



***KLAIPĖDOS VALSTYBINĖS KOLEGIJOS
VEIKLOS VERTINIMO IŠVADOS***

***INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW REPORT OF
KLAIPĖDOS VALSTYBINĖ KOLEGIJA***

Grupės vadovas:	Prof. Dr. Neil Cameron Sammells
Panel chairperson:	
Vertinimo sekretorė:	Ms. Christina Rozsnyai
Review secretary:	
Grupės nariai (kategorija):	Prof. Hannele Tiittanen (academic)
Panel members (category):	Prof. Dr. Robert Coelen (academic)
	Ms. Karolina Zelbienė (social partner)
	Ms. Rūta Šutinytė (student)
SKVC vertinimo koordinatorius:	
Review coordinator at SKVC:	Mr. Sigitas Puodžiukas

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I hereby certify that this is the final text of the institutional review report
of Klaipėda State College.



Prof. Dr. Neil Cameron Sammells

I. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

1. The purpose of the external review is to determine the quality of the performance of a higher education institution based on the findings of the external review, to create prerequisites for improvement of the performance of a higher education institution, to promote a culture of quality, and to inform founders, academic community and the society about the quality of higher education institutions.
2. This review report is based on the evidence given in the self-evaluation report, additional evidence requested by the Panel, information provided by the Centre for Quality Assessment in Higher Education (hereinafter – Centre, SKVC) and a site visit, where meetings with a wide range of audiences were held.
3. The Panel was composed of the reviewers, following the Experts Selection Procedure approved by the Director of Centre for Quality Assessment in Higher Education on 31 December 2019 [Order No. V-149](#) and included the following members:
 - Prof. Dr. Neil Cameron Sammells (Panel chair)
 - Ms. Christina Rozsnyai (review secretary)
 - Prof. Dr. Hannele Tiittanen (academic)
 - Prof. Dr. Robert Coelen (academic)
 - Ms. Karolina Zelbienė (social partner)
 - Ms. Rūta Šutinytė (student)
4. In summary on its impressions on the review of Klaipėda State College the Panel recognises the progress the College has made since its last external evaluation in 2016. It has addressed all main recommendations systematically. The Panel commends the increase in quality and quantity of applied research and is impressed by the quality culture that pervades the college and is taken on by its internal and external stakeholders. Students are committed, engaged, and supportive of Klaipėda State College. They feel supported and proud to be part of the community.
5. As a result of external review **Klaipėda State College (*Klaipėdos valstybinė kolegija*)** is given a **positive evaluation**.
6. Evaluation areas:

Area	Assessment with points*
MANAGEMENT	3
QUALITY ASSURANCE	4
STUDIES AND RESEARCH (ART)	3
IMPACT ON REGIONAL AND NATIONAL DEVELOPMENT	4

*5 points - **excellent**– the area is rated exceptionally well in the national context and internationally;

4 points – **very good** – the area is rated very well in the national context and internationally, without any drawbacks;

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

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

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

7. **5** examples of good practices were found; **14** recommendations are made.

II. INTRODUCTION

2.1. Background of the review process

8. The external review of Klaipėda State College (hereinafter – KVK or the College), KVK was organised by the Centre and carried out in December 2022 by an Expert Panel of international experts (hereinafter – the Panel). It was conducted in accordance with the Procedure for the External Evaluation and Accreditation of Higher Education Institutions and Branches of Foreign Higher Education Institutions, Evaluation Areas and Indicators approved by the Minister of Education, Science and Sport of the Republic of Lithuania (hereinafter – the Procedure) on 19 of December 2019 [Order No. V-1529](#) and the Methodology for Conducting an Institutional Review in Higher Education approved by the Director of SKVC on 9 of March 2020 [Order No V-32](#) (hereinafter – the Methodology).
9. According to the Procedure, the external review consists of the following stages: submission of a self-evaluation report prepared by the higher education institution to the Centre; formation of an expert Panel and analysis of the self-evaluation report; expert Panel visit to the higher education institution; the preparation of the external review report, decision-making on the external review as well as accreditation and publication thereof; follow-up activities aimed at improving the performance of the higher education institution, taking into account the external review report.
10. At the preparatory stage of the external review, the Panel received a Self-Evaluation Report (hereinafter – SER) with 25 annexes and a background video. SKVC provided to the Panel additional information about the College, as set in the Methodology (Chapter 26), including statistical data on students and staff; financial data; findings from the ex-post study field reviews, institutional reviews and evaluations of research and development activities; state-budget allocations for research activities; information on violations of academic ethics from the Office of the Ombudsperson for Academic Ethics and Procedures of the Republic of Lithuania. The Panel requested and was provided additional information, specifically, bachelor theses from different KVK departments.
11. The site visit was undertaken after a training session organised by SKVC staff 30 September 2022 and 7 October and a preparatory Panel meeting. Two additional online Panel meetings took place on 8 November and 5 December. The Panel visited the College on 13-15 December 2022, where it had meetings with internal and external stakeholders. On 16 December, the Panel met to review and agree conclusions and recommendations. The review report was finalised by correspondence and submitted to the SKVC.
12. In line with the Procedure, the external review focused on four areas covered by the evaluation indicators and related criteria: **Management, Quality Assurance, Studies and Research** and **Impact on Regional and National Development**. In analysing the evidence collected, the Panel also gave due consideration to the recommendations of the previous review from 2016. The Panel noted that KVK has carefully considered and acted on the recommendations, which is reflected in the SER, including a dedicated annex, and was corroborated in the site visit interviews.
13. On receipt of the SER, the Panel’s initial impression was how very detailed the description of KVK’s processes and activities is presented, while it missed a greater degree of self-analysis and

reflection. This is particularly notable regarding the weaknesses presented in the SWOT analysis at the end of the chapters, which are barely discussed in the text. Given that the self-evaluation process is considered a cornerstone of an external review procedure in that it serves as an instrument for self-reflection for the institution on its achievements, strengths and weaknesses, the Panel felt that KVK had missed this opportunity.

14. The SER testifies of KVK having involved a broad range of internal and external stakeholders in its procedures, but the SWOT analyses appeared perfunctory. The Panel also noted that the SER could have been more condensed and some repetitions edited out. The Panel was pleasantly surprised, however, when it learned during the interviews in the site visit that comprehensive self-reflection had in fact taken place on many levels of the institution. Interview groups were informed about the self-evaluation process and had contributed to the SER. This, the Panel wishes to commend.
15. The review of a higher education institution assesses each of the evaluation areas with one of five ratings: **excellent** – 5 points – the area is rated exceptionally well in the national context and internationally; **very good** – 4 points – the area is rated very well in the national context and internationally, without any drawbacks; **good** – 3 points – the area is being developed systematically, without any major drawbacks; **satisfactory** – 2 points – the area meets the minimum requirements, and there are drawbacks that must be addressed; **unsatisfactory** – 1 point – the area does not meet the minimum requirements, there are fundamental drawbacks.
16. The decision on **positive** evaluation is made when none of the evaluation areas is evaluated unsatisfactorily (1 point). The decision on **negative** evaluation is made when at least one of the evaluation areas is evaluated unsatisfactory (1 point).
17. In line with the Methodology the review report, prepared by the Panel, is reviewed by SKVC and sent to the higher education institution to submit comments on factual errors and the evaluations based thereon. The Panel revises the report in response to the comments from the higher education institution (if applicable) and submits it to SKVC.
18. The Panel did not receive comments from Klaipėda State College regarding factual errors in the report.
19. After the Panel considers comments from the Higher Education Institution (if applicable) and finalises it, the report is considered by the external Commission of the Higher Education Institutions' Review (hereinafter – the Commission), set up by SKVC. On the basis of the proposal, made by the Commission, provisioned in the Commission's regulations, approved by the order of the Director of SKVC on 8 of January, 2020 order [No. V-5](#), SKVC takes one of the decisions:
 - to evaluate the performance of the higher education institution positively;
 - to evaluate the performance of the higher education institution negatively.

The higher education institution shall be entitled to lodge a reasoned complaint to the Commission for Appeals formed by the Centre.

The decisions of the Centre and the Commission for Appeals may be appealed against in accordance with the procedure established by the Law on Administrative Proceedings of the Republic of Lithuania.

20. On the basis of the external review decision SKVC takes one of the following decisions on the **accreditation** of the higher education institution:
- to **accredit for a period of seven years** if performance of the higher education institution is evaluated positively;
 - to **accredit for a period of three years** if performance of the higher education institution is evaluated negatively;
 - to **provide no accreditation** if the repeated external review results of the higher education institution are negative.
21. SKVC announces the decision on the external review together with the conclusions of the external review and the decision on the accreditation of the higher education institution on its website. The higher education institution respectively announces the decision on the review of the higher education institution together with the external review report on its website and maintains it until the next external review.

