



CENTRE
FOR QUALITY
ASSESSMENT
IN HIGHER
EDUCATION

ANALYSIS OF 2011-2015 EXTERNAL
REVIEW OF HIGHER EDUCATION
INSTITUTIONS IN LITHUANIA

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INTRODUCTION

Quality assurance is one of the tools helping to achieve accountability of higher education institutions. This tool is appropriate for all higher education institutions both state and non-state. Albeit not funded by the state, non-state education institutions provide a public service to the society, the quality whereof is subject to public oversight. In accordance with the Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area (ESG), as well as the Law of the Republic of Lithuania on Education and the Law on Higher Education and Research, the primary responsibility for the quality of their provision is assigned to higher education institutions.

Institutional review is one of the mechanisms of external quality assurance usually encompassing all activities carried out in higher education institutions. Improvement is the key goal of an institutional assessment undertaken with the aim of providing feed-back to the management of higher education institution on the strengths and weaknesses of the organisation for the ultimate goal of performance enhancement.

In 2015 the first external review of all higher education institutions based in Lithuania was completed. The **aim of the analysis** was to highlight general positive and negative trends prevalent in higher education institutions which were emphasised in expert reports of external review. This publication analyses the external review reports, reviews general trends identified during the evaluation and the results of the survey of higher education institutions. Although the experts primarily focussed on the performance quality of higher education institutions, they have also presented recommendations to the system of higher education of Lithuania on the whole and for improvement of the process of external review.

We sincerely hope that the recommendations presented will contribute significantly to further performance enhancement of higher education institutions and will stimulate the quality culture in the institutions.

External quality assurance in Lithuania

At present there are two types of on-going external evaluation in Lithuania – external evaluation of study programmes and higher education institutions.

The evaluation of on-going study programmes was initiated in 1998; by the middle of 2015 over 3.600 study programmes evaluations had been conducted¹.

The first review of activities of higher education institutions in Lithuania was launched in 2000 at the time of reorganisation of postsecondary technical schools into colleges of higher education. On the basis of the then valid legal acts, the institutional review of higher education institutions had to be conducted within four years from the start of their activities; hence, as of 2004 colleges of higher education have been subject to the institutional

¹ Note: this is the number of evaluations, not the study programmes.

review to verify their compliance with the conditions stipulated at the time of their establishment. At the same time, the institutional review of universities has been taking place exclusively upon their own initiative aided by international organisations, such as the European University Association, the Salzburg Seminar, etc.

In the opinion of experts of the Lithuanian higher education², the necessity for institutional review in Lithuania was brought about by the following factors: in the absence of the national institutional review system Lithuanian higher education institutions would experience difficulties related to their involvement in the European higher education area, resulting in the need to invite agencies of other countries. The costs of such services would be enormous. Moreover, either way Lithuania would need specialists capable of managing external review procedures of a certain scale. Development of a national institutional review framework would create the foundations for training national experts of external review who could participate in international activities. Authors believe that failure to launch an institutional review would encumber the launch of quality cultural change in individual higher education institutions or to expect their full-fledged recognition within the common area of European higher education and research.

The newly adopted Law on Higher Education and Research (LHER, 2009) provided for that the quality of research (art) activities and studies shall be ensured throughout internal quality assurance, external evaluation and accreditation of study programmes, external review of research activities and external review and/or accreditation of research and study institutions. Upon entry into force of the law, the legal preconditions were put in place for a general institutional review of universities and colleges of higher education, with the first new-type reviews launched already in 2011.

External review process

The review of activities of higher education institutions is initiated by the Ministry of Education and Science which approves the list of institutions planned to be reviewed alongside with the schedule of external reviews. The entire external review process is organised by the Centre for Quality Assessment in Higher Education (hereinafter – SKVC) in accordance with the procedure established by the Government of the Republic of Lithuania (RoL) and the review methodology approved by SKVC defining the areas and criteria for review. Data about the state of play of learning resources held by higher education institutions and their compliance with the baseline requirements are provided by the Research and Higher Education Monitoring and Analysis Centre (hereinafter – MOSTA). Until autumn 2014, MOSTA used to present its decision on compliance of learning resources to the baseline requirements which might have impacted the final review outcome of a higher education institution.

Upon the launch of an external review every higher education institution drafts its self-evaluation report. The self-evaluation report, the data provided by MOSTA on learning resources and any other additional information is submitted to the group of experts, who after desk analysis of the data goes on a

² Vincentas Dienys, Kęstutis Pukelis, Pranas Žiliukas „Institucinis mokslo ir studijų vertinimas: neišvengiamas modernios valstybės požymis ar dar viena biurokratinė užgaida Lietuvoje?“ [Institutional Review of Research and Higher Education: Inevitable Feature of a Contemporary State or yet Another Bureaucratic Whim of Lithuania], *Aukštojo mokslo kokybė*, 2005, Nr. 2, P. 26–51.

site visit to the institution under review. During the site visit (lasting from 2 to 3 days) experts meet members of an academic community, the administrative staff, students, alumni, and employers. Following the visit experts present draft review report which is submitted for information to every institution under review. The final reports of the review is analysed by the Higher Education Evaluation Commission established under SKVC. It is noteworthy that the Higher Education Evaluation Commission made up from members of the academic community, representatives of social partners and students approved all review reports of higher education institutions, which testifies to the objectiveness, comprehensiveness and reasonability of the results. The final decision on accreditation is made by SKVC with due account to expert reports and the proposal from the Commission. The reports are published on the SKVC website.

Activities of a higher education institution may be assessed positively or negatively. A positive assessment is awarded to an institution compliant with the established external review procedures, having learning resources compatible with the baseline quality requirements for learning conditions and study organisation as established by the Methodology for assessment of learning resources and having no substantial shortcomings identified in its activities, i.e., where all areas reviewed have been assessed positively. As of autumn 2014, following the amendment to the resolution by the Government of RoL, the final outcome of the evaluation is no longer subject to the assessment of learning resources, which become, instead, an additional information source for experts performing an external review.

Institutions not satisfied with the awarded assessment may lodge appeals. The right of appeal was exercised by 4 higher education institutions; all appeals were heard by the Appeal Commission under the Ministry of Education and Science. Three appeals were dismissed; the remaining fourth appeal was partially upheld (resulting in a new external review). One appellant sought justice in court, but after two years of litigation the original decision by SKVC was upheld.

Following an external review of activities, on the basis of review results, the following accreditation decisions are possible:

- Accreditation for 6 years where a higher education institution received a positive assessment during the external review;
- Accreditation for 3 years where a higher education institution received a negative assessment during the external review (except for repetitive negative assessments or where the negative assessment is given to a newly established higher education institution whose performance results do not meet the requirements set forth during the establishment and permission to offer study programmes and study-related activities);
- Non-accreditation, where a higher education institution has been repeatedly negatively assessed or where the performance results of a newly established institution do not meet the conditions set forth at the time of its establishment.

The external review process does not end with the elaboration and publication of review reports. It is highly important that universities and colleges of higher

education analyse recommendations provided by the experts and take all the necessary actions to improve their performance. To this end, every higher education institution which has been subject to external review shall foresee the corrective actions to be taken in the event of shortcomings identified during the self-evaluation and external review processes and in order to improve the institutional performance. Such corrective actions shall be made public. After approximately six months following the publication of review reports, the SKVC representatives shall go on a follow-up site visit to every higher education institution which has been reviewed earlier to meet with the administration in order to discuss quality improvement plans. These plans shall be made public not only on the website of the institution concerned, but also on the SKVC website next to the review results. In this way all members of the academic community, social partners and the public at large are informed about actions taken by the higher education institution in response to the received recommendations.

Context of the institutional review

All higher education institutions in Lithuania were subject to initial reviews in 2011–2015. During this period quite a larger number of changes took place in the area of higher education in Lithuania. Until the end of 2011 state-funded higher education institutions had to be reformed from budgetary institutions into public institutions. Since 1 September 2011, a new concept of credits was introduced into the higher education framework of Lithuania based on the European Credit Transfer System (ECTS) which was the underlying reason for undertaking the major overhaul of all study programmes. At the end of 2012 the Constitutional Court gave its ruling on non-compliance with the Constitution of RoL of certain provisions contained in the Law on Higher Education and Research, which led to relevant amendments to the LHER: higher education institutions were obliged to notify about quality assurance measures and the disbursement of state budgetary funds; the functions of the Senate and Councils were amended; the procedure for student rotation in the distribution of state-funded and privately-funded places was changed. In accordance with these developments, higher education institutions undertook internal reforms – new Councils were elected (following the newly established principles for selection of Council members), the public information procedure was changed, etc. Therefore, tasked with institutional review experts had to review both the current situation and to look into changes, eventually analysing many documents already amended or draft documents under preparation.

Features of the institutional review in Lithuania

Institutional review in Lithuania is exceptional in terms of its international dimension. A larger proportion of experts came from abroad. This fact allowed reviewing the performance of higher education institutions not only against national standards, but also from the European or global perspective. Such reviews pooling experts from several foreign countries are undertaken

by a fraction of European states. Nordic agencies exchange experts among themselves for external reviews purposes.

In the new review a lot of focus was given to involve all stakeholders. All review groups were made up of representatives of the academic community, the employers based in Lithuania and students. As far as the latter are concerned, these came from Lithuanian and foreign higher education institutions.

Another important aspect of external review is a holistic approach. The performance of a higher education institution is reviewed in 4 major areas of assessment: strategic management, academic studies and life-long learning, research and/or art activities, impact on regional or national development. These areas of assessment reflect the underlying goals of a higher education institution which have been set forth in the Law on Higher Education and Research.

The external review system applied in Lithuania may be considered as being rather rigid with only two possible outcomes offered – a positive or negative assessment of a university or a college of higher education. Such extreme review decisions entail certain consequences for a higher education institution. First, after being evaluated negatively a higher education institution loses the right to register any new study programme through a simplified procedure. Second – a negative decision allegedly forms a negative public opinion, leading to shrinking numbers of potential students. Third, already in two years' time a higher education institution has to make arrangements for a new self-evaluation and review. Conversely, a positive decision enables a higher education institution to enhance its image in the public eye.

LIMITATIONS OF THE ANALYSIS

Considering that the analysis conducted by SKVC is based on expert reports and recommendations provided, it would be necessary to emphasise that the results of the evaluation do not represent a comparison between higher education institutions or benchmarking achievement levels, because these tasks could only be implemented providing that a certain tolerance is allowed due to the following reasons:

1. External reviews of higher education institutions were undertaken at various times from 2011 to 2015. During this period a substantial number of legal provisions were amended which had a direct impact on the performance of higher education institutions.
2. The external review of higher education institutions was conducted by taking into account not only the factual data, but also the regional specifics and needs in question, the relevant institutional development within a given period of time, i.e., the review was conducted following a contextual approach.
3. The aim of the external review of higher education institutions was to come up with recommendations on possible improvements in the overall performance; therefore, during the analysis of the expert reports rather unique and versatile situations were identified on a case-by-case basis, with experts underscoring what was relevant for a given higher education institution.

EXTERNAL REVIEW RESULTS ON THE PERFORMANCE OF HIGHER EDUCATION INSTITUTIONS

During the external review of higher education institutions from 2011 to 2015, 47 institutional reviews were initiated by the Minister of Education and Science. The Centre for Quality Assessment in Higher Education organised 44 reviews: in 23 colleges (13 state and 10 non-state) and 21 universities (14 state and 7 non-state). In accordance with par. 9¹ of the Procedure for the External Review of Higher Education Institutions approved by Resolution No. 1317 of 22 September 2010 of the Government of the Republic of Lithuania, the external review of Telšiai Bishop Vincentas Borisevičius Priest Seminary and Vilnius St. Joseph Seminary were conducted by the Agency for the Evaluation and Promotion of Quality in Ecclesiastical Universities and Faculties (AVEPRO). The review was performed in accordance with the AVEPRO criteria; on account of the review reports SKVC accredited both seminaries (the results of the seminary reviews are included into the analysis). One college – Klaipėda business higher school – was not reviewed because it wound up its activities.

The review yielded the following results: 34 higher education institutions were evaluated positively and 12 received a negative assessment (Chart 1).

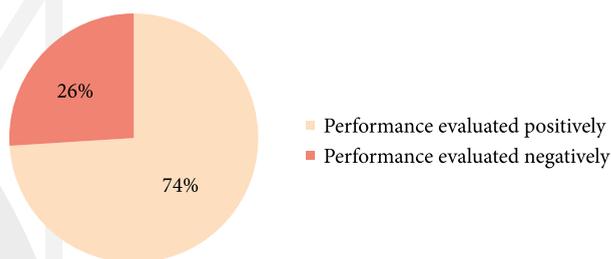


Chart 1. Results of institutional review

As far as universities are concerned, 15 of them received a positive assessment (13 state and 2 non-state), 8 – negative assessment (3 state and 5 non-state) (Chart 2).

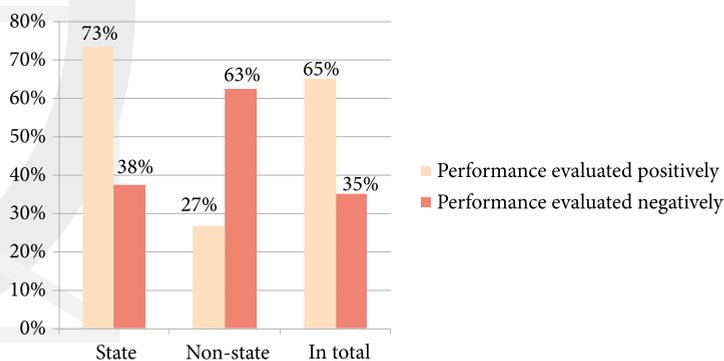


Chart 2. Review results of universities

Out of all colleges of higher education reviewed, the performance of 19 of them received a positive assessment (11 state and 8 non-state) and 4 – a negative assessment (2 state and 2 non-state) (Chart 3).

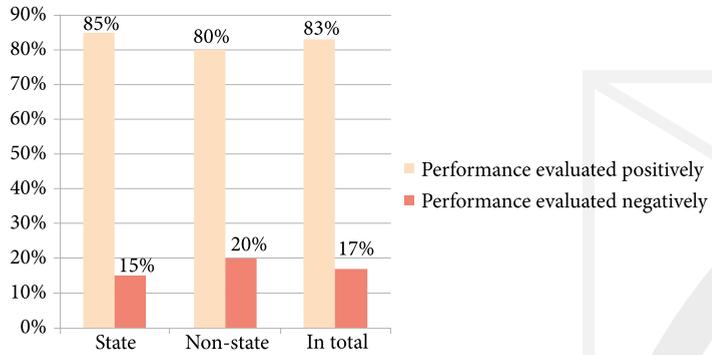


Chart 3. Review results of colleges in percentage

An institutional review of higher education institutions assessed the operation of the institutions according to the following areas:

- Strategic management;
- Academic studies and life-long learning;
- Research and/or art activities;
- Impact on regional and national development.

The performance of higher education institution is assessed positively provided that all the above mentioned four areas receive a positive evaluation. It shall be noted that the overall number of such higher education institutions which received positive evaluation in all areas amounted to 36 (78 percent)³. As Chart 4 demonstrates, the area which received a negative evaluation in most of the cases was strategic management (9 higher education institutions) as well as research and/or art activities (4 higher education institutions).

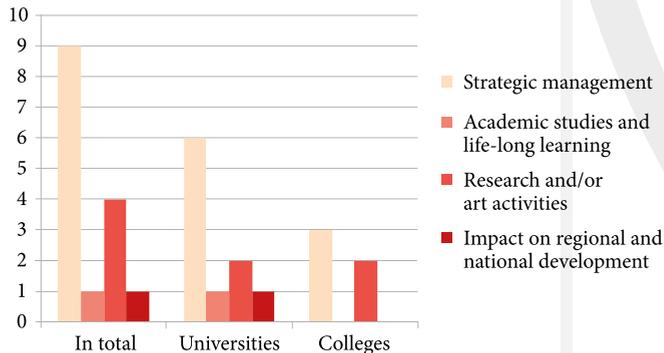


Chart 4. Areas with negative assessment

³ This number is not the same as the results of accreditation, because it does not include the results of assessment of learning resources and infrastructure performed by MOSTA. Until autumn of 2014 a negative evaluation of learning resources and infrastructure by MOSTA would lead to a negative evaluation of the entire performance of the higher education institution.

In the majority of cases (in the case of 7 higher education institutions) which received a negative evaluation, one of the four areas was assessed negatively, in 2 higher education institutions the number of non-compliant areas was two, and in 1 higher education institution all the four areas analysed received a negative assessment. Two higher education institutions received a negative assessment after receiving an unfavourable evaluation of their learning resources by MOSTA, because under the review procedure valid before November 2014 a negative evaluation of learning resources by MOSTA would lead to a negative evaluation of the entire performance of a university or college of higher education.

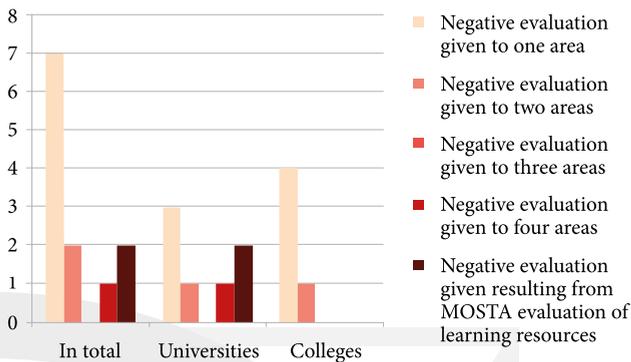


Chart 5. Number of areas with negative evaluation

STRATEGIC MANAGEMENT

Experts gave a positive evaluation of the strategic management area to 37 higher education institutions. Six universities (three state and three non-state) and three colleges of higher education (one state and two non-state) were given a negative evaluation of their strategic management area.

Review of strategic management area in universities

In the majority of universities the area of strategic management received a positive evaluation. It shall be noted that a larger proportion of state universities as opposed to non-state universities received a positive evaluation of this area (Chart 6).

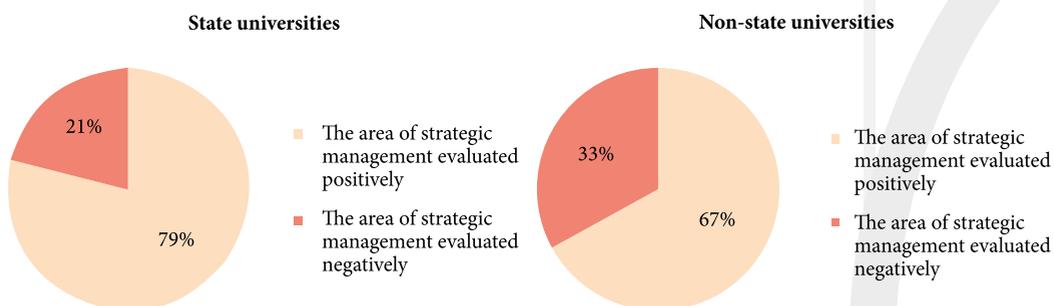


Chart 6. Evaluation of strategic management area in universities

Strategic management in universities

Best practices singled out by the experts:

- Support by external stakeholders in drafting of a strategic plan, performance indicators explicitly defined, focus on the unique niche, appropriate goal setting practices, effective planning and monitoring, a clear strategic vision.
- Praiseworthy cooperation of majority universities with stakeholders, willingness to be in close contact with them, efforts undertaken to cooperate with other institutions and higher educational establishments. Universities feedback on the needs expressed by social partners and involve them in internal strategic planning processes.
- Efforts taken to expand the internationalisation, primarily referring to an active participation of students and teaching staff in Erasmus and other mobility programmes, a growing number of incoming teaching staff, participation in international projects and international partnerships.
- Strive to advance staff competences. Such examples are given as the establishment of Centre of Excellence for Teacher Training, strategic investments into staff competences for further advancement of academic skills, important programmes undertaken, such as the Innovative Researcher and Innovative Teaching, other projects for staff professional development.

Strategic management areas to be improved:

<p>Strategic planning</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Part of universities do not have a clear or comprehensive strategy which would foresee specific goals, performance indicators and implementation monitoring to enable a systematic approach for institutional advancement or identification of shortcomings. • Higher education institutions often do not have a risk management strategy. • A strategic plan does not include consistent quantitative and qualitative indicators and fails to describe the value scale of such indicators. • Too little attention given to performance reporting and information system improvements; performance reports are not circulated among a wider circle of stakeholders.
<p>Internal quality assurance system</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Part of universities does not have an integrated quality assurance system that would cover all processes within the institutions and all available quality assurance measures. • The quality management strategy does not outline specific goals and formal evaluation indicators to verify the efficiency of quality assurance. • Quality assurance processes do not involve students and social partners – they do not get any feedback on their contribution to quality improvement. • When drafting quality assurance systems, insufficient attention is given to the Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area (ESG). • A process of feedback from students is not standardised or is not analysed. • The balance between quality control and quality enhancement is insufficient.
<p>Managerial efficiency</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Managerial systems are overly bureaucratic (in state universities). • The organisational structure is too cumbersome, the management is overly centralised, decisions are made by one person. • The management does not involve students, social partners and teaching staff to an appropriate level.
<p>Staff management</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The majority of universities do not have a universal human resource strategy that would define the staffing needs, staff plans and operational management. Even where such system does exist, it is not formalised. • Procedures for appraising academic and administrative staff are missing. • No staff incentive systems are in place – both pecuniary and non-pecuniary. • Absence of the institutional policy on staff training and professional competence advancement, no analysis on training needs conducted, failure to ensure that the teaching and education material kept abreast with the recent developments.

Review of strategic management area in colleges of higher education

In the majority of colleges of higher education the area of strategic management received a positive evaluation, with a larger proportion of those positively evaluated being state rather than non-state colleges of higher education (Chart 7).

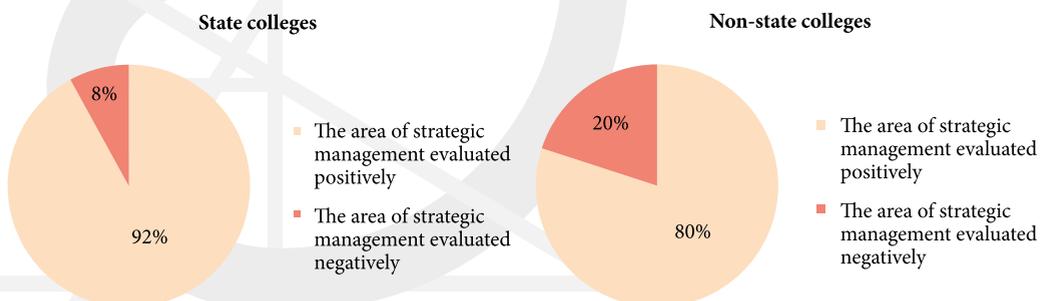


Chart 7. Evaluation of strategic management area in colleges of higher education

Strategic management in colleges of higher education

Best practices singled out by the experts:

- Almost half of all colleges of higher education keep close contacts with urban and regional social partners. An obvious role played by social partners is emphasised on the activities within colleges of higher education and a valuable contribution of institutions to the regional development through partnerships with social partners;
- Almost half of the colleges of higher education have appropriately elaborated individual elements of strategic planning – the strategic plan is in compliance with the national standards, there is a clear vision of strategic goals, reflection of topical issues relevant for higher education;
- Visible efforts by colleges of higher education to follow-up on the implementation of the strategy and select procedures enabling a proper verification of the management, consistency between in-house strategic documents and external strategic documents, taking public expectations on board while pursuing their mission. The visions and missions set by the colleges of higher education are often praised for being clearly defined and for their consistency with the activities undertaken or strategic documents. There are colleges of higher education which have been praised by the experts for fine-tuned and deliverable elements of the strategic plan, for realistic and assertive analysis of internal obstacles hindering internal transformations; a pro-active publicity of information on the implementation of their strategic plan;
- Efficiency of the quality management system – among best practices mentioned was the establishment of an advisory quality Council, an appointment of a person in charge of quality overseeing the development and implementation of an appropriate and target-driven quality system, establishment of a quality department, other efficient quality management processes;
- Cooperation of colleges of higher education with other institutions and strategic partners, ability to respond to innovations and embrace transformations, responsiveness to market changes;
- Efforts made by colleges of higher education to ensure a continuous staff proficiency training process, a best practice of inviting visiting lecturers to seminars on academic advancement. Among best practices was mentioned the establishment of the Study Centre for Proficiency Training or the Centre for Competence Building, active measures undertaken to ensure that a continuous proficiency training of staff would lead to a larger number of teaching staff capable of engaging in applied research activities.

Areas of strategic management to be improved:

Strategic planning

- Vision and mission of colleges of higher education. Although quite a large number of colleges of higher education received a positive evaluation as far as the clarity of their mission and vision is concerned, about 20 percent of the institutions were recommended revising their formulations of the mission and vision to make them better focussed and reflective of the exceptional properties of colleges of higher education; recommendation to rethink the mission to make it more specific, to formulate distinctive features of a given institution to increase its competitive edge vis-à-vis its rivals.
- Clarity of strategic planning indicators. The experts noted on the need to include into an institutional strategic plan measurable performance indicators. A note was made on rather frequent instances of over-abundance or non-concreteness of performance indicators. Therefore, it was recommended to develop a comprehensive system of qualitative indicators for measuring progress, to define clearly the targets on an annual basis to make any progress more visible and measurable, as well as to indicate the priorities for the key performance indicators. Moreover, colleges of higher education were recommended reviewing the methodology of data collection, reporting and formal use in order to ensure that any data facilitates measuring the key targets of the strategic plan on the basis of qualitative and quantitative indicators.
- Risk management. It was often noted that colleges of higher education do not include risk analysis into their strategic planning. Experts recommended improving risk management by means of compiling a list of risk factors and, for the purpose of an efficient risk mitigation, making the quality assessment a long-term, transparent and systematic rather than an episodic exercise.

<p>Strategic planning</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Strategic planning. During the evaluation of colleges of higher education it was often emphasised that their strategic plans fail to set priorities for their activities, plans lack structure, that strategic planning is not commensurate with the size of the institution or the funds and resources available. Moreover, some colleges do not follow up on the delivery of tasks and goals set forth in the strategic plan, or perform a comprehensive analysis of market needs in order to verify their capacities to respond to those needs. Quite a large number of suggestions were made related to the use of real financial figures to substantiate strategic plans, to draft business plans and perform cost and benefit analysis before embarking on any new initiatives and activities. Against the background of a rather tough competition some colleges of higher education were suggested by experts to develop a strategic approach which would help to establish a niche within the system of higher education and to offer a small number of study programmes relevant for that niche only.
<p>Quality assurance system</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Too little attention is given for the Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education (ESG). In order to infuse quality culture within institutions, experts suggested considering either national and international best practices, noting, in particular, on a clear relation between quality systems of colleges of higher education and ESG. • Quality assurance, quality policy and procedures are not formalised. A significant number of colleges of higher education were recommended defining their quality enhancement processes in a more precise manner, integrating their quality procedures into managerial procedures. • Absence of a quality culture within an organisation. Experts recommended to colleges of higher education establishing their in-house quality assurance systems and resorting to actions aimed at defining and dissemination of the quality culture within their organisations. Quality assurance procedures and all relevant data shall be systemised and processed, while the results shall be presented to staff, students and social partners for information purposes in a user-friendly format.
<p>Managerial efficiency</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Role of the Academic Council. Almost a quarter of colleges of higher education received comments from the experts that the role of their Councils should be strengthened, with the mandate and composition of the Council be made subject to an official approval procedure (it is important to stress that the reviews took place from 2011 to 2015 at the time when such Councils were being established). • Distribution of responsibilities not defined. The organisational structure, efficiency of distribution of tasks among academic and administrative staff raised doubts in many colleges of higher education; experts noted on inefficiency of decision making by managerial structures and on the prevailing obscurity in distribution of responsibilities.
<p>Information to social partners</p>	<p>In over half of all colleges of higher education a note was made of inappropriate information to social partners and stakeholders on the progress, relevant issues and challenges of colleges of higher education. This finding resulted in a significant number of recommendations related to definition and improvement of measures aimed at enhancement of public information and its dissemination to social partners, making it a standard regular practice to inform social partners about annual progress achieved by the college of higher education or to formalise co-operation with stakeholders, municipalities, employers and other potential partners. A large number of comments were made in relation to further improvements necessary in the area of involvement of social partners into key operational processes of colleges of higher education.</p>

Human resource management and competence enhancement of academic staff	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The staff policy to be developed shall encompass all measures pertaining to human resource management; staff management system has to be put in place which would ensure discussion and definition of operational priorities for the upcoming year among all staff (academic and non-academic), the system of personal self-assessment and development shall be introduced to create the conditions enabling discussion on next year priorities between staff and their immediate supervisors. • Academic staff competences need to be enhanced. A fourth of colleges of higher education were recommended enhancing professional competences of academic staff through a mandatory inception course into pedagogy for all newly hired teaching staff.
Internationalisation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Almost all colleges of higher education received comments from the experts on the necessity to further expand internationalisation. The reports of the institutional review emphasise that often colleges of higher education do not have a strategic plan for planned international activities which would clearly define the concept and strategy of internationalization and would allow ensuring sufficient in-coming and out-going mobility flows of students and staff. It was noted that English versions of college of higher education websites are often not exhaustive and are not updated regularly. • Attention was drawn to the fact that within international context college of higher education names are misleading; therefore, it was recommended to find ways how to convey “college of higher education” names in English and other foreign languages without using the word “university” or any other similar equivalents.

Review of strategic management in state and non-state institutions

In comparison to the review of strategic management in state versus non-state institutions, a conclusion can be drawn that more or less similar trends were underlined by experts in strategic management. Judging from experts opinion it may not be concluded that any sector could be credited for sector-specific best practices or for facing sector-specific challenges; nevertheless, a point was made of more numerous comments on the wordings of visions and missions reflecting on the needs of interested parties, absence of a clear financial strategy and a larger focus on business, public at large and other teaching establishments which the experts addressed primarily to institutions in non-state sector. Moreover, institutions operating in non-state sector were more frequently encouraged to develop skills of self-criticism and self-evaluation, whereas state universities and colleges of higher education were reminded of the need to improve their strategic planning and to develop all-inclusive internal quality assurance systems.

ACADEMIC STUDIES AND LIFE-LONG LEARNING

During the institutional review the area of academic studies and life-long learning received most of the positive evaluations, with only one higher education institution evaluated negatively.

Review of academic studies and life-long learning in universities

A negative evaluation in the area of academic studies and life-long learning was given to one non-state university (all areas under review in this university received a negative evaluation).

Academic studies and life-long learning in universities

Best practices singled out by the experts:

- Strong study programmes well-adjusted to rapid developments and needs on the market, appreciated by employers for the competences acquired by students ensuring a high employability ratio of students.
- Progress in revision of study programmes in accordance with principles of Bologna process; a study concept which is student-oriented; activity harmonised with the European Qualifications Framework and provisions of Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area.
- Improving relations with industrial and social partners in the area of programme improvements, development of proficiency and other types of programmes, involvement of stakeholders in study programme committees, contribution to new programmes being developed.
- Strong focus on internationalisation, foreign language learning and offering study programmes in English as the language of instruction, assistance to students and staff to help to avail of international mobility possibilities, attraction of international students, participation in Erasmus and other mobility programmes.
- A strong facilities and learning resources, as well as well-established infrastructure, the learning environment of the highest standards, access to modern learning resources for students with disabilities.
- Nurturing good relations with students, listening to their needs, offering professional assistance, close relations with the alumni.

Areas in academic studies and life-long learning to be improved:

Diversity of life-long learning	It was noted that universities often do not have an in-house life-long learning methodology, this concept is not clearly defined, there are no possibilities provided for individuals who do not seek to obtain a qualification degree. It was noted that the life-long learning model applied by universities is not linked to the official or systematic assessment of market needs or market research.
Internationalisation	A large proportion of universities were credited for promoting internationalisation, noting, however, that quite substantial additional efforts were necessary in some universities to reach the desirable level of internationalisation. In some universities student and teacher mobility is not sufficiently promoted, no internal rules have been approved to ensure recognition of studies undertaken abroad or to explain the procedure for granting academic leave, students do not have possibilities to study foreign languages, individual study modules are not offered in foreign languages, institutions are not attractive for teaching staff from abroad.
Practical training of students	For almost one third of universities it was suggested to put more efforts to ensure possibilities for practical training and internships of students, put in place a clear procedure allowing overseeing practical training of students, including measures aimed at providing feedback by host organisations on the knowledge and skills of students as well as feedback by students on the organisation of practical training and the practical use thereof.

Quality assurance	In almost all universities shortcomings in the quality of study programmes were identified to a smaller or larger extent. One of the most pressing issue highlighted is insufficient attention to the student feedback on the quality of studies and to testimonials of employers; the respondents who took part in surveys are not informed if any actions were taken following the feedback they had provided, students of part-time and distant studies are not represented in study programme committees, student appraisal is not described in a systematic way, the alumni are not asked about possible improvements to the study programmes.
The content and structure of study programmes	Attention shall be paid to the fact that study programmes in larger universities are often inter-linked, are similar or repetitive, all resulting in larger workloads and costs for teaching and administrative staff. In some universities experts lacked clarity as to the extent that study programmes relate to the declared vision, mission and strategy of the university; some study programmes did not seem to be driven by the needs of the market or the society.
Student-centered learning	Almost half of all universities are still in the process of implementing the learning outcomes model, still developing and expanding student-centered teaching and learning, aiming to link learning outcomes to the levels of the European Qualifications Framework.
Recognition of earlier studies	Not all universities have a methodology in place to allow recognition of earlier studies, while such possibility would ensure broader life-long learning possibilities for adults, in particular.

Review of academic studies and life-long learning in colleges of higher education

The area of academic studies and life-long learning in all colleges of higher education was evaluated positively by experts.

Academic studies and life-long learning in colleges of higher education

Best practices singled out by experts:

- Strong focus by staff to ensure a positive learning experiences, a positive and friendly learning atmosphere.
- Great attention in study programmes devoted to practical skills, students get placements in local companies for work-based practical training, positive evaluation of study programmes by employers for practical focus of the study programmes.
- Involvement of social partners in improvements of study programmes and evaluation of final thesis.
- Unique and niche-type study programmes adjusted to national or regional needs.
- Adherence to the life-long learning principle enabling proficiency training for the public at large.
- A well-developed learning infrastructure, effective disbursement of EU structural funds for the improvement of life-long learning areas, equipment and IT classrooms.
- Diversity of life-long learning opportunities and modes, efforts made to expand distant learning possibilities.

Areas in academic studies and life-long learning to be improved:

Internationalisation	The review group noted on insufficient level of internationalisation of academic studies in almost half of all state and non-state colleges of higher education. In-coming and out-going student and teacher mobility was identified by the experts as being too low. The primary cause for unsatisfactory level of out-going mobility is the lack of foreign language skills, whereas in-coming mobility is dampened by a shortage of study modules offered in English language. Experts encouraged colleges of higher education to enhance foreign language skills of their academic staff and students, develop study programmes offered in a foreign languages, improve access to information in English on college of higher education websites, and develop joint programmes or projects with foreign partners.
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Student drop-out	In almost all of the expert reports the necessity to find ways to mitigate student drop-out problem was highlighted. The experts noted on ineffectiveness of measures aimed at controlling student drop-out levels – there is no clear system for student motivation or assistance, information about academic requirements for students is lacking, academic support mechanism is insufficient. Experts advised maintaining closer links with local schools of secondary education.
Student-centered learning	Almost one third of all colleges of higher education have to put rather substantial efforts in order to comply with the principles of student-centered learning. Some colleges of higher education still lack a comprehensive understanding of various aspects of student-centered learning on the level of entire organisation, the learning outcomes are not clearly defined or are described without reference to the provisions of the Lithuanian Qualifications Framework and are not compatible with the European Qualifications Framework. Experts recommended adding a supplementary academic teaching on student-centered learning.
Curriculum design	During the institutional review, experts had made comments to some of the colleges of higher education on their curricula or quality thereof. It was emphasised that not all colleges of higher education are good at maintaining the balance between practical and theoretical components of their study programmes, not all colleges of higher education put all the necessary efforts to improve the process of elaborating new or developing the existing programmes; there is an insufficient involvement of students, alumni and employers into the composition or further improvement of study programmes, the student feedback on organisation of studies is used ineffectively.
Quality assurance of academic studies	Colleges of higher education often lack an effective and efficient quality assurance system for academic studies. Not all colleges of higher education have a standardised practice of drafting documents on follow-up actions taken in response to recommendations given by external review experts; or they do not define the procedure for utilising data – both statistical and feedback-type information collected from students, alumni and employers who participated in opinion surveys or other forms of feedback collection – which could provide valuable information on the teaching and learning processes and suggest desirable improvements of activities.
Communication with the alumni	In respect of more than half of all colleges of higher education observations were made in external review results on the shortcomings in the area of communication with the alumni. Colleges often fail to utilise the alumni network as a possible channel for meeting new social partners and for expanding the area of their influence, they do not have official alumni clubs or associations which would create favourable environment for cooperation among college students and alumni. Colleges were also recommended analysing possible venues for better use of alumni data, to improve follow-up on career paths of the alumni members and get them more involved in publicity campaigns to attract potential new students to colleges.

External review of academic studies and life-long learning in state and non-state institutions

Experts underlined more or less identical challenges faced by state and non-state institutions in the area of academic studies and life-long learning, such as ineffective quality assurance of academic studies, irrational composition of study programmes and curricula design, absence of communication with the alumni. Nevertheless, non-state institutions were more often likely to face the challenge of ensuring possibilities for work-based practical training and full-time employment possibilities for teaching staff, whereas the state sector was characterised by a higher student drop-out level and insufficient academic and social support system for students. In state sector study programmes were also more often based on workload input rather than learning outcomes in accordance with the European Qualifications Framework; the insufficiency of life-long learning possibilities was also emphasised.

RESEARCH AND/OR ART ACTIVITIES

During the first institutional review, the area of research and/or art activities was the area to be negatively assessed immediately after the area of strategic management. The area of research and/or art was negatively assessed in two universities and two colleges of higher education. However, it shall be noted that research activities were analysed by taking into account different nature of individual sectors of this activity – in universities the primary focus was given to evaluate research activities, whereas in colleges of higher education – to evaluate applied research activities.

Review of research and/or art activities in universities

Research and/or art activities were evaluated positively in all state universities and in seven out of nine non-state universities (Chart 8).

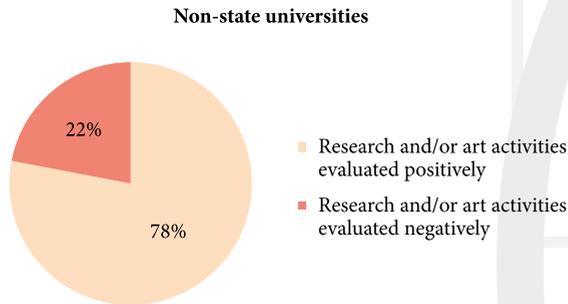


Chart 8. Evaluation of research and/or art activities in non-state universities

Research and/or art activities in universities

Best practices singled out by experts:

- The research activities in the bigger part of the universities were in line with the national and/or regional economic, cultural and social development priorities.
- The research activity areas in most of the universities comply with the priorities of the European research area.
- Although many universities still need to expand the number and quality of their research activities, in the case of several universities a very high level of achievements of global significance in individual research and/or art activities had been identified.
- Several universities successfully raised financial funds necessary for an effective research activity.
- Approximately one third of universities were credited for their achievements in internationalisation of research activities; they also demonstrated a rather broad involvement in international research projects.
- As an example of best practice the experts emphasised benchmarking in higher education in university participating in a project dedicated to universities and colleges of higher education striving to compare their activities with counterpart institutions. Despite several deficiencies of the benchmarking procedure (for instance, on account of the threat to confidentiality), its benefit is widely recognised by foreign higher education institutions who often use this practice. In Lithuania this was something new.
- In the majority of universities experts noted on intensified efforts in the area of research. “A very strong resolve to implement the research mission”, “commitment to achieve academic perfection in research” and other actions related to planning were laying the theoretical foundations for successful results in the future, which is always credited by the experts.

Areas of research and/or art activities to be improved:

Strategic management of research activities	In a larger number of universities the highlighted problems were related to strategic management in the area of research activities. The problem is linked to ineffective use of indicators, strategic implementation and organisation of organisational branches. Approximately one third of universities were recommended to improve conformity of research and/or art activities to the mission and strategic documents of universities.
Publications	A perfect way for self-promotion of universities in the area of research is to public research articles in international reviewed journals. Bearing in mind the aspirations of some universities to reach European university standards, the increase of number of publications in such journals is very relevant. Only in one third of universities experts took a note of a sufficient number of research publications in such journals.
Internationalisation	International mobility of researchers and teaching staff as well as international projects all contribute to enhancement of research possibilities, giving birth to new research initiatives. Partnerships undertaken on an international scale may directly contribute to the advancement of research activities in Lithuania. Although approximately one eighth of the universities received recommendations to increase internationalisation, the experts highlighted that the overall level of internationalisation needs to be improved.
Financial planning	Experts underscored and the universities acknowledged the high importance of sufficiency of resources, especially during difficult economic times which were prevalent during the external review procedure. With regard to universities aspiring to become global players the experts recommended using an effective financial planning in order to ensure long-term investments, because any attempts to achieve the goal of becoming the global player only by means of appropriately directing and developing research activities are impossible without substantial funding.
Quantity and quality of research activities	In almost one third of all universities the area of research activities were evaluated positively, whereas in the remainder universities the quality and the scale of research activities needs to be enhanced.

Review of research and/or art activities in colleges of higher education

Research and/or art activities were evaluated positively in twelve out of thirteen state colleges of higher education and in nine out of ten non-state colleges of higher education.

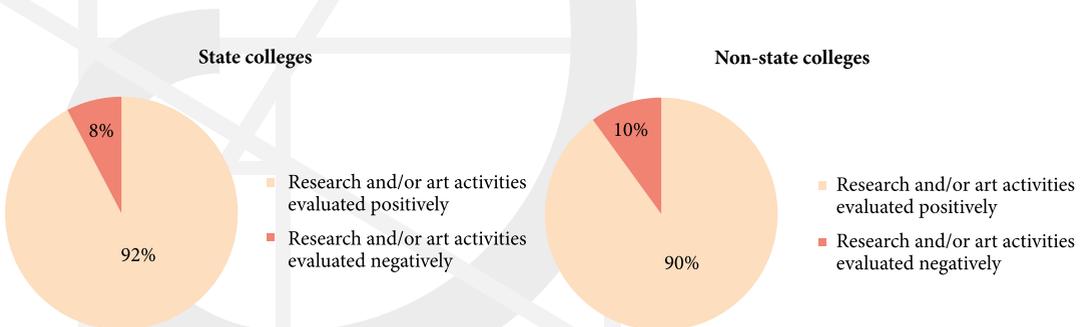


Chart 9. Evaluation of research and/or art activities in colleges of higher education

Research and/or art activities were evaluated negatively in 2 out of 23 colleges of higher education in Lithuania. Although this number is identical to universities, colleges of higher education received much more recommendations.

As earlier mentioned in the beginning of the analysis of the external review, while reviewing a higher education institution experts were following the contextual approach, which is demonstrated in the overall positive evaluation of achievements in the context of limited available resources and the scope of college of higher education mission. Moreover, a positive assessment was often given in consideration of the fact that applied research activities were adjusted to study programmes and regional needs.

Research and/or art activities in colleges of higher education

Best practices singled out by experts:

- In two thirds of colleges of higher education, research and/or art activities were in line with national and/or regional economic, cultural and social development priorities.
- Research projects undertaken in these higher education institutions had a direct impact on the regional development, for instance, by implementing such social projects as reintegration into the labour market, adults education, small to medium-size business development.
- Some colleges of higher education were credited by the experts for an active development and results of applied research.
- Some colleges of higher education were praised for their efforts in organisation of distance learning possibilities, enthusiasm and willingness to cooperate with other providers of higher education services, an efficient EU project management, fund raising capacities.

Areas in research and/or art activities to be improved:

<p>Strategic management of research activities</p>	<p>In a larger proportion of colleges of higher education shortcomings were identified in strategic management of research activities. These shortcomings were stemming from the shortage of formal research policy, absence of a clear research strategy, from strategic planning not focussed on long-term research possibilities, insufficient management and communication. Approximately one third of colleges of higher education reviewed were recommended fine-tuning their research activities with the organisational strategy. Some colleges of higher education were advised drafting a clear and realistic research strategy without delay. Research strategies should help to attract new commissioned research activities, evaluation of efficiency of research activities and implementation of other goals.</p>
<p>Funding</p>	<p>For the development of applied research funding possibilities are highly important. Colleges of higher education have to embrace applied research activities without any additional state budgetary allocations for this type of activity. Against a rather tense demographic situation and a decreasing number of students, colleges of higher education are facing yet a bigger challenge of securing sufficient funds for applied research. Therefore, lack of funding was identified by the experts as one of the key causes affecting a low level of applied research in colleges of higher education. Despite these challenges, experts recommended developing a consistent strategic direction (by clear goal setting, defining priority directions, improving strategic cooperation with current and potential partners, engaging in qualitative research), which would enable raising additional funds.</p>

Definition of applied research activities	In respect of almost 40 percent of colleges of higher education the experts advised defining and using a more precise definition of applied research activities. During the review a confusion was noticed among such concepts as applied research, life-long learning or continuous proficiency training. The use of a more precise definition of applied research activities would benefit colleges of higher education in their attempts to meet the interests of social partners, as well as would contribute to a better evaluation of results achieved in applied research activities and their impact.
Publications	There is a prevailing trend of publishing articles in Lithuanian magazines usually published by the same higher education institutions. Colleges of higher education entertaining aspirations of internationalisation were recommended encouraging their academic staff to publish their research papers not only on the national, but also on the international level.
Internationalisation	Considering that the criteria of conformity with the standards of the European research area are not applied to colleges of higher education, the experts were not expected to submit recommendation in this area; in some of the expert results, though, they referred to internationalisation as a possible means for creating a value added to the colleges of higher education recommending to boost the scale of research activities onto international level.
Research staff	A larger number of teaching staff with doctoral degrees guarantees a larger amount and higher quality of research activities. It was noted in the experts reports that many colleges of higher education ensure a baseline requirement when employing teaching staff with doctoral degrees, but are faced with the challenge of maintaining them or encouraging to engage in research.
Quantity and quality of research activities	Even those colleges of higher education which received a positive evaluation in this area (in over half of them) received many expert recommendations for intensifying, improvement and continuity of research and/or art activities.

Review of research and/or art activities in state and non-state institutions

High performance results in research and/or art activities were noted by the experts in several state and non-state universities. Universities with research activities of the highest global standards or those which could aspire reaching this high standard provided that sufficient long-term funding was secured were state universities.

Despite the fact that best practices and recommendations differ from non-state to state universities, it was noted that state universities were far better advanced in research activities than non-state universities. For instance, in state universities there were quite a few praiseworthy practices discovered, such as the research activity plan and staff incentive system. A larger progress was also demonstrated in the recommendation given to such institutions to improve activities of their entrepreneurship centre, inter-disciplinary career centres, etc. Larger proportion of non-state universities received recommendations which were directly related to the research strategy itself or setting of priorities.

As far as colleges of higher education are concerned, both state and non-state colleges of higher education received similar recommendations. Both sectors need to improve the quantity and quality of their research activities, both sectors are likewise deprived of state funding for applied research activities and, hence, are facing similar challenges. The fact that only a fraction of colleges of higher education succeeded at reaching a rather high level of applied research activities as well as the fact that approximately 40 percent of colleges of higher education had wrong perception of the concept of applied research activities speaks of insufficient efforts by most of the colleges of higher education (both state and non-state) in this area.

IMPACT ON REGIONAL AND NATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

The scale of impact by higher education institutions on the regional and national development is beyond any doubt and marks a win-win situation: a positive regional and national impact is felt by institutions of research and academic studies and their social partners. Among many positive things highlighted, cooperation with business and academic partners merits special attention for its stimulating effect on knowledge development, facilitates qualitative improvements of curriculum subjects, contributes to the implementation of the employment and other national priorities. Effective regional and national development activities and publicity thereof contributes to the status, high reputation and prestige of higher education institutions among potential new students.

Review of the impact of universities on regional and national development

In only one non-state university the area of impact on regional and nation development received a negative assessment. In this university cooperation with social partners was extremely low; apart from a number of research projects the experts could not find any evidence of involvement in local and international educational activities by this university. However, even these projects were not always related to the mission of the institution.

Review of the impact of universities on regional and national development

Best practices singled out by experts:

- The larger share of universities have a major role to play on a regional and national level, this role being efficient and relevant most of the time. An active, consistent and systemic cooperation with a large number of various partners makes a significant impact upon them and defines new cooperation possibilities.
- In approximately half of all universities a good degree of involvement in voluntary programmes by staff and students was highlighted or it was noted that the involvement in this kind of activities was at least promoted.

Areas of impact on regional and national development to be improved:

<p>Cooperation with partners</p>	<p>Despite the fact that in most of the universities a high degree of effective cooperation with social partners was highlighted, with such cooperation seen as a strength of the institution, at the same time unequal level and quality of such cooperation was also noted. Several universities were recommended getting more contacts with local governmental and educational institutions, transforming their cooperation into a more structural, formalised and targeted activity.</p>
<p>Planning, monitoring and evaluation of impact on regional and national development</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Part of the universities were recommended improving their planning activities in the area of impact, i.e., defining or clarifying the goals of the third mission, integrating them into strategic documents so as to bring them in line with the general strategic management structure. • One third of universities received recommendation in the evaluation and monitoring of impact. They were recommended setting more precise impact evaluation indicators or foreseeing specific actions to be taken.

<p>Publicity of activities</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Experts noted that several universities, in particular, large ones, had the potential of embracing activities on an international level, but were not good at self-promotion, i.e., by not engaging themselves in publicity or marketing of their activities on such a level that would be advisable for universities seeking not only national but also international acclaim. Experts believe that the level of these universities was much higher than the official image they were projecting. • In approximately one third of universities deficiencies with publicity of performance results were noted. Universities were advised to inform the public about their achievements, reinforce the external image, update activities of public relations or marketing, and embrace more in-depth awareness raising activities on the purpose and role of social cooperation.
<p>Relations with the alumni</p>	<p>Approximately one fourth of universities received recommendations on cooperation with the alumni. Such cooperation was primarily spontaneous. Universities were recommended adopting a more targeted approach towards activities of alumni organisations, because they are one of the tools reinforcing relations with the community and enhancing impact on national development. Universities were proposed to embrace contacts with the alumni on a more systematic way, utilise their possible contribution to the higher education institution and the society, further support their professional activities and professional advancement.</p>

Review of the impact of colleges of higher education on regional and national development

The regional and national impact of all colleges of higher education was evaluated positively, which illustrates a significant focus devoted by this type of higher education institutions to the third mission.

Review of the impact of colleges of higher education on regional and national development

Best practices singled out by experts:

- Majority of colleges of higher education are important for regions and the country on the whole because of their positive impact on the demographic, social, economic and cultural development. During the external review a large number of best practices in the area of impact on regional and national development were identified.
- In the bigger part of colleges of higher education contacts and cooperation with social partners were close, efficient, strong and active. In approximately half of the colleges of higher education the experts highlighted the available study programmes which were often flexible, focussing on practical skills and the labour market.
- In almost all colleges of higher education final papers of students reflected the regional and national needs and were based on the interests of business companies.

Areas in the impact on regional and national development to be improved:

<p>Cooperation with partners</p>	<p>Colleges of higher education were advised becoming more pro-active in applied research activities, maintaining contacts with social partners, analysing possibilities of forming consortia within their respective regions and beyond more actively, developing a more formalised mechanisms of cooperation with external partners.</p>
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Planning, monitoring and evaluation of impact on regional and national development	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Almost one fifth of colleges of higher education were recommended improving planning in the area of impact, i.e., prioritising their activities, developing clear strategies to enable establishment of new partnerships, envisaging clearer and more open procedures for aligning new and current partnerships with the strategic target. • Part of colleges of higher education were recommended improving their measuring tools: setting more specific and clear indicators. • Actions to be taken should be defined by taking into account regional and national development needs as well as the strategic plan of the higher education institutions. A systemic evaluation of performance and impact would facilitate verification of the targets achieved, highlight guidelines for further development, and reinforce the external image of the institution within the region and beyond.
Publicity of activities	Approximately half of all colleges of higher education did not have marketing strategies, with very fragmented approach towards publicity and marketing. Experts recommended making an extra effort to enhance marketing for the services offered, enhancing one's image aimed at attracting higher flows of potential students and bridging the gap between business partners.
Relations with the alumni	In over half of the colleges of higher education the alumni contribution is not used to the full potential. Several colleges of higher education were recommended establishing an alumni club or making better use of the already existing clubs.
Shortage of funding	As earlier mentioned, colleges of higher education do not benefit from state funding for applied research activities; this activity remains of paramount importance in order to enhance the impact on regional and national development of colleges of higher education.

Review of the impact of state and non-state institutions on regional and national development

The majority of state and non-state universities demonstrated a positive impact on regional and national development. Compliance of this impact with regional priorities could be seen from the following practices: a fast and timely response to the needs of social partners; the programmes offered are compatible with national and regional needs; the alumni are well-prepared for commercial activities and are bound to make a positive impact on the region and the country on the whole, involvement in voluntary activities. Two non-state universities did receive recommendations on strengthening the plan of their regional impact, whereas several state universities received recommendation more linked with measuring the effectiveness of impact tools. Other recommendations were different on a case-by-case basis, which makes it impossible to present general overview of positive or negative trends.

State and non-state colleges of higher education were noted for an abundance of evidence illustrating their impact on regional and national development, with the number of recommendations not being too different from state versus non-state colleges of higher education. It was highlighted that a larger number of state colleges of higher education received recommendations related to more systematic impact assessment.

RECOMMENDATIONS OF EXPERTS ON IMPROVEMENT OF THE SYSTEM OF HIGHER EDUCATION AND EXTERNAL REVIEW PROCESS

Having analysed the system of higher education and institutional problems, the experts who performed an external review of higher education institutions of Lithuania presented their recommendations on how to improve the educational system and external review of higher education institutions.

Research. Observations related to a more precise definition of research activities and its improvements are the most prevalent in the recommendations by the experts to the Ministry of Education and Science. The key experts recommendations are as follows:

- Considering that high global standards of research activities in some of the universities of Lithuania are considered as a national priority, the Ministry should review its investment strategy into research activities aimed at speeding up progress in research activities and attracting more professors and doctoral students on an international scale. This would facilitate achievement of more real results empowering at least one university to become a global player within the upcoming five years.
- To reflect on amendments necessary to support colleges' of higher education attempts to perform applied research activities and to recognise their contribution to regional development.
- Ministry of Education and Science should reflect on the possibility of allowing strong in applied research colleges of higher education to compete along with other higher education institutions for public funding for research.
- On the national level the Ministry of Education and Science should specify applied research activities in various study fields.
- In order to simplify management of applied research in colleges of higher education, colleges of higher education too should be allowed to compose and submit for approval master degree programmes in the areas in which they can demonstrate the strength and regional impact of their study programmes.

Improvement of external evaluation of learning resources. Although the methodology applied by MOSTA is very new, the review team noted several major deficiencies:

- Measuring of learning resources is not convincing, in particular, as regards the upper and lower values. Some indicators seem unreasonable, with no logical explanation given. Even though it was not one of the tasks given to the external review team, the experts believe that in the future the Ministry and MOSTA should cooperate with higher education institutions in Lithuania in order to ensure that the value of measurable indicators were fixed in accordance with best available European and global practices. In this way universities and colleges of higher education operating in Lithuania would be able to do a self-assessment by means of benchmarking themselves against European and other international competitors. This would enhance the value of collected data and the validity thereof on an institutional and national level.

- Some of the selected indicators are not necessarily valuable when it comes to evaluation of business schools which usually apply rather unique procedures for hiring staff and offering study programmes.

Improvement of the external review. The experts expressed the following observations with regard to improvements to external review of higher education institutions:

- The review model whereby positive review results are approved for a period of six years is potentially not useful for institutions or the national system of higher education. For many successful institutions with growth and improvement potential it would be more useful to organise review every three years. This being said, as well as considering that the review teams do not have such a possibility, an interim review is being proposed to be arranged every three years.
- Experts suggested launching advisory external reviews of higher education institutions aimed at further improvement of quality systems. Where an institution of research or higher education is fully compliant with the national and European standards, such review would present a good opportunity for critical self-assessment by every institution, leading to a higher quality of education services in the region.

Other observations. In expert review reports the following recommendations were given to the Ministry of