type="radio"/> Yes | <input type="radio"/> No            |                          |
| 8.8  | Academic staff produce schemes of work and detailed lesson plans and lodge these with the administration.  | <input type="radio"/> Yes            | <input checked="" type="radio"/> No |                          |
| 8.9  | Academic staff draw upon current research in their teaching.   | <input checked="" type="radio"/> Yes | <input type="radio"/> No            |                          |
| 8.10 | Students are encouraged and enabled to develop independent learning skills.  | <input checked="" type="radio"/> Yes | <input type="radio"/> No            |                          |
| 8.11 | Where appropriate, students are given the opportunity to obtain relevant workplace experience.   | <input checked="" type="radio"/> Yes | <input type="radio"/> No            | <input type="radio"/> NA |
| 8.12 | Students have access to teaching staff outside teaching and learning sessions.   | <input checked="" type="radio"/> Yes | <input type="radio"/> No            |                          |
| 8.13 | The institution provides students and academic staff with access to appropriate resources and materials for study and encourages and supports their use of these.  | <input checked="" type="radio"/> Yes | <input type="radio"/> No            |                          |

**This standard is judged to be:**  Met  Partially Met  Not Met

### Comments

Academic staff are well qualified with relevant, often current, professional experience.

Documentation supporting teaching, learning and assessment is comprehensive and well thought-out.

Considerable emphasis is placed upon developing students' skills. The provision of work placements is an integral part of the provision and is effective in preparing them for employment. At the time of the inspection only part-time bachelor's students were on campus. Consequently, only a limited amount of teaching could be observed. Therefore, it is not possible to draw upon extensive, direct, evidence of classroom teaching and learning techniques employed by lecturers.

8.8 Schemes of work, or course outlines, are available on the University intranet and provide useful information for students. These are monitored by administrative staff to ensure that they are maintained up-to-date. However, detailed lesson plans are not routinely deposited with administration and the preferred action, in the event of an unexpected staff absence, is to reschedule the class rather than deploy a substitute lecturer.

Teaching staff operate an open-door policy thereby providing students with extensive access to them outside class.

- |     |  |   |
|-----|--|---|
| 9.  | <b>Assessment is fair, well-organised and appropriate for the level and nature of the courses, and students receive timely and supportive feedback on their work</b> |   |
| 9.1 | Students are provided with an assessment schedule in which required coursework and revision periods are detailed in advance with clear submission dates.             | <input checked="" type="radio"/> Yes <input type="radio"/> No |
| 9.2 | Assessment strategies are relevant to the content and nature of the courses and focused on measuring students' achievement of the intended learning outcomes.        | <input checked="" type="radio"/> Yes <input type="radio"/> No |
| 9.3 | Assessment tasks are clearly written, indicating what students need to do to achieve stipulated levels of achievement.   | <input checked="" type="radio"/> Yes <input type="radio"/> No |
| 9.4 | Students receive detailed and supportive oral and written feedback on their assessments and overall performance and progress, which are effectively monitored.       | <input checked="" type="radio"/> Yes <input type="radio"/> No |
| 9.5 | There are secure and efficient procedures for the administration of examinations and other means of assessment.  | <input checked="" type="radio"/> Yes <input type="radio"/> No |
| 9.6 | The institution takes appropriate steps to identify and discourage cheating, including plagiarism and other misdemeanours, and to penalise offenders.                | <input checked="" type="radio"/> Yes <input type="radio"/> No |
| 9.7 | There are clear policies and procedures for students to claim mitigating circumstances and to appeal against marks awarded.  | <input checked="" type="radio"/> Yes <input type="radio"/> No |
| 9.8 | There are effective procedures for internal and external moderation at pre- and post-assessment stages.  | <input checked="" type="radio"/> Yes <input type="radio"/> No |
| 9.9 | The institution makes student records and transcripts available to its students in a timely manner.  | <input checked="" type="radio"/> Yes <input type="radio"/> No |

**This standard is judged to be:**  Met  Partially Met  Not Met

#### Comments

The assessment regime is transparent and students are well-informed on the timing and nature of assessment tasks, including grading schemes.

Students have ready access to lecturers and are appreciative of the written and oral feedback they receive on their assessed work.

Students receive clear instructions on avoiding cheating, including plagiarism, and staff are instructed to monitor students' adherence to these. Stiff penalties are applied where misdemeanours are identified.

Pre-assessment moderation is undertaken and student work is second-marked.

University of Sheffield programmes are also subject to scrutiny by external examiners.

- |      |  |   |
|------|--|---|
| 10.  | <b>The institution encourages and supports its staff to undertake research and other forms of scholarship and to engage in other professional activities</b> |   |
| 10.1 | Academic staff are encouraged and supported to undertake research in relevant fields and to publish their findings.  | <input checked="" type="radio"/> Yes <input type="radio"/> No |
| 10.2 | Academic staff contracts require academic staff to engage in research and/or scholarship relevant to their teaching and other duties.                        | <input checked="" type="radio"/> Yes <input type="radio"/> No |
| 10.3 | The institution encourages and supports staff to obtain additional qualifications.   | <input checked="" type="radio"/> Yes <input type="radio"/> No |
| 10.4 | There is a fair and transparent procedure for staff to seek financial support for their research and other professional development activities.              | <input checked="" type="radio"/> Yes <input type="radio"/> No |
| 10.5 | The institution provides time for staff to meet regularly to share and discuss current research activities and, if appropriate, invites external speakers.   | <input checked="" type="radio"/> Yes <input type="radio"/> No |

**This standard is judged to be:**  Met  Partially Met  Not Met

#### Comments

Staff are required to maintain a research profile and the University provides financial and other support for approved activities.

Staff are active nationally and internationally and benefit from ready access to an in-house publishing company. The result

is an impressive range of attractive publications. Staff events are held, often with external speakers. The emphasis of these is on research and there is scope for a formal programme of staff seminars focusing on developing other forms of scholarship, including pedagogical skills.

#### INSPECTION AREA - STUDENT RECRUITMENT, SUPPORT, GUIDANCE AND PROGRESSION

##### 11. **Publicity material, both printed and electronic, gives a comprehensive, up-to-date and accurate description of the institution and its curriculum**

- |      |  |   |
|------|--|---|
| 11.1 | Text and images provide an accurate depiction of the institution's location, premises, facilities and the range and nature of resources and services offered.        | <input checked="" type="radio"/> Yes <input type="radio"/> No |
| 11.2 | Information on the programmes available is comprehensive, accurate and up-to-date.   | <input checked="" type="radio"/> Yes <input type="radio"/> No |
| 11.3 | There are effective procedures to update information on a regular basis.   | <input type="radio"/> Yes <input checked="" type="radio"/> No |
| 11.4 | Students are informed of the status of the qualifications offered, including the awarding body and level of award.   | <input checked="" type="radio"/> Yes <input type="radio"/> No |
| 11.5 | Students are given some indication of the type of careers graduates may follow and any professional body exemptions that may be available.                           | <input checked="" type="radio"/> Yes <input type="radio"/> No |
| 11.6 | Students are informed of the full cost of all programmes, including costs of assessments and any required materials.   | <input checked="" type="radio"/> Yes <input type="radio"/> No |
| 11.7 | Students are informed as to the necessary English language requirements for entry on to programmes.  | <input checked="" type="radio"/> Yes <input type="radio"/> No |
| 11.8 | The institution has a clear policy on the accreditation of prior learning and prior experiential learning which is brought to the attention of prospective students. | <input checked="" type="radio"/> Yes <input type="radio"/> No |

**This standard is judged to be:**  Met  Partially Met  Not Met

#### Comments

11.3 The inspection team experienced difficulty in accessing some information on the website. Furthermore, some material was out-of-date. This has been addressed, but needs to be kept under review through regular monitoring.

Although students are informed of the full cost of their chosen programme before or at enrolment, the website, in English, states only the application fee and the range of discounts available. As this is likely to be the first point of call for prospective students, the University, notwithstanding the complexities brought about by the diverse nationalities of prospective students, is advised to review this situation. The inspection team was informed that the Bulgarian language website does include this information.

12. **The institution takes reasonable care to recruit and enrol suitable students for its courses**

- 12.1 Entry requirements for each programme are set at an appropriate level and clearly stated in the programme descriptions seen by prospective students.  Yes  No
- 12.2 A formal application process ensures that students meet the entry requirements and any claimed qualifications are verified.  Yes  No
- 12.3 Prospective students are properly briefed on the nature and requirements of the programme(s) in which they are interested and provided with advice on choosing their programme.  Yes  No
- 12.4 All application enquiries are responded to promptly and appropriately.  Yes  No
- 12.5 Any recruitment agents are properly selected, briefed, monitored and evaluated.  Yes  No  NA
- 12.6 Students receive a proper initial assessment, which includes language ability, to confirm their capability to complete the programmes on which they are enrolling.  Yes  No
- 12.7 Students with special needs are identified so that appropriate support can be provided.  Yes  No
- 12.8 Entry on the basis of accreditation of prior learning and prior experiential learning is subject to a rigorous process and is clearly documented.  Yes  No

**This standard is judged to be:**  Met  Partially Met  Not Met

**Comments**

12.5 Recruitment agents are employed, but are not briefed or monitored. These actions would prevent the recruitment of unsuitable students, although such instances are rare.

Students with special needs, who apply to join the University of Sheffield's programmes, are identified but this is not applied as systematically or transparently to applicants to VUZF programmes. Furthermore, a wider range of disabilities could be identified.

13. **Students receive pastoral support appropriate to their age, background and circumstances**

- 13.1 There is at least one named staff member responsible for student welfare who is suitably trained, accessible to all students and available to provide advice and counselling.  Yes  No
- 13.2 Students receive an appropriate induction and information on the pastoral support available to them.  Yes  No
- 13.3 Students are issued with a contact number for out-of-hours and emergency telephone support.  Yes  No
- 13.4 The institution has policies to avoid discrimination and a published procedure for dealing with any abusive behaviour.  Yes  No
- 13.5 There are effective systems to communicate with students out of class hours.  Yes  No

**This standard is judged to be:**  Met  Partially Met  Not Met

**Comments**

Administrative and academic staff demonstrate a strong commitment to student care.

In an emergency, students can contact the 24-hour Front Office Manager. However, it would be helpful if this were made more explicit, in a handbook, or on a poster.

13.4 While there is no evidence of discrimination or abusive behaviour, and there are statements relating to these issues, there are no formal, published policies or formal procedures for dealing with such behaviour.

#### 14. Students receive appropriate guidance

- |      |  |                                      |                                     |
|------|--|--------------------------------------|-------------------------------------|
| 14.1 | Students are given an induction to the institution, their programme of study and guidance on the use of facilities such as the library and IT.                         | <input checked="" type="radio"/> Yes | <input type="radio"/> No            |
| 14.2 | Additional support or advice on alternative programmes is provided to students who are judged not to be making sufficient progress to succeed.                         | <input checked="" type="radio"/> Yes | <input type="radio"/> No            |
| 14.3 | Students have access to a fair complaints procedure of which they are informed in writing at the start of the course and offered guidance in submitting a complaint.   | <input type="radio"/> Yes            | <input checked="" type="radio"/> No |
| 14.4 | Students have access to careers advice and guidance, including progression to further study, from a designated and suitably qualified and experienced member of staff. | <input checked="" type="radio"/> Yes | <input type="radio"/> No            |
| 14.5 | Students have access to careers information including prospectuses for further study.  | <input checked="" type="radio"/> Yes | <input type="radio"/> No            |

**This standard is judged to be:**  Met  Partially Met  Not Met  NA

#### Comments

14.3 Student complaints are considered, and taken seriously. However, the procedure could be brought to the attention of students in a more formal manner by a published policy, which is disseminated widely.

Students receive excellent careers advice and support, including help with writing curriculum vitae and interview techniques.

#### 15. Student progress is measured and recorded regularly on the basis of adequate and explicit data and effective remedial action taken where necessary

- |      |   |                                      |                          |
|------|---|--------------------------------------|--------------------------|
| 15.1 | Assessment outcomes are monitored to enable the identification of students who are not making satisfactory progress and there is prompt intervention where appropriate. | <input checked="" type="radio"/> Yes | <input type="radio"/> No |
| 15.2 | There is a clear and published policy on required student attendance and punctuality, with effective procedures and systems to enforce it.                              | <input checked="" type="radio"/> Yes | <input type="radio"/> No |
| 15.3 | Accurate and secure records of attendance and punctuality at each session are kept for all students, collated centrally and reviewed at least weekly.                   | <input checked="" type="radio"/> Yes | <input type="radio"/> No |
| 15.4 | Student absences are followed up promptly and appropriate action taken.   | <input checked="" type="radio"/> Yes | <input type="radio"/> No |
| 15.5 | Students are each allocated a personal tutor who is responsible for the regular review of students' progress.   | <input checked="" type="radio"/> Yes | <input type="radio"/> No |

**This standard is judged to be:**  Met  Partially Met  Not Met  NA

#### Comments

Attendance is recorded in paper form and then submitted digitally. During this process the administrative team monitors student attendance and can instigate prompt remedial attention. Student assessment records are stored electronically and easily accessed, allowing continuous monitoring of student performance.

Personal tutors address both the students academic and pastoral need. Personal tutors are seen regularly and go to great efforts to assist the students.

More generally, the close contact between staff and students ensures that any problems that students may have are identified and addressed at an early stage.

16. **International students are provided with specific advice and assistance**

- 16.1 Before their arrival, international students receive appropriate advice on travelling to and living in the country or location.  Yes  No
- 16.2 On arrival, international students receive an appropriate induction in issues specific to the local area.  Yes  No
- 16.3 Information and advice specific to international students continue to be available throughout their time at the institution.  Yes  No
- 16.4 Provision of support takes into account cultural and religious considerations. Where possible, students have access to speakers of their own first language.  Yes  No

**This standard is judged to be:**  Met  Partially Met  Not Met  NA

**Comments**

The website provides international students with comprehensive, helpful advice. Students are also given an induction and continuous support is provided by the administrative team.

17. **Where residential accommodation is offered, it is fit-for-purpose, well maintained and appropriately supervised**

- 17.1 Any residential accommodation is clean, safe and of a standard which is adequate for the needs of students.  Yes  No
- 17.2 Any residential accommodation is open to inspection by the appropriate authorities.  Yes  No  NA
- 17.3 A level of supervision is provided appropriate to the needs of students.  Yes  No
- 17.4 Students are provided with advice on suitable private accommodation.  Yes  No

**This standard is judged to be:**  Met  Partially Met  Not Met  NA

**Comments**

18. **The institution provides an appropriate social programme for students and information on activities in the locality**

- 18.1 Students are provided with appropriate information on opportunities for participation at events and other leisure activities which may be of interest.  Yes  No
- 18.2 The social programme is responsive to the needs and wishes of students.  Yes  No
- 18.3 Any activities within the social programme have been chosen with consideration of their affordability by the majority of students.  Yes  No
- 18.4 Any activities organised by the institution are supervised by a responsible representative with suitable qualifications and experience.  Yes  No
- 18.5 Students are encouraged to develop and participate in extra-mural activities.  Yes  No

**This standard is judged to be:**  Met  Partially Met  Not Met

**Comments**

A number of appropriate social events are arranged. These are often of an academic-related kind and the University might wish to consider broadening its offer to include more extra-mural events, such as sporting activities.

## INSPECTION AREA - PREMISES, FACILITIES AND LEARNING RESOURCES

### 19. The institution has secure possession of and access to its premises

- 19.1 The institution has secure tenure on its premises.  Yes  No
- 19.2 The institution has the legal right to use these premises for the delivery of higher education.  Yes  No
- 19.3 Where required, the institution has access to suitable external premises for academic or non-academic purposes of a temporary or occasional nature.  Yes  No  NA

**This standard is judged to be:**  Met  Partially Met  Not Met  NA

#### Comments

The University leases the premises from its parent company which owns the premises. The University is authorised to use the premises for the delivery of higher education.

### 20. The premises provide a safe, secure and clean environment for students and staff

- 20.1 Access to the premises is appropriately restricted and secured.  Yes  No
- 20.2 The premises are maintained in an adequate state of repair, decoration and cleanliness.  Yes  No
- 20.3 There are specific safety rules in areas of particular hazard (e.g. science laboratories) which are brought to the attention of students, staff and visitors.  Yes  No  NA
- 20.4 General guidance on health and safety is made available to students, staff and visitors.  Yes  No
- 20.5 There is adequate signage inside and outside the premises and notice boards for the display of general information.  Yes  No
- 20.6 There is adequate circulation space for the number of students and staff accommodated, and a suitable area in which to receive visitors.  Yes  No
- 20.7 There are toilet and hand-washing facilities of an appropriate number and acceptable level of cleanliness.  Yes  No
- 20.8 There is adequate air conditioning, heating and ventilation in all rooms.  Yes  No

**This standard is judged to be:**  Met  Partially Met  Not Met

#### Comments

Access is via one entrance, which is manned 24 hours a day.

The premises throughout are very clean and well-maintained. They provide a light, airy environment for students and staff.

Circulation space is spacious and well-appointed.

Signage and noticeboards are informative and well-presented, although notices in English could have a higher profile. This

would not only reflect the University's link with the University of Sheffield, but also lend a more international look and feel to the University.

**21. Classroom and other learning areas are appropriate for the programmes offered**

- 21.1 Classrooms and other learning areas provide adequate accommodation in size and number for the classes (e.g. lectures, seminars, tutorials) allocated to them.  Yes  No
- 21.2 Classrooms and any specialised learning areas (e.g. laboratories, clinics, workshops, studios) are equipped to a level which allows for the effective delivery of each programme.  Yes  No
- 21.3 There are facilities suitable for conducting assessments such as examinations.  Yes  No

**This standard is judged to be:**  Met  Partially Met  Not Met  NA

**Comments**

The classrooms are appropriate for the class sizes. They are functional and have a traditional, lecture-room, layout. They would, however, lend themselves to a more imaginative layout for more interactive learning sessions.

Where necessary, additional equipment can be requested by lecturers in advance.

There are sufficient rooms, including a large auditorium, suitable for conducting examinations.

**22. There are appropriate additional facilities for students and staff**

- 22.1 Students have access to sufficient space and suitable facilities for private individual study and group work.  Yes  No
- 22.2 Academic staff have access to sufficient personal space for preparing lessons, marking work and consultations with students.  Yes  No
- 22.3 Students and staff have access to space and facilities suitable for relaxation and the consumption of food and drink where appropriate.  Yes  No
- 22.4 Students and staff have access to secure storage for personal possessions where appropriate.  Yes  No
- 22.5 There are individual offices or rooms in which academic staff and senior management can hold private meetings and a room of sufficient size to hold staff meetings.  Yes  No
- 22.5 Administrative offices are adequate in size and suitably resourced for the effective administration of the institution.  Yes  No

**This standard is judged to be:**  Met  Partially Met  Not Met  NA

**Comments**

Students can access classrooms, the library and communal space for private and group work.

Academic staff offices, either individual or shared, facilitate staff preparation, marking and consulting with students.

Administrative staff offices are of a similar standard.

A cafe and dining area on the ground floor offers a range of beverages and food.

23. **The library is appropriately stocked and provides a fit-for-purpose learning resource for the student body**

- 23.1 The library is adequately staffed with appropriately qualified and experienced staff.  Yes  No
- 23.2 The library has sufficient space for student independent study and group working.  Yes  No
- 23.3 There is sufficient provision of learning materials including books, journals and periodicals and online materials.  Yes  No
- 23.4 There is a well-organised lending policy.  Yes  No
- 23.5 There are clear, systematic and effective means of ensuring the adequacy and currency of library stock to reflect staff and student needs.  Yes  No
- 23.6 Library opening times are sufficient to encourage and support student independent learning.  Yes  No

**This standard is judged to be:**  Met  Partially Met  Not Met  NA

**Comments**

Library staff are enthusiastic, welcoming and supportive.

The library has limited space, but is adequate given the scheduling of attendance of the students according to their mode of attendance and the increasing emphasis on online materials which students can access remotely. Although information is available online, it would be helpful for students to be given a hardcopy leaflet of key library information.

24. **The information technology resources are well managed and provide a fit-for-purpose learning resource for the student body**

- 24.1 There are sufficient computers of the necessary specification to meet student and staff needs.  Yes  No
- 24.2 There is provision of appropriate, up-to-date, software which reflects the needs of the programmes.  Yes  No
- 24.3 There is an effective means of ensuring the renewal of hardware and software to ensure efficiency and currency.  Yes  No

**This standard is judged to be:**  Met  Partially Met  Not Met

**Comments**

The operating system on the computers is currently being updated in line with global industry practices.

The University benefits from close working relations with some key companies who support it in renewing its hardware and software to reflect current industry practice. Although information is available electronically, provision of a brief hard copy guide to Information Technology (IT) resources for students would be helpful.

## INSPECTION AREA - QUALITY MANAGEMENT, ASSURANCE AND ENHANCEMENT

### 25. The institution has effective systems to review its own standards and assess its own performance

- 25.1 The institution undertakes regular and systematic monitoring of its operations.  Yes  No
- 25.2 The institution conducts periodic reviews of all aspects of its performance against clearly specified and appropriate performance indicators.  Yes  No
- 25.3 The nominated leader for each course produces an end of-session (semester or year) report which includes measures of student satisfaction, completion rates and achievement levels.  Yes  No
- 25.4 The nominated programme leader, drawing upon reports from its constituent courses, produces an annual programme report which includes analysis of year-on-year results on student satisfaction, achievement levels, completion rates and progression to further study or employment.  Yes  No
- 25.5 Reports, which present the results of the institution's reviews, evaluate its performance and incorporate action plans, are compiled at least annually. These are considered by senior management and the board of trustees and, where appropriate, shared with all stakeholders.  Yes  No
- 25.6 All programmes are subject to annual review and to full revalidation every five years.  Yes  No
- 25.7 Annual review and revalidation of programmes involve external assessors.  Yes  No
- 25.8 All quality management policies and procedures are clearly documented, for example in a quality manual or similar, and brought to the attention of staff and, where appropriate, students and other stakeholders.  Yes  No
- 25.9 Particular attention is paid to the quality of the student learning experience and to ensuring there is fair treatment of all students.  Yes  No

**This standard is judged to be:**  Met  Partially Met  Not Met

#### Comments

A combination of Bulgarian education laws, oversight by the University of Sheffield, external audit and internal processes, ensures that the University has appropriate and effective quality assurance and enhancement processes.

Internal quality assurance procedures allow for regular and continuous review of activities resulting in speedy enhancements to the student experience.

**26. The institution regularly obtains and records feedback from students and other stakeholders and takes appropriate action where necessary**

- |      |   |   |
|------|---|---|
| 26.1 | Views of all stakeholders, including academic staff and students, partner institutions and employers, are canvassed and recorded regularly through various means, including face-to-face meetings, feedback questionnaires and, where appropriate, formal student representation. | <input checked="" type="radio"/> Yes <input type="radio"/> No |
| 26.2 | The views of stakeholders are considered objectively, evaluated thoroughly and, where necessary, appropriate action is taken.   | <input checked="" type="radio"/> Yes <input type="radio"/> No |
| 26.3 | There are effective means of responding to stakeholders' opinions and keeping them informed of any actions taken and reasons for no action being taken, through formal feedback mechanisms.   | <input checked="" type="radio"/> Yes <input type="radio"/> No |
| 26.4 | Key performance indicators will include analysis of student outcomes in terms of the current year and year-on-year performance and any significant variations in student achievement between different programme components.  | <input checked="" type="radio"/> Yes <input type="radio"/> No |
| 26.5 | The institution engages with the wider community, such as employers and its alumni, in a formal and systematic manner in order to obtain feedback on the relevance of its provision and to identify areas for development.  | <input checked="" type="radio"/> Yes <input type="radio"/> No |

**This standard is judged to be:**  Met  Partially Met  Not Met

**Comments**

There is continuous student and stakeholder engagement with the University. Stakeholder input is canvassed widely and used effectively. Prompt action is taken, particularly where it is considered that the student experience could be improved.

The University's engagement with employers and business leaders is systematically embedded throughout their curriculum development and delivery of programmes. Communication channels are effective.

Stakeholders are informed when changes have been made and, where suggested changes are not possible, the reasons for this.

The University uses its network of external stakeholders effectively to ensure that its students are well-prepared for their careers, a fact borne out by the very high employment rate of its graduates.

**27. The institution has a strong commitment to, and procedures that facilitate, continuing enhancement of its provision**

- |      |  |   |
|------|--|---|
| 27.1 | All stakeholders are invited and encouraged to make suggestions for enhancement.   | <input checked="" type="radio"/> Yes <input type="radio"/> No |
| 27.2 | In their annual appraisal, all staff are required to identify where they have facilitated enhancement and to identify further areas requiring enhancement. | <input checked="" type="radio"/> Yes <input type="radio"/> No |
| 27.3 | End-of-session course and annual programme reports should include enhancements made and identify further areas requiring enhancement.                      | <input checked="" type="radio"/> Yes <input type="radio"/> No |
| 27.4 | Action plans are implemented and reviewed regularly within the institution's committee structure.  | <input checked="" type="radio"/> Yes <input type="radio"/> No |
| 27.5 | Staff professional development needs are identified through appraisal and other means, and measures taken to support staff to address these.               | <input checked="" type="radio"/> Yes <input type="radio"/> No |
| 27.6 | The institution has formal mechanisms to monitor the information it provides internally and externally and to make any enhancements deemed necessary.      | <input checked="" type="radio"/> Yes <input type="radio"/> No |

**This standard is judged to be:**  Met  Partially Met  Not Met

**Comments**

There is widespread canvassing of stakeholder views and a very responsive approach to delivering enhancements to the student experience, and the experience of staff. Student and staff performance are regularly monitored and examined for potential enhancements.

Staff demonstrate a clear understanding of, and commitment to, the enhancement processes and procedures which are designed to facilitate continuous improvement.

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**COMPLIANCE WITH STATUTORY REQUIREMENTS**

Declaration of compliance has been signed and dated.

Yes  No

## PART C - SUMMARY OF STRENGTHS AND ACTION POINTS

Numbering of action points aligns with that of the minimum standards

### GOVERNANCE, STRATEGY AND FINANCIAL MANAGEMENT

#### Institution's strengths

There is a clear organisational structure, with very well-qualified and experienced personnel who have a clear understanding of their respective roles.

The University's strategy is well-informed by input from an extensive range of stakeholders.

Actions required	Priority H/M/L
None	<input type="radio"/> High <input type="radio"/> Medium <input type="radio"/> Low

### ACADEMIC MANAGEMENT AND ADMINISTRATION

#### Institution's strengths

Very well-qualified and experienced staff in positions of responsibility work together well as an effective team.

Actions required	Priority H/M/L
4.8 11.3 Procedures for ensuring the accuracy and currency of publicity material must be tightened and kept under close review.	<input type="radio"/> High <input checked="" type="radio"/> Medium <input type="radio"/> Low
5.5 Classroom observations must be undertaken for all staff.	<input type="radio"/> High <input checked="" type="radio"/> Medium <input type="radio"/> Low

### TEACHING, LEARNING AND ASSESSMENT

#### Institution's strengths

Very well-qualified staff with relevant, often current, professional experience.

Staff are highly accessible to students.

Work experience is a well thought-out, integral part of the student experience.

The in-house publishing company offers excellent opportunities for staff publications.

Actions required	Priority H/M/L
8.8 The University must introduce sharing of good practice in devising lesson plans to ensure that they are all fit-for-purpose and easily accessed by administration when required.	<input type="radio"/> High <input type="radio"/> Medium <input checked="" type="radio"/> Low

## STUDENT RECRUITMENT, SUPPORT, GUIDANCE AND PROGRESSION

### Institution's strengths

A high level of student care is provided by administrative and academic staff.

Careers guidance and preparation support is of a high quality.

Actions required	Priority H/M/L
11.3 There must be regular monitoring of the website for accuracy and functionality.	<input type="radio"/> High <input type="radio"/> Medium <input checked="" type="radio"/> Low
12.5 The University must provide recruitment agents with a clear brief and/or training and monitor them closely.	<input type="radio"/> High <input checked="" type="radio"/> Medium <input type="radio"/> Low
13.4 The University must publish a formal anti-discrimination policy and procedures document and bring it to the attention of all students.	<input type="radio"/> High <input checked="" type="radio"/> Medium <input type="radio"/> Low
14.3 VUZF must publish a formal students' complaints policy and bring it to the attention of all students.	<input type="radio"/> High <input checked="" type="radio"/> Medium <input type="radio"/> Low

## PREMISES, FACILITIES AND LEARNING RESOURCES

### Institution's strengths

The very pleasant, clean, light and airy, and well-appointed accommodation includes staff offices and communal space, which offer an excellent environment for staff and students.

Helpful and enthusiastic library staff.

Actions required	Priority H/M/L
None	<input type="radio"/> High <input type="radio"/> Medium <input type="radio"/> Low

## QUALITY MANAGEMENT, ASSURANCE AND ENHANCEMENT

### Institution's strengths

Close liaison with stakeholders to ensure the continuing relevance of its provision and the employability of its graduates.

The commitment to continuous improvement through widespread canvassing of stakeholder input.

Actions required	Priority H/M/L
None	<input type="radio"/> High <input type="radio"/> Medium <input type="radio"/> Low

## RECOMMENDED AREAS FOR IMPROVEMENT

It is recommended that the University ensures that all publicity material displays its publication date.

The University may wish to consider introducing regular staff seminars, with an emphasis on developing staff pedagogical skills.

It is recommended that the University collates its existing documentation to produce and publish a formal Equality and Diversity policy.

It is recommended that the University includes on its websites more comprehensive information on fees payable.

The University is recommended to introduce a more systematic and consistent approach to identifying a wider range of

disabilities on student application forms.

The University is recommended to make the fact that, in an emergency, students can contact the 24-hour Front Office more explicit, in a handbook or on a poster.

The University may wish to consider providing additional student activities of a non-academic nature, such as sports.

It is recommended that the University gives greater prominence to English language material on noticeboards.

It is recommended that the University reviews the suitability of classroom layouts for more interactive learning activities.

The University should consider providing students with hardcopy guides to the library and IT provision.

The University should ensure an early update of the computer operating system.

## **COMPLIANCE WITH STATUTORY REQUIREMENTS**