2.2. Background information about the institution

22. KVK, situated in the port city of Klaipėda on the coast of the Baltic Sea in western Lithuania, is a public higher education institution with the status of a state college. The SER lists the national laws and regulations as well as the KVK Statutes and other internal documents accepted by the KVK Council that govern the College's operations.
23. As a public college, KVK was established in 2009 with the merger of Klaipėda College and Klaipėda College of Business and Technology. Its oldest predecessor institution was the Teacher's Seminary, founded in 1902, and the Pedagogy Department is still the second largest one in terms of student numbers, after Nursing and Midwifery. KVK ranks itself as the dominant higher education institution in western Lithuania and third in the country among colleges regarding the number of its students.
24. According to the SER and several annexes, the number of students studying at KVK in 2021 was 2495, with 913 new enrolments in 2021. That year, 55 full-time foreign students were enrolled. Of the total of 344 employees, 206, or 59.88%, were academic staff, one from abroad.
25. The mission of KVK, as set down on its website and in strategic documents, is
- “To provide high-quality studies in higher education based on professional practice, applied research studies and experimental development, and to create conditions for people to pursue lifelong learning:
- to contribute to sustainable regional development in collaboration with the local community and groups of government representatives;
 - use financial and material resources rationally by bringing together competent staff and fostering the values of the organisation;
 - think creatively and act meaningfully by developing personal and communal skills.”
26. As a college, KVK offers study programmes on the bachelor level (providing professional bachelor's diploma), as set down in the national legislation and KVK's Statutes. The SER lists 23 study programmes in 21 study fields as of 1 October 2021. They cover seven study field groups:

health sciences, social sciences, education sciences, engineering sciences, computer sciences, technological sciences, business and public management. They are taught in three faculties: business, technologies, and health sciences, with altogether ten departments.

27. Among the five centres serving KVK is an Applied Research Activities Centre whose task is to propose research topics and to coordinate research. In line with the rules and regulations, KVK conducts applied research and development. This encompasses work done together with and/or for social partners from business and local and regional government as well as partnering in European projects.
28. The faculties are dispersed in four buildings in the city, with the Business Faculty in two different buildings in the same street. The main complex, which the Panel saw during the site visit, is fully renovated, although the Panel learned that this is not the case with the other buildings.
29. KVK is active in providing life-long learning courses for companies and individuals in the region. They encompass specialty training courses for professionals as well as adult education for interested citizens.
30. The previous external evaluation of the College was performed in 2016. The international expert panel gave recommendations, how to improve activities of the College, and based on those recommendations, the Plan for Improvement of the Activities of the College in the Fields of Strategic Management, Studies and Life-Long Learning, Research and/or Art Activities, Impact on the Region, and National Development was prepared and implemented.
31. The Panel conducting the 2016 SKVC review made a number of recommendations in all four areas covered by the review and gave the College a positive evaluation
32. The international Review Panel would like to express its appreciation to the members of KVK for preparing the meticulous documentation on which this review is based. Specially, it would like to express its thanks for arranging the site visit of the Panel at the College and for the frank and open interviews with the range of internal and external stakeholders, which has allowed the Panel to get a clear picture of the quality of the institution.

III. ANALYSIS BY EVALUATION AREAS

3.1. Management

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

1.1. Compliance of the higher education institution's Strategic Action Plan with the mission, assurance of its implementation:

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

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

1.1.3. Regular monitoring of the implementation of the Strategic Action Plan is carried out and the results are used to improve performance management.

33. KVK “2022-2024 Strategic Action Plan” lists the College’s vision, mission, and values. Following various analyses, the plan defines three strategic objectives in line with the mission:

- Training highly qualified specialists that meet the needs of the labour market;
- Developing applied research activities;
- Organisational development.

The plan also sets down actions, tasks, and responsibilities as well as funding allocations for the activities. National and internal regulations pertaining to the activities range from the Law on Higher Education and Research of the Republic of Lithuania as well as European Union regulations to KVK’s Statutes, as approved by the government in August 2011. International documents and processes are also considered in the development of the plan, such as the *Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher education Area* (hereinafter – ESG) and the *2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development* issued by the United Nations. The Strategic Action Plan lists altogether 13 laws and regulations supporting their activities.

34. The Strategic Action Plan, in addition to setting down the College’s mission, vision and values, contains a table on the various predominantly external factors influencing KVK’s activities and analyses on whether each of these had a neutral, positive or negative impact. The factors range from national legislation affecting KVK to demographic factors, with one internal item, “Own funding from business organisations for applied research studies and staff training.” An analysis follows of the national and regional developments affecting the College, such as on its place in national rankings. Here, “KVK ranks first among all higher education institutions in Western Lithuania that have received targeted scholarships from the Ministry of Economy and Innovation for the third year in a row”. A SWOT analysis of KVK’s Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats is then followed by a section on strategic priorities for activities to be implemented and their funding sources. The priorities are aligned in a table with the sustainable development goals of the United Nations, whose compliance with which are included among the College’s priorities. The priorities, as well as the annual plan, include collaboration with stakeholders and regular analyses on how this is achieved. Subsequently each priority objective is given timelines for their completion and persons responsible for them. The key objectives, national and internal documents supporting them, and the frequency of their evaluation and consequent analysis are listed. The document concludes with a detailed “technical appendix” listing and defining the indicators for each evaluation criterion.

35. The Panel heard in the interviews with management, staff and students that the comprehensive Quality Management System (hereinafter – QMS, to be discussed in detail in section 3.2), which, among others, regularly examines the fulfilment of the strategic priorities, is a living document, taken on by all members of the College. Academic and administrative staff, students and social partners were aware of the priorities and managed their activities, be it teaching, research, stakeholder involvement or outreach to society, in line with them.

36. The Strategic Action Plan is evaluated in line with the QMS process, with assigned units, committees, departments and individuals responsible for specific focus areas. Based on the analyses, is updated annually. An action plan is produced for the following year, which lists the

- planned actions, indicators, persons responsible, and funding allocations. The College appears to be making every effort to adhere to action plan timelines and to the delivery of its key objectives.
37. The Panel explored the main developments of KVK in the last five years in all its interviews. The principal developments have been the streamlining of the curriculum in response to lack of demand for particular courses; the increased volume and quality of applied research activity; and the decentralisation of a degree of decision-making. These will be discussed in the relevant sections of this report.
38. The Panel heard in a number of interviews, including the one with students, that their views are taken into account. In fact, students clearly seem to play an active role in KVK government bodies and organizational units. During interview with students, Panel members heard that the involvement of their representatives in the KVK Council but also in discussion groups in developing the Strategic Action Plan has had huge impact on KVK's future accomplishments. Student representatives hold scheduled monthly and yearly meetings with the management of KVK in order to ensure the effectiveness of evaluations and their follow-up actions taken. For example, students provide information about subjects to the administration and express their opinion about every aspect of their studies and their experiences regarding the institution's services. Conversely, students provide feedback to KVK on what could be improved.
39. The Panel analysed the Strategic Action Plan and the Annual Action Plan for 2022. It found that the 2020-2024 plan is well developed and in line with the mission of KVK. Each of the three strategic priorities identified in the Plan, namely "high-quality higher education studies based on practical skills, research and technological progress; correspondence of applied research activities to regional and national sustainable development; and sustainable development of KVK", incorporate parts of the mission. E.g., to "provide high-quality studies in higher education based on professional practice" and "to contribute to sustainable regional development in collaboration" is reflected in "Strategic objective (01). To train highly qualified specialists, to develop applied research activities 2030 Sustainable Development Goals – Programme (01 01): Training highly qualified specialists that meet the needs of the labour market" is linked to two objectives: "To ensure a healthy lifestyle and promote well-being for all ages" and "To ensure comprehensive and equitable high-quality education and promote lifelong learning."
40. The subsequent actions described in the annual plan derive from the previous document, indicators and timelines a logically derived. The indicators include both quantitative and qualitative elements, such as numerical/percentage goals as well as satisfaction survey results. The Panel heard in interviews that KVK is well capable of following up on set down actions and working with the indicators. A summary of the Annual Activity Report for 2021, also provided with the SER, shows that the vast majority of the objectives was achieved. In fact, the Panel was impressed by the well-operating QMS and quality culture, as described in the Quality Assurance section of this report, and hence of the capability of KVK's stakeholders to fulfil its set objectives.
41. Based on the documentation received and especially on the interviews during the site visit with governing bodies, staff, students as well as social partners, the Panel is satisfied with the meticulous strategic planning carried out in line with the vision, mission and goals of KVK and involving a range of stakeholders. Interviews with students, academic staff and social partners all corroborated that internal and external stakeholders are involved in both strategic planning the execution of planned activities. All three groups are represented by law in the top decision-making bodies, where the strategy is accepted. But the Strategic Action Plan also lists the surveys KVK has conducted

among stakeholders to identify the strategic priorities and notes their participation in working groups discussing them.

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

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

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

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

42. The organisational structure of KVK is in line with the national legislation. The main governing entities are the KVK Council and the Academic Council as well as the Director. The KVK Council is responsible for strategic and budget decisions and appoints the Director. Its members are from inside and outside the College, including two students. The Academic Council is an internal body that decides on all academic matters and also includes students. The Director is the College's top manager and represents it externally.
43. The Director oversees the Head of the Quality Centre, the Head of Financing and Accounting, as well as the Deputy Directors for Strategic Development and for Infrastructure.
44. The three faculties, under the Deputy Director for Studies and Research, are headed by deans and vice-deans, with heads or directors overseeing the departments, centres and service and management units. Additionally, KVK has set up management and advisory bodies to support its activities, including, as listed in the SER, the "KVK Management, the Directorate, the Dean's Office and the Research Council, the Labour Council; the KVK Student Union, KVK student self-governing body".
45. The Statute and internal documents set down the responsibilities for each group. The documents describe the responsibilities and legal documents governing the various positions. The Panel took the view that there is nothing exceptional in the governance structure of the College, being in line with the national legislation as well as similar structures in many similar higher education institutions in Europe. The Panel felt that the respective accountabilities of the different bodies involved in that governance were understood, clearly defined, and acted upon.
46. The participation of students is in Study Programme Committees, the Academic Ethics Committee, the Directorate meetings, the Student Union, the Academic Council, the Council, and in various committees, working groups and meetings. The Panel was pleased to see a strong student involvement in decision-making bodies on all levels. It was evident from the interview with students, staff and management that student involvement is useful to all faculties and the leadership.
47. KVK has set up a QMS. The comprehensive process includes regular reviews of the management structure of the College. Changes to the structure are implemented as needed, such as when a centre or department were closed. Funding allocation adjustments are also implemented in line with QMS outcomes.
48. Social partners are represented in the KVK Council with five of the eleven members. As such they participate in the decisions on strategy with input about the needs of business, industry and the community. The Panel heard in the interview with external stakeholders that they participate in programme committees, contributing to the design of new study programmes. The SER notes how

external stakeholders were involved in the self-evaluation process through questionnaires and focus groups, which was also mentioned in interviews.

49. The Panel was assured from the documents, and was able to corroborate it in the interviews during the site visit, that KVK operates as an autonomous higher education institution within the framework set down in national legislation and its statutes. The Panel took the view that social partners add value to the management of the College and, in particular, to the impact it has on the local region.
50. KVK stresses its philosophy of subsidiarity and decentralisation, allocating responsibilities at the lowest possible level. This is in line with the pervasive quality culture whereby all internal stakeholders are held accountable for their activities.
51. Documents of the College are listing eight risk and potential factors, both internal and external, and the measures taken to meet them. The introduction of the Risk Management Process in 2015 produced a “Risk and Opportunity Register”, which categorises high and medium risks as well as opportunities. Subsequently the factors causing the risks and opportunities, their impact and management are described.
52. The Panel noted that although the external risks predominate, as is the case in most higher education institutions in Europe, internal ones were also taken into account. External ones range from the changing legal environment to the deterioration of buildings, while internals tend to focus more on potential, rather than risk, such as the readiness of teachers and students to teach and learn in a virtual environment. Just as in the SER, here a bit more self-critique might be helpful for KVK. The Panel took the view that a more systematic use of benchmarking data would allow the College to measure its progress against its own objectives relative to the performance of other HE institutions: such benchmarking would enable the College to be more self-evaluative and self-critical. After ascertaining the well-functioning QMS and quality culture at the College, the Panel felt that KVK sufficiently oversees its functioning as to be sustainable. The missing instrument, the Panel found, is benchmarking against other higher education institutions, which would help KVK in setting its strengths and weaknesses into perspective (a recommendation is made in recommendations section).
53. Students’ involvement in the Strategic Action Plan is evident. KVK cooperates and coordinates with students and the Students’ Union. The Panel was able to ascertain in many of its interviews, with students and alumni but also staff and external stakeholders, that students are not only represented in the governing bodies as required by law, but are also active there. Student Union representatives channel their opinions into the discussions and are listened to. An example given by students in the interview with them was their complaint about the unavailability of food on campus. Subsequently a canteen with warm and cold food was set up. The Panel also heard that students are active members in internal bodies, such as study programme committees or working groups, including for the preparation of the strategy or the SER.
54. The Panel was able to corroborate in its discussion with stakeholders during the site visit that regular evaluations and discussions take place on various levels and result in the necessary corrections to documents and activities. The involvement of “social stakeholders” is set down in internal documents and the Panel heard from social partners about their extensive involvement in KVK activities. For example, the Panel interviewed a representative from the Klaipeda Public Health Bureau, with which KVK has a partnership since 2008. The collaboration extends to the

bureau suggesting work places for graduates to participating in a KVK commission, where she provides feedback about necessary competences for graduates. The Panel would like to *commend KVK for its extensive involvement of internal and external stakeholders, staff, social partners and alumni in decision making and planning.*

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

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

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

55. The QMS involves data collection on numerous levels, including management, financing, graduate tracking, and others, and via various databases. For example, the Study and Career Centre is responsible for the collection and systematisation of study information and for “timely submission of student data to state departmental and inter-departmental registers and databases”, as set down in the Quality Manual. The entire QMS extends to responsibilities on all levels of KVK and ensures the plan-do-check-act circle with set follow-up actions foreseen and carried out. The Panel learned in many interviews that members of KVK were not only aware of the system but practicing it day to day.
56. The Strategic Action Plan covers employment data, such as graduate employability assessment, employee job satisfaction and employers' opinions. The Quality Manual also covers “the systematic monitoring of graduate careers and employment” and the annual action plan tracks graduate employment rates. For example, a graduate tracking indicator set down in the Strategic Action Plan is the “Percentage of graduates employed 12 months after graduation out of all graduates who have graduated and are not continuing their studies (%)”, which was 85.33% at the starting date of 2020 and aims to reach 85-90% in 2024. The Panel heard in interviews that KVK considers the successful employment of its graduates as one of its strengths.
57. The KVK website in English, which at a glance is nearly as extensive as the Lithuanian site, provides access to various data, such as those listed in the Quality Manual or the rubric for students leading to Moodle and Edina. A dedicated rubric for students covers both learning and leisure topics. Also, this rubric presents financial information on the cost of studies and living as well as psychological and social support. The Panel learned from students that in the Moodle and Edina databases, students and teachers can find useful information on courses and supporting material in both Lithuanian and in English.
58. Information for foreign students is provided, including admission, living costs and recognition of prior learning. Social partners may find useful information via the headings Internationalisation, Erasmus+ or Projects. There is no dedicated rubric for social partners, but this follows international practice, as the website is not the usual contact point between a higher education institution and external stakeholders.
59. The QMS calls for regular internal auditing and follow-up actions. For example, the Quality Manual states, “Each year, KVK forms a large (13–16 people) team of QMS internal auditors on a rotational basis. In order to maximise the value of the QMS internal audit, auditors are appointed

from the KVK staff with different roles in the management of the QMS processes. For instance, the QMS process managers focus on ensuring cross-process interactions, heads of academic divisions (deans, vice-deans, heads of departments) add value by identifying opportunities for improving processes and procedures...”. In the interviews, the Panel was assured that the QMS is a functioning system taken on by the members of the KVK community. The QMS also calls for complying with the legal requirements of providing a range of information on KVK to authorities and, conversely, KVK accessing and using national databases.

60. The Panel was satisfied that the collection and analysis of data, as well as the clarity and availability of information is in compliance with the criterion. Students, including an international student the Panel interviewed, were satisfied with the data provided on the website, while external partner contacts were conducted through other, direct channels. The KVK is present in social media, such as Facebook and Instagram.

61. The Panel read in the SER and heard repeatedly during various interviews about the placing of KVK in the region and nationally and hence explored how the College benchmarks its achievements. The Panel heard about various comparisons KVK analyses but found that there is no systematic approach to benchmarking. Systematic benchmarking was mentioned neither in the SER, nor were staff or management able to provide relevant details in interviews. The Panel, therefore, felt that the absence of systematic benchmarking does not allow KVK to measure its progress or quantify its relative strengths as compared to other colleges in the region or the country, let alone abroad. While the QMS is comprehensive and elaborate, projections via such benchmarking should be integral to an institution that is managed in a self-critical and evaluative way. Therefore, the Panel *recommends that KVK develop more systematic approach to benchmarking and to use that comparative data to set the regional and national ambitions that follow*. This pertains to risk management, as discussed in paragraph 52, as well as other aspects of KVK, such as its standing in the region, nationally and internationally. Benchmarking would allow the College to track its own progress, measure its performance against other higher education institutions, and allow for more systematic self-evaluation.

1.4. Effectiveness of human resource management:

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

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

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

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

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

62. KVK has numerous documents regulating its staff. The processes related to staff management are covered in the QMS, but the Quality Manual lists also detailed regulations, such as the Procedure for the Preparation and Remuneration of the Teacher’s Workload; Procedure for Certification of KVK Teaching Staff and the Organisation of Competitions for Positions; Description of the Qualification Requirements for KVK Teaching Positions; Description of the Procedure for KVK Staff Qualification Improvement and an Equal Opportunities Policy.

63. Staff are hired by public competition and certified every five years, the latter involving a review of the staff member's work and progress as well as skills development. New staff are mentored and trained as well as assessed during a three months period. As noted in the SER, mentors "advise the new staff member, to provide a thorough introduction to the activities of the department, the internal procedures of KVK, evaluation criteria for staff members and to assess the areas where the new staff member needs to develop the skills required to perform work activities."
64. Staff development is both regulated in internal documents and practiced regularly. KVK has increased the number of its staff with PhDs in the last five years (please see para. 115-116).
65. Academic staff training, available for both full-time and part-time staff, ranges from English language courses, concluding in a certificate, to teaching and learning skills. Digital competences, trained for already previously, came into focus during the COVID-19 pandemic.
66. Non-academic staff work is also monitored and they receive regular training. The SER states that in 2019, 83.33% of non-academic staff received further training, and their ratio rose to 96.8% in 2021. The Panel heard in the interviews that non-academic staff is aware of, and participate in various training schemes.
67. Administrative staff feel that they are provided with opportunities for development. These are foreseen and implemented with the QMS. The heads of units plan the development of competencies of their staff and monitor its implementation. The SER notes that in 2019, 83.33% of non-academic staff underwent further training, a ratio that rose to 96.8% in 2021. For example, the Information Technologies Centre offers training in digital competences, and the Panel heard in an interview that both teaching and administrative staff were able to successfully continue their work from home after the COVID-19 pandemic lockdown started. A 2021 job satisfaction survey, conducted every second year, shows that 62.1% are satisfied with their work.
68. A considerable number of staff have participated in activities to improved their teaching, research, generic and course unit competences. It was noted in an interview that staff was able to implement online teaching after the lockdown due to COVID-19 in as little as two weeks, owing to their previously acquired digital skills. The training of non-academic staff is tailored to their particular skill-requirements, identified in their annual appraisals.
69. In addition to the re-certifications, staff performance is evaluated annually by the relevant department heads for academic staff and the relevant unit heads for other staff. Additionally, job satisfaction surveys are conducted. This is part of the package of career development, as tracked by the QMS, and is used by department heads in their annual appraisal of teaching staff and in staking out their career progress. Re-certification equally hinges on staff progress.
70. KVK staff numbers have reduced in 2018 and 2019, as compared to 2017 by 26.34 full-time equivalent positions, which KVK explains with the drop in the number of students. The decrease has levelled off since then. In the same period, the number of full-time research support staff positions was 9.5 in 2017 and 6.5 in 2021, administrative staff reduced from 40.5 to 36 positions and other staff from 25 to 24.5 in the same period. The College notes in its SER that the staff continues to suffice for the set tasks. This was corroborated in a number of interviews during the site visit. The Panel found no evidence that current staffing levels are inadequate, though as a matter of course the College needs to keep such levels under constant review, for which the functioning QMS is the adequate framework.

71. The Panel was satisfied that the criteria for human resource management are met. Based on discussion in interviews during the site visit, the Panel further explored how KVK foresees the development of student numbers and how it plans for future staff development and found that there is room for improvement in this area. The Panel heard conflicting views from senior staff as to KVK's future size in terms of student numbers. In one meeting the Panel was told that numbers would stabilise, in another that numbers would shrink. Such uncertainty does not allow for useful scenario planning and budget setting and needs to be addressed with clarity shared and understood by senior management. KVK evaluates current conditions extensively and implements short-term planning, but the Panel feels that the College would benefit from looking further into the future to refine its strategic approach. Therefore, the Panel *recommends that KVK develops a student number forecasting model that covers a 3-5 year period to support planning for material and human resources*. The Panel *recommends*, further, that *KVK share the student number forecasting model and benchmarking data with senior staff and ensure they understand its implications so that there is no ambiguity about KVK's relative performance nationally and its ambitions to either stabilise student numbers or plan for contraction*.

1.5. Efficiency of financial and learning resource management:

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

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

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

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

72. The Panel was provided with a detailed description of KVK's financial management in the SER, and had discussions with the financial administration. The budget planning, implementation and audits follow national requirements and are regulated by internal documents. The "Description of Budget Management Process" is part of the QMS, as stated in the SER. The budget is determined by balancing the submitted requests from departments and units and balanced with planned incomes. It is approved annually by the KVK Council.

73. Funds are received predominantly from the state budget, and additional income from tuition fees for paying students, EU funds for dedicated activities and for services. In 2017, funding from the state budget amounted to 3805 thousand Euros, reaching 4244 thousand in 2021. In the same period, paid services reached 1868 thousand and 2794 Euros, other financial resources 30 thousand to 35 thousand, municipal budget 5 to 3 thousand, and EU and international funding 271 thousand and 445 thousand, respectively.

74. KVK systematically renovates its buildings and, in fact, its interviews were conducted in a recently refurbished complex. One of the two dormitory buildings was said to have been renovated recently as well. The Panel heard that building renovations extend to ensuring access for disabled persons.

75. Learning resources, including IT and the library (located in three faculties with the relevant collections), receive funding according to allocations balancing between need and availability, but were said to be satisfactory for the efficient implementation of their objectives. Students testified that IT and the library are accessible for any student. Using IT, students can access the online library

and browse to locate journal articles or bachelor theses. The Panel found no evidence that IT or Library resources are inadequate though as a matter of course the College will need to keep such resourcing under constant review.

76. Ensuring the KVK income-cost is a dedicated action line in the annual Strategic Action Plan for 2022. Moreover, KVK runs an internal financial control system, as described in the SER, whose key goals are

- “1) to use the State’s assets in an efficient, economical, and purposeful manner;
- 2) to receive timely financial information, develop precise, reliable financial accountability, prepare reports on programme implementation and other types of reports;
- 3) to follow legislation and contractual obligations;
- 4) to ensure appropriate setting of the budget and its implementation.”

77. The Panel felt that financial management is in competent hands, as testified in the interview with the heads of administrative units. Similarly, the discussion with staff responsible for real estate and IT infrastructure corroborated the description in the SER that learning resources management are managed in proficiently.

78. **In summary**, KVK operates under consideration of national legislation, European regulations, such as those set down for the European Higher Education Area and the ESG as well as the European Research Area, and internal regulations. It has a detailed Strategic Action Plan that is in line with its mission, vision and values, and is developed and followed up on with the involvement of internal and external stakeholders. KVK has governing and management bodies on various levels, which include students and, where appropriate, such as the KVK council of programme committees, also external stakeholders. In addition to the bodies required by legislation, KVK has additional management set down in its statutes. The Panel heard from both staff and students that the latter are active members in the community and that their voices are heard. Annual action plans ensure regular monitoring of achieved indicators and further actions. An overarching QMS covers all activities, including students, academic and non-academic staff and management, as well as physical resources. KVK has shown that it has implemented the recommendations of the last external review in 2016. Data collection is an integral part of the QMS, which includes their analysis and follow-up measures. The website of the College is informative, with a dedicated rubric for students. The Panel found that the area of management at KVK, including its mission, strategy, monitoring activities, human resources and financial management is operating efficiently and systematically. KVK has clearly enhanced its management in recent years, with the involvement of a wide range of internal and external stakeholders in its planning and decision making. While having developed a well-functioning evaluation system for current processes and resources, KVK’s opportunities for improvement include systematic benchmarking and forecasting. The Panel has mentioned this in interviews, pointing to the necessity of these instruments for realistic planning for the future.

79. **Judgment:** the area is being developed systematically, without any major drawbacks and is given 3 points.

80. **Recommendations for the area:**

- Develop a student number forecasting model that covers a 3–5-year period to support planning for material and human resources.

- Develop a more systematic approach to benchmarking and use that comparative data to set the regional and national ambitions that follow.
- Share the student number forecasting model and benchmarking data with senior staff and ensure they understand its implications so that there is no ambiguity about KVK's relative performance nationally and its ambitions to either stabilise student numbers or plan for contraction.

81. **Good practice examples:**

- The Panel commends KVK for its exemplary extensive involvement of internal and external stakeholders, staff, social partners and alumni in decision making and planning.

3.2. Quality Assurance

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

82. Extensive documentation is provided for all of the QMS procedures and their implementation. Documentation described in the SER and the Quality Manual indicates that the QMS documentation is publicly available. The Quality Manual covers the QMS policy and activities, with regular evaluations in individual documents. Responsibilities and timelines are set down and follow-up actions foreseen.

83. KVK provide a detailed description of how the QMS criteria are in alignment with the European Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance for EHEA in the SER documents.

84. Students participate in councils and committees at all levels from the highest level of KVK, namely the Council, to the programme committees. Where appropriate, other stakeholders were involved in the governing bodies and the various committees.

85. Support for students is available on many levels, which are described in detail in the SER and is available on the website of KVK (<https://www.kvk.lt/studentams/parama>). Academic support provided in KVK is regulated by the Klaipėda State University of Applied Sciences Description of the Procedure for Monitoring Students' Academic Performance and Providing Academic

Assistance, available at (<https://www.kvk.lt/wp-content/uploads/2021/12/Pazangumo-stebesenos-ir-akademines-pagalbos-teikimo-tvarkos-aprasas.pdf>) Moreover, the Panel was with a detailed organisational chart showing the components of the various types (psychological, financial, social, and academic) of student support, which shows an flow chart for student support. An adaptation scheme for first-year students was introduced after QMS evaluations revealed that in that year highest drop-out rate occurs.

86. Staff, both academic and non-academic, receive support both in training schemes and to further their career development. The latter include measures to promote research activities, such as financial support to attend conferences. International mobility counts among the indicators for career development.
87. Academic integrity, tolerance and non-discrimination, appeal and ethics are addressed in the SER. Among the public KVK documents accessible from the website the Code of Ethics specifically defines the terms and expectations, and a dedicated Academic Ethics Committee, comprised of 9 persons from the College's departments, is tasked with ensuring the implementation. A table in the SER shows altogether seven ethics complaints, two by students and five by academic staff, none by administrative staff. Four of these were upheld.
88. An "Appeals Submission and Examination Regulations" document sets down the specific rules for objecting to examination results. A single appeal was lodged in the last five years, in 2018, the outcome of which, according to the SER, was a higher grade for the student. On another level, disputes on procedures are regulated by "Rules of Procedure of the Dispute Settlement Commission". A single case is stated in the SER from 2021, which, after review by the commission, was judged as unfounded.
89. A comprehensive table provided in one of the annexes of the SER shows the eleven recommendations from the 2016 evaluation of KVK with timelines, with completion by 2018, the responsible persons and the details of their implementation.
90. The Panel was satisfied that the QMS and, more importantly, actual quality practices at KVK, are in compliance with the ESG.
91. In a number of discussions, the Panel heard about the conduct of surveys to gauge satisfaction with education, lecturers' performance (by students), KVK's and its internal stakeholders' relationship with social partners, usefulness of the education in terms of early career challenges (for alumni), and relevance of the programmes as assessed by social partners. Indeed, the procedures were presented as a matter of course. In other words, students, staff, alumni, and social partners were already used to the conduct of these activities. Their continued participation stemmed from the satisfaction that all voices were heard and acted upon wherever appropriate and possible.
92. It is fair to say that the QMS implementation has led to a culture of continuous improvement that monitors all the vital processes and infrastructure related to the delivery and conduct of the activities of KVK.
93. The Panel *commends the quality and rapidity of response to suggestions that were obtained from structured and systematic investigation as a result of the procedures of the QMS*. Indeed, at times the implemented response led to unforeseen and less than optimal consequences, which, in turn, were addressed relatively quickly due to the same process of continuous monitoring of the programmes and their outcomes. A student representative in a study field committee, for example,

- noted that where examinations were held only at the end of the course they are now held each year and consequently receive better results in the final examination.
94. The Panel was also impressed with the active and effective participation of students in councils and committees at all levels from the highest level of KVK, namely the Council, to the programme committees. Where appropriate, other stakeholders were involved in the various committees and their participation was also considered effective by the internal and external stakeholders. The Panel was impressed with, and *commends* KVK for, *the active involvement of all internal (students and staff) and external stakeholders (alumni and social partners) in its quality assurance.*
95. Of note is the involvement of alumni in programme committees, as became evident from the discussion with alumni, showing that adaptations of the programme for better preparation of new graduates for professional practice.
96. From the interview with students it was evident to the Panel that their voice is heard. E.g., their learning tool Moodle was updated according to student requests. This and other interviews showed that staff is prepared to respond to student wishes and follow up on them, indeed, it is clear that this is every-day practice. An example is the open discussions with students arranged in order to reduce missed attendance, where students and staff aimed to, and agreed on, the best option to resolve the problem.
97. A very extensive scheme for student support was evident from the documentation provided to the Panel in the SER. The discussions with various groups, such as the Deans, and academic staff, as well as the students, revealed individualised support for students at risk of failure. Students that were at risk of dropout received individual counselling by academic staff to understand their reasons for wanting to drop out and were offered assistance to resolve these issues, including counselling to attempt another more suitable programme.
98. The most striking example for how KVK attempts to resolve dropouts' concerns two students from the Nursing programme, who after counselling transferred to Social Work and have since graduation set up an organisation to support abused children. Students are also supported in the use of the generally available digital resources through seminars and workshops.
99. The Panel heard in interviews that the dropout rate is by far the highest in the students' first year. The SER provides statistics in a table, whereby 23.4% of students dropped out in the academic year 2017/18 and 28.2% in 2021/22, with similar ratios in the other years. This compares to the total dropout rate of 17.5% and 13.98% in these two years and similar numbers in the other years. The most common causes are dropouts before defence of the thesis, "lack of progress" and "voluntary". Dropouts in the first year are usual in higher education institutions in other countries. However, the Panel also heard reasons from students, including that some were unaware of what the programme entailed.
100. A number of procedures and regulations pertaining to students are provided on the KVK websites in the "For Students" section, and the "Degree Studies" section lists the programmes, with additional links to their details, including expected learning outcomes and a list of mandatory subjects. However, in order to help decrease dropout rates in first year, the Panel would like to *recommend KVK to continue efforts to reduce student drop-out rates, particularly in the first year by providing more detailed information for prospective students, particularly on the KVK website, and that information is made available also about the content of their courses with particular focus on the balance of theory and practice.*

101. From the documentation provided as well as discussions with staff the Panel was satisfied that staff received support in the conduct of their tasks, as well as ancillary support, e.g., to apply for funding for research or editing support for manuscripts in English. In addition, workshops on a variety of topics are conducted from time to time. Staff are also trained in the use of new laboratory equipment and were supported in the digital transition required to cope with the lockdowns during the COVID-19 pandemic. It was remarked in several interviews that this change-over was achieved in two weeks.

102. The Panel took note of, and was satisfied with, the documentation in the SER, as well as the publicly available documents related to academic integrity, tolerance, and non-discrimination, and the procedures for addressing any transgressions in respect of these issues. Consequently, it did not feel the need to investigate this issue further.

103. The evidence for the well-functioning QMS comes from the Panel's interviews with staff and from the documentation provided:

- The previous external review recommended improvements in access to and greater clarity of the strategic plan. The most recent three plans are available on the KVK website in a clear and unambiguous format.
- KVK Council meetings annual schedules are drawn up.
- The QMS has been aligned with the requirements of the ESG, shown in details in the SER.
- Study programmes were reduced from 27 to 23 as a result of the recommendation of the previous external review.
- During many of the meetings, the strength of the KVK programmes in terms of practice was emphasised.
- Documentation and discussions revealed that the mobility, both incoming and outgoing, has increased since the last review in 2016. It should be noted that the last two years, 2020 and 2021, were in the context of the global COVID-19 pandemic.
- During the meeting with the social partners, it was revealed that there were significant increases in the quality of final theses in multiple areas. (The Panel received two theses as additional material on request.) This is an attestation of the increased attention to applied research at KVK. The Panel heard that some student theses received special mention and were noted in the local media. The quality of the recommendations for implementation in professional local practice was also commented upon, alerting to greater levels of knowledge transfer into the local professional practice.
- The alumni and social partner meetings also revealed that there was a two-way communication of new ideas, procedures, and knowledge transfer between KVK students and staff through research projects and internships. Indeed, a business company was alerted by an intern as to the usefulness of a digital marketing strategy, for example.
- The meetings with the alumni and social partners revealed a best practice level of collaboration between social partners and KVK.

104. **In summary**, it can be concluded that the QMS of KVK is effective and a quality culture imbues all of the College community. A "Quality" section on the website publishes the Quality Manual, various student feedback results and other information. Compliance with the ESG is presented in an

annex to the SER and from the panel discussions it became clear that the compliance was active and sufficient. In addition, the integration of the ESG 2015 standards and guidelines was visible in a number of important documents including, the KVK Statute, Quality Policy of KVK, the Strategic Action Plans, various other strategic plans including marketing and communication, and internationalisation, as well as annual activity plans, and QMS process descriptions. The QMS was judged to be elaborate and functional as well as used by the College's stakeholders, with the plan-do-check-act principle ensured. Support for students and staff is described in the SER and corroborated in interviews. The Code of Ethics sets down the rules for academic integrity, tolerance and non-discrimination and appropriate bodies are functioning to handle them. KVK has been efficiently responsive to the recommendations of the previous external panel review. All these aspects were points of discussion with the various internal and external stakeholders of KVK and at all times there was ample evidence that the QMS was not a paper procedure, but part of the lived culture of KVK. In that sense KVK has a true quality culture that provides well-considered evidence to continuously improve the education of KVK. The Panel concluded that, in comparison with other similar institutions in other countries that have been within the ambit of experience of the panel members that KVK performs its quality processes to international standards. For instance, a key project on quality culture conducted under the European University Association in 2007 describes similar features of quality culture that KVK has implemented (https://www.enqa.eu/wp-content/uploads/EUA_QA_Forum_publication.pdf). In particular, the responsiveness of the staff to findings from the QMS to make improvements is to an international standard.

105. **Judgment:** the area is rated very well in the national context and internationally, without any drawbacks and is given 4 points.

106. **Recommendations for the area:**

- Continue efforts to reduce student drop-out rates, particularly in the first year by providing more detailed information for prospective students, particularly on the KVK website, and make information available also about the content of courses with particular focus on the balance of theory and practice.

107. **Good practice examples:**

- The quality and rapidity of response to suggestions that were obtained from structured and systematic investigation as a result of the procedures of the QMS.
- The active involvement of all internal (students and staff) and external stakeholders (alumni and social partners) in quality assurance.

3.3. Studies and Research (Art)

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

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

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

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

education institution;

3.1.3. Studies are based on research (art);

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

108. The Strategic Action Plan for the years 2022-2024 presents the strategic priorities, including support for studies and research development. They are in line with KVK's mission and vision to carry out high-quality higher education studies and to contribute to the sustainable development of the region. A "Procedure for the Applied Research Activity Management" which is noted in the SER explains the implementation, publicity of the applied research results, promotion, and presentation to society of the applied research activities of KVK's academic divisions and teachers. The adequate quantitative and qualitative evaluation is performed to ensure the level of the applied research activities. The SER shows that the average number of applied research during the assessed period 2017–2021 was 60 (50-67), and the number of applied research carried out with the international social partners annually varied from 6 to 12; the number of commissioned applied research activities varied annually from 11 to 20. The amount of the received funds from commissioned applied research between the years 2017-2021 has increased from the year 2017 being 9 537.18 euros to the year 2021 being 29 815.00 euros. Publications in scientific and other publications in 2017-2021 varied annually between 37 and 58. The set priority and activities support the development of the quality and diversity of applied research studies, and the relevant risks have been recognized and adequate risk management planned.
109. The KVK Strategic Action Plan includes plans and actions for continuously developing applied research activities. The Panel heard in an interview that KVK has a "Developing Applied Research Action Plan". The target is to ensure the competitiveness and the quality of applied research conducted at KVK. An example of the quality improvement of applied research is the increased number of the publications in the scientific journals. During the teacher interviews teachers explained how applied research has affected to their work and competences positively. They are able to apply their study results to their teaching work, and larger projects are done in a group with the help of the associate professors. The Panel is, therefore, satisfied that the unity of research and studies is implemented.
110. The College has five applied research and development priority areas: Sustainable Development, Food Technologies, Information Technologies, Health Technologies, and Inclusive and Creative Society, which are presented on KVK's website. The website presents the focus fields of those priority areas. The new technological innovations are the main theme throughout the priority areas corresponding to the competence requirements of the future professionals. The emphasis of technology in different priority areas also creates the possibilities for the multidisciplinary project implementations between the faculties, which were mentioned in the interview with academic staff.
111. Local stakeholders provide thesis topics for the College based on their needs. These topics were by invitation or suggestion and are given to the college on an ongoing basis. The spontaneity of the ontogeny of new problems creates in part the tremendous support that KVK receives from its social partners. There are regular and formal moments where these topics can be provided, e. g. during the meetings of the relevant program committees, but the spontaneous approach, involving lecturers on topics, creates the kind of dynamism that the Panel has experienced during the site visit.
112. Local stakeholders are also invited both as external expert lecturers in courses' implementation and consulted for programme design and updating. The SER lists "roundtable discussions, open

days, career days “Karjeros dūzgēs,” during individual meetings discussing the development of the required competences, topics for final theses etc.” as the fora for stakeholder input. In addition, social partners may commission theses on particular research expectations, of which several examples are provided. In addition, teachers explained that the research and development priorities are presented to stakeholders, which external stakeholders also corroborated.

113. The SER describes how KVK encourages the students to participate in conferences and publish the results of their research activities, noting that 297 such publications were issued between 2017 and 2021. Students participate in research projects with their teachers in the framework of their study programme as well as collaborators in research groups.
114. Statistics provided to the Panel by SKVC present comparisons of research and development at KVK vs. other Lithuanian higher education institutions. One table shows that income from R&D for the period 2015-2020 on „One full-time teacher ratio with incomes, received from R&D services on demand in 2015-2020 (in thousands euros)” is 1.5 for KVK where the average is 2.1, while the same for just 2021 was 0.7% vs. 0.8%, respectively. SKVC notes that “KVK lags behind the Colleges’ average in terms of the volume of R&D orders per full-time position, but is significantly ahead of the average in terms of points received for R&D work.” KVK is well aware of its slight lag and is doing much to improve the situation. The upgrading of staff qualifications, in terms of research degrees, forms the backbone of an enhanced research profile. The close collaboration with the surrounding related industries and organisations and the noticed increase in quality of the student research work points towards significant improvement of the R&D environment. The panel is confident that KVK will enhance its R&D per full-time equivalent staff profile notwithstanding its regional location.
115. Among the priorities for KVK has been the increase of scientifically qualified academic staff, with various incentives implemented, as discussed earlier in this report. The Panel heard in an interview that currently, 13 academic staff members are studying for their PhD. They may ask for reduced teaching load, and the consequent decrease in salary is made up by the government scholarships they receive.
116. The number of faculty members holding or studying for a PhD, presented in statistics in the SER, has clearly raised the integration of studies and research and contributed to developing students’ critical thinking skills. The SER provides statistics on PhD holders as follows: “The number of positions of teachers holding PhD is increasing steadily: 23.05 in 2017, 24.25 in 2018, 24.14 in 2019, 26.34 in 2020 and 30.37 in 2021. Ratio of teachers with doctoral degrees to the total number of positions held by teachers was 21.12% in 2021.” In order to raise the academic quality of the teaching staff, the Panel *recommends that KVK continues its efforts to increase the number of its academic staff with doctoral qualifications, and keeps under review its means of supporting them to do so, in order to ensure such support is adequate and equitable.*
117. The SER describes how the process of recognition of foreign qualifications, partial studies, and prior non-formal and informal learning is documented following the legislation and internal documents. It is stated in the SER, and the Panel was provided information by SKVC, that in 2021, KVK was given the right by an order of the Minister of Education “to implement academic recognition of the potential students’ education and competences relating to higher education that were obtained in the education programmes of another country or international organisations.” The “Recognition of Study Results” (hereinafter – recognition of prior learning or RPL) document with the RPL templates can be found on the College’s website.

118. The Panel concludes from the documents, information on the website, and the site-visit interviews that the set objectives in the areas of studies and research are relevant; the presented statistics in the SER and its annexes support the achievements in this area. Student satisfaction with their studies, according to a table in the SER, rose from 69.1% in 2017 to 85.9% in 2021. In the same period, graduate satisfaction rose from 5.06 to 5.48 on a seven-point scale, while “Employers’ evaluation of KVK graduates readiness for the labour market” rose from 88.39% to 91.6%. The relevance of studies at KVK was corroborated in several site-visit interviews, where the Panel heard about actions concerning studies and research, which are consistent with the strategic aims of the College.
119. The five research priority areas mentioned in para. 110 above correspond to the regional and national developmental needs set down in national documents. While the text of the SER did not analyse how the applied research and faculty members’ publications are related to each of the research and development priority areas, an annex titled “Key results of applied research, projects and other activities related to regional development of Klaipėda State University of Applied Sciences in 2017–2021” listed the projects related to the topic. In interviews with teaching staff the Panel learned that the research and development priorities and topics are related to the implemented study programmes, thesis works and faculty members’ research activities. For example, the two theses examined by the Panel reflect the priority of Health Technologies and are clearly applied research in subject and in their research process. The Panel was able to conclude that the level of the applied research activities is appropriate and that social partners are well served by relevant applied research that solves problems.
120. One pitfall for institutions that are involved in applied research is that they begin to attempt to direct research towards a more fundamental nature. Whilst at times this may be unavoidable, by ensuring that the research that is conducted stays close to the needs of the social partners, the applied nature will be maintained. This creates immediate value for the local/regional partners of the institution. This may mean that the outcomes of the research can be generalised less, but that should not be of concern in the conduct of applied research.
121. In programme development, the local stakeholders’ needs are listened to, with representatives of business, industry and municipal government present in programme and decision-making committees but also via less formal contacts with teaching and research staff members. The Panel *commends* KVK for *being very responsive to professional needs in the maintenance and creation of new and existing programmes*. The development process of the new programme is clearly described also in SER.
122. In addition, local stakeholders provide thesis topics for the College based on their needs. Stakeholders expressed their satisfaction for the theses and the value and impact they provide for them. External stakeholders serve on KVK’s final thesis committee where the papers are judged. In the interview with external partners, stakeholders explained the notable improvements in the quality of the theses in the last years. The thesis requirements are available on the College’s website and the Panel was provided with two theses in English.
123. Students and teachers noted during their interviews with the Panel that students have participated in the project groups with teachers and collaboration partners, and that they have prepared joint publications. In addition, teachers have integrated their research activities into the courses they teach. The Panel heard of an example of a current project involving students, which is to develop standards of service to clients at the Maritime Museum.

124. Students emphasised the importance of the theory and its need in practice, although theoretical studies might be the challenging part of the studies. Students were very pleased about their internship opportunities and possibilities to choose the places, which are presented on the internal Moodle site. During internships, students have a possibility to apply all their theoretical knowledge to practice, learn new skills but also share their latest knowledge with colleagues in the internship placements. During the Panel's interview with external partners, stakeholders expressed their satisfaction with the students' competences and their contribution during the internship placements.
125. Students' use of international databases, available to them online and via the library, are required as part of course assignments and projects. The Panel heard that the databases are actively used. Students are well counselled on how to conduct data searches in the databases. Students have also good IT facilities available, and their use is well instructed and supported.
126. In general, the interviews gave the impression that students have a good relationship with their teachers. Various student-centred teaching and learning methods and a variety of pedagogical methods are applied, such a project-based learning, team projects, and simulation.
127. Students testified in the interview with the Panel that their needs and suggestions are heard. E.g., students have the possibility to apply for individual study plans, and their individual special needs are discussed, flexible learning paths are enabled in line with the ESG.
128. As regards, RPL, the SER notes an internal document titled "Procedure for Assessment and Recognition of Non-Formal and Informal Learning and Self-Study Achievements", but only six such cases were applied for since 2017. The Panel explored the RPL issue in a meeting during the site visit. Teachers mentioned in their interview that the RPL mechanism is in use and students are informed about this possibility. The Panel also interviewed students on the subject of recognition of prior learning and heard that several students had taken advantage of it. They knew about the application procedure and noted that each student manages it on an individual basis. Respondents in the interview answered that a lot of actions have been taken, including the issuing the Procedure. In line with that, department heads are responsible for, and carry out, the evaluation of applications. The process includes portfolio submissions, examinations and evidence of work experience. The small number of cases reflects demand.
129. The Panel notes, however, that the RPL document could be modified to a more student friendly form showing competence based recognition of prior learning. For example, the document on the website titled "Description of the Study Result Recognition Procedure ...", where at the end of the document there is an application form which allows students to apply for recognition based on the vocational training courses, does not reflect competence based thinking. Recognition should be done based on achieved competences, not just courses completed at a lower level of education. The Panel *recommends*, therefore, that KVK *review its recognition approach to focus on competence-based learning outcomes in order to embrace the full scope of achieved learning, skills, and competences*.
130. Moreover, in the interview with teaching staff the Panel heard that teachers are aware that they still need to develop their non-formal recognition procedures, including raising awareness about this possibility. The issue of RPL for intending students is rather important. If KVK wants to attract more international students, it needs to take away any uncertainty potential students might have. The reason is that uncertainty may lead to not considering the college. The Panel *recommends that at the bachelor entry level, KVK should spell out what the basic requirements are for entry from the*

most usual source countries. In terms of additional learning, the College needs *to start publishing the decisions they have made in an anonymous aggregated form, where they show what additional RPL a student can obtain by having done certain post-secondary courses, which the Panel recommends.* It *recommends also creating a register of these decisions together with the performance of students that were subject to the decision.* This register needs to be evaluated (poor performing students are an indication that the RPL decision may have been too generous). As a learning organisation, this will improve their RPL decisions over time and help students consider them. Ultimately, these RPL decisions could lead to articulation agreements. Such agreements are popular with Asian institutions who can then advertise that if their students complete their diploma, it'll take a specified amount of time to finish a bachelor's degree at KVK. The European connection conveys prestige.

131. The Panel is very appreciative of initiatives undertaken to stimulate interdisciplinary work, such as become evident in the interviews during the site visit. The Panel appreciates how capably KVK is stimulating this real-world approach to complex problems that are presented by social partners and encourages the College to explore the opportunities further, based on the intersection of the various disciplines present.

3.2. Internationality of studies, research (art):

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

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

132. KVK included improving its international competitiveness and mobility as an indicator to its strategic priorities. An objective within the first priority, to provide “high-quality higher education studies corresponding to the scientific and technological progress”, aims “to increase the internationality of the study programmes”. Measuring and analysing the results of indicators achieved is integral to the QMS, with regular processes, analyses and follow-up activities set. To stimulate internationalisation, KVK offers seven study programmes in English. The number of students participating has risen from 11 in 2017 to 55 in 2021. In order to ensure the cost-effectiveness of this scheme, KVK is keen to attract more students into these programmes, not only foreign but also national ones.

133. An annex to the SER lists 24 international research projects conducted between KVK and various European partners between 2017 and running into 2023. The number of publications in foreign journals has, according to an annex to the SER, constitutes at total of 147 between 2017 and 2022. The Panel heard in an interview that students also participate in international projects. One example of a student writing their thesis on such a project is provided in the SER and staff interviewed have mentioned such a case as well. While such cases seem to be rare, they are an indication of the efforts KVK puts on internationalisation.

134. There is a separate Internationalisation Strategy, updated every three years. Moreover, it also constitutes part of its 2022 Annual Action Plan, which includes goals and timelines. The plans cover the institutional, programme and individual level, the latter extending to students and staff. The implementation of internationalisation is broken down into three areas of responsibilities, the

institutional, programme and individual levels, ranging from the organisation of international conferences to promoting internationalisation in study programme content and participation in mobility schemes.

135. KVK has, according to the SER, has 276 Erasmus+ partnership agreements with higher education institutions in Europe, Asia and Africa. Between 2017 and 2022, 182 new agreements were signed. The rise in new agreements indicates to the Panel the commitment of KVK to develop its internationalisation in this area. During meeting with academic staff, the Panel heard that every year the number of partnership agreements grows. The Panel is satisfied with the development at KVK about the scope of Erasmus+ partnerships.
136. Staff are given financial and career incentives to participate in mobility programmes, international events and international research projects. Indeed, indicators, including publications in foreign journals and participation in conferences and projects, have improved in the past years, as indicated in the SER. Staff from abroad teaching at KVK for various periods, as presented in SER, peaked in 2018 with 36 and was 32 in 2021, while KVK staff teaching abroad peaked at 34 in 2019 and comprised 14 teachers in 2021. However, full-time visiting teachers from abroad, as shown in SER, peaked at three in 2018 and 2020.
137. The students the Panel interviewed recognised the importance of mobility for language improvement and to expand their views on practices in their subjects, to get insight into different cultures and to expand their networking. For those with family, KVK provides special assistance so they can conduct studies abroad.
138. Nevertheless, the numbers of outgoing and incoming students are still low compared to the overall number of students, between 2017 and 2021 it was 480 outgoing and 588 incoming students, respectively. The Panel appreciates that KVK is well aware of the value of internationality for both the experience of its staff and students and the quality of teaching and learning as well as research. Its QMS covers this area and sets goals for improvement, which KVK has met annually, and which include the increase of dedicated funding. The Panel believes that KVK has moved forward in improving its internationalisation. At the same time, the Panel considers that KVK is a small College which has limited potential to have a genuinely international impact across most of its activities. The recruitment of international students could be key to helping it stabilise its student numbers and hence to securing its financial position.
139. In terms of internationalisation KVK has two main directions it can develop. One is to *enhance the international mobility of students and staff further*. The other direction is to *enhance internationalisation at home*. However, both activities should be *underpinned by explicit learning outcomes*. These the Panel recommends. It recommends further that the institution *adopt the following two learning outcomes: (a) graduates leave their program interculturally competent and (b) graduates are internationally aware*. To leave a program interculturally competent requires a student to develop knowledge, skills, and attitudes that are required to interact with diverse individuals. Intercultural competent means they are equipped to interact or effectively work together with people from another culture. Internationally aware includes the global effects of local actions, the conduct of their discipline in other contexts etc. So the first relates to personal characteristics to equip someone with skills attitudes and values to interact with cultural others and the second is more cognitively focused and relates to an understanding of the wider world. The source of diversity does not necessarily have to be nationality or ethnicity, but may be based on other sources, such as discipline, age, gender, etc. The functional principle is that students come to

embrace diversity to achieve more than would be possible if only collaborating with people of the same background. The international awareness relates to the chosen profession in multiple contexts, but also more generally the global effects of local actions. Staff and students stand much to gain from international mobility, but the reality is that for a variety of reasons the majority will not be internationally mobile. Therefore it is important, and the Panel *recommends that internationalisation at home is given careful consideration in the development of a portfolio of activities that can impact all students and all staff.*

140. **In summary**, KVK has shown in its documentation and in the interviews during the site visit that it fulfils most of the evaluation criteria. The study programmes and research are in line with the mission and the strategic goal of KVK to reflect the advances in science and technology and The adequate quantitative and qualitative evaluation is performed to ensure the level of the applied research activities. The set priority and activities support the development of the quality and diversity of applied research studies, and the relevant risks have been recognized and adequate risk management planned.

Five applied research and development priority areas. The new technological innovations are the main theme throughout the priority areas corresponding to the competence requirements of the future professionals. In interviews with teaching staff the Panel learned that the research and development priorities and topics are related to the implemented study programmes, thesis works and faculty members' research activities.

Local stakeholders provide thesis topics for the College based on their needs. These topics were by invitation or suggestion and are given to the college on an ongoing basis e. g. during the meetings of the relevant program committees. Local stakeholders are also invited both as external expert lecturers in courses' implementation and consulted for programme design and updating. KVK encourages the students to participate in conferences and publish the results of their research activities. Among the priorities for KVK has been the increase of scientifically qualified academic staff, with various incentives implemented. A recommendation has been made above that KVK continues its efforts to increase the number of its academic staff with doctoral qualifications.

The process of recognition of foreign qualifications, partial studies, and prior non-formal and informal learning is documented and implemented. The Panel concludes from the documents, information on the website, and the site-visit interviews that the set objectives in the areas of studies and research are relevant; the presented statistics in the SER and its annexes support the achievements in this area. Processes are in place for RPL and several cases have been dealt with in the past five years. The Panel sees room for improvement in this area and three recommendations are provided. KVK lays emphasis on improving its internationalisation and has made improvements in the last five years, as the presented data shows. The Panel encourages KVK to continue putting efforts into increasing the mobility numbers in line with its relevant strategic priority.

141. **Judgment:** the area is being developed systematically, without any major drawbacks and is given 3 points.

142. **Recommendations:**

- Continue efforts to increase the number of academic staff with doctoral qualifications, and keep under review its means of supporting them to do so, in order to ensure such support is adequate and equitable.

- Review the approach to recognition to focus on competence-based learning outcomes in order to embrace the full scope of achieved learning, skills, and competences.
- At the bachelor entry level, spell out what the basic requirements are for entry from the most usual source countries.
- In terms of additional learning, start publishing the decisions made in an anonymous aggregated form, showing what additional RPL a student can obtain by having done certain post-secondary courses.
- Additionally, create a register of these decisions together with the performance of students that were subject to the decision.
- Enhance the international mobility of students and staff further and enhance internationalisation at home.
- Underpin both by explicit learning outcomes: (a) graduates leave their program interculturally competent and (b) graduates are internationally aware.
- Give internationalisation at home careful consideration in the development of a portfolio of activities that can impact all students and all staff.

143. **Good practice examples:**

- KVK is very responsive to professional needs in the maintenance and creation of new and existing programmes. Local stakeholders are invited both as external expert lecturers in courses' implementation and consulted for programme design and updating. Local stakeholders provide thesis topics for the College based on their needs.

3.4. Impact on Regional and National Development

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

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

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

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

144. KVK has an extensive network of strong partnerships with all its faculties. It has set clear criteria in its QMS for measuring the effectiveness of its partnerships and for selecting partners strategically. The Panel had the opportunity to meet a number of strategic partners representing Republic Klaipėda Hospital, Taikos Karalienės Nursing Home, JSC Mars Lietuva, JSC Inchcape Motors and others. A table with indicators for assessing the impact of KVK on the region of western Lithuania and nationally was provided in the SER. The performance criteria measuring the impact of KVK in the region between 2017 and 2021 ranges from the share of student market compared to students overall in the region, at 46.8% in 2017 and 49.02% in 2021, the share of graduates employed within a year, at 85% vs. 82.83%, respectively, to the proportion of

commission theses vs. total theses relevant to regional development, at 13.8% in 2018 (criterion not applied in 2017) to 38.63% in 2021.

145. As the largest college in western Lithuania, KVK is responsive to the needs of the region and sees its regional role as an opportunity of mutual benefit. The SER lists numerous links with partners in local and regional government, research and service provision. Seventy-two academic staff are members in local, regional and national committees or councils, such as the Higher Education Council of Lithuania or the National Health Council. The College has 105 strategic partnerships, including for academic and research cooperation as well as support partnerships. The latter covers life-long training programmes, internship placements as well as consultation contracts.

146. As one of its roles in contributing to regional and national development, KVK sees its provision of relevant study programmes as a key aspect. A table in the SER lists study programmes in relation to types of activity, such as “Agriculture, forestry and fisheries” or Mining and quarrying”, and others. Twenty-five study programmes provided at KVK cover 18 main economic activity areas in the Klaipeda region, which indicates the relevance of the study programmes to market needs.

147. KVK notes in its SER that it is included in a regional strategic plan, the “Klaipėda Region Specialisation Strategy 2030”. Many other examples on the embeddedness of KVK in regional development are listed. To provide some examples:

“The community of KVK actively participates in the activities of external institutions - 72 teachers are members of associations, chambers, councils, commissions, for example: the Higher Education Council of Lithuania (Deputy Director for Studies and Research Dr N. Galdikienė), the National Health Council (in the plan of the National Health Council for 2022, J. Andriuskienė was assigned with the area of oral health system restructuring corresponding to the historical WHO oral health resolution),”

“Participation in the activity of the associations involves making presentations and organising trainings - Hospitality - Selling without Selling (Dr R. Kinderis), Effective Staff Management. Conflict Management Between Staff and Clients (Dr I. Piktornaitė). The teaching staff are active members of working groups of national documents that regulate preparation of specialists: members of working groups that prepare descriptions of the Nutrition, Food Technologies, Informatics, Oral Care, Cosmetology study fields...”

148. KVK provides a table in its SER on “The measures and performance criteria for the impact of KVK on Western Lithuanian region and the country in 2017-2021”. Indicators and performance values are provided.

149. KVK also provides a long list of local and regional strategic partners. It is noted that the College signed 19 new cooperation agreements in 2021, with a total of 437 such agreements reached. In its 2020-2024 Strategic Action Plan, strategic partnerships count among the strengths of KVK in its SWOT analysis, while priorities include the further development of strategic partnership networks.

150. The Panel heard in the interview with social partners that they are involved in a wide range of activities, from teaching courses to membership in governing bodies to programme design. The Panel would like to commend KVK for its *extensive collaboration with social partners on many levels to meet the needs of the local region.*

151. Social partners readily interact with students, primarily via internships but also joint projects with KVK where students are often involved. These evolve from partnership agreements, joint

projects with social partners, alumni contacts, and often various contacts between KVK staff and external stakeholders. KVK notes in its SER that it has 437 cooperation agreements with social partners with the main aims of jointly disseminating the outcomes of applied research, their contributing to study programme design, advisory work, adult education, and internship placements. The Alumni Club of KVK lists 402 full members. Several of their companies are listed as taking in and mentoring interns from the College.

152. Internships are regulated in the KVK document “Procedure for the Organisation and Assessment of Internships”, which notes that students may chose placements from a KVK database or individually. Internships are overseen by both a KVK advisor and an advisor at the company, who reports on the student’s activity. In the interviews with social partners the Panel heard that company advisors are provided with a framework of their responsibilities. The Panel also hear, importantly, that they see value in imbuing students with more confidence to ask questions and that company staff are conscientious in helping their charges.

153. It was evident to the Panel that KVK upholds extensive contacts and carries out numerous activities with social partners on an ongoing basis in a strategic way. The SER notes that KVK also has an international network of social partners in 30 countries. The Panel heard from social partners that these relationships have expanded in recent years. Partners are aware of KVK as a partner and confirmed the impact the College has in the region. Nevertheless, while commending KVK for its extensive partner relations, the Panel felt that in order to continue the College’s systematic development of partnerships, it *recommends that KVK continues to develop the strategic nature of its partnerships in order to ensure it meets the evolving needs of the local region.*

4.2. Assurance of conditions for lifelong learning:

4.2.1. *The higher education institution monitors and analyses the need for lifelong learning;*

4.2.2. *The higher education institution anticipates the diversity of forms and conditions of lifelong learning and ensures their implementation;*

4.2.3. *The higher education institution performs the evaluation of assurance of conditions for lifelong learning.*

154. Among its strategic priorities under the category “to train highly qualified specialists”, one of the objectives is to “ensure high-quality adult continuing training and education services as well as consultancy activities.” KVK offers specialty or further education courses developed with and/or for partners from business, administration and cultural institutions. The SER notes that in the period 2017-2021, an annual average of 53 lifelong training programmes were offered that involved 30% of teaching staff.

155. KVK also offers consultation services on subjects ranging, according to the SER, from social inclusion to smart technologies in health care. Moreover, staff and students participate in volunteer programmes benefiting the community.

156. Different forms of lifelong learning are implemented and conditions for lifelong learning are assured, as described in the SER and corroborated in several interviews during the site visit. As an example, it was mentioned that a social partner has requested lectures by KVK staff for museum workers on intergenerational diversity and subsequently working with youth has led to the improvement of their services. KVK runs a Training and Service Centre to implement lifelong learning programmes. The Centre also regularly conducts surveys with students who completed a

programme to measure satisfaction; analyses market needs. Study departments or units organise meetings with social partners to gauge their needs. Expressed needs are taken into consideration when introducing new subjects. For example, according to the social partners, KVK introduced more lectures covering the topics of entrepreneurship and establishing a company.

157. The SER describes modes of assessing the success of its lifelong learning courses as well as for raising awareness about the programmes. The latter include social and other media as well as a dedicated Adult Learning Week organised by the Lithuanian Association of Adult Education. The Panel noted, however, that there is no information at least on the English website to attract lifelong learners. The Panel, therefore, *recommends that more information about lifelong learning opportunities is made available on the website.*

158. **In summary**, KVK is aware of its responsibility for contributing to the advancement of the region and the country and has developed, and, indeed, expanded, its activities with and for social partners in teaching, research, services and lifelong learning. Social partners are active in the life of KVK on many levels. KVK runs numerous lifelong learning courses and programmes, which are regularly assessed and adjusted to the needs of the community.

159. **Judgment:** the area is rated very well in the national context and internationally, without any drawbacks and is given 4 points.

160. **Recommendations for the area:**

- Continue to develop the strategic nature of its partnerships in order to ensure it meets the evolving needs of the local region.
- Make more information about lifelong learning opportunities available on the website.

161. **Good practice examples:**

- KVK is in extensive collaboration with social partners on many levels to meet the needs of the local region.

IV. EXAMPLES OF GOOD PRACTICE

The Panel identifies the following examples of good practice in:

Management:

- KVK's exemplary extensive involvement of internal and external stakeholders, staff, social partners and alumni in decision making and planning.

Quality Assurance:

- The quality and rapidity of response to suggestions that were obtained from structured and systematic investigation as a result of the procedures of the QMS.
- The active involvement of all internal (students and staff) and external stakeholders (alumni and social partners) in quality assurance.

Studies and Research (Art):

- KVK is very responsive to professional needs in the maintenance and creation of new and existing programmes.

Impact on Regional and National Development:

- KVK is in extensive collaboration with social partners on many levels to meet the needs of the local region.

V. RECOMMENDATIONS FOR ENHANCEMENT

The Panel's recommendations for further enhancement are:

Management:

- Develop a student number forecasting model that covers a 3–5-year period to support planning for material and human resources.
- Develop a more systematic approach to benchmarking and use that comparative data to set the regional and national ambitions that follow.
- Share the student number forecasting model and benchmarking data with senior staff and ensure they understand its implications so that there is no ambiguity about KVK's relative performance nationally and its ambitions to either stabilise student numbers or plan for contraction.

Quality Assurance:

- Continue efforts to reduce student drop-out rates, particularly in the first year by providing more detailed information for prospective students, particularly on the KVK website, and make information available also about the content of courses with particular focus on the balance of theory and practice.

Studies and Research (Art):

- Continue efforts to increase the number of academic staff with doctoral qualifications, and keep under review its means of supporting them to do so, in order to ensure such support is adequate and equitable.
- Review the approach to recognition to focus on competence-based learning outcomes in order to embrace the full scope of achieved learning, skills, and competences.
- At the bachelor entry level, spell out what the basic requirements are for entry from the most usual source countries.
- In terms of additional learning, start publishing the decisions made in an anonymous aggregated form, showing what additional RPL a student can obtain by having done certain post-secondary courses.
- Additionally, create a register of these decisions together with the performance of students that were subject to the decision.
- Enhance the international mobility of students and staff further and enhance internationalisation at home.
- Underpin both by explicit learning outcomes: (a) graduates leave their program interculturally competent and (b) graduates are internationally aware.

- Give internationalisation at home careful consideration in the development of a portfolio of activities that can impact all students and all staff.

Impact on Regional and National Development:

- Continue to develop the strategic nature of its partnerships in order to ensure it meets the evolving needs of the local region.
- Make more information about lifelong learning opportunities available on the website.

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A. Goštauto g. 12, 01108 Vilnius, Lithuania
tel.: +370 5 205 3323
skvc@skvc.lt
<http://www.skvc.lt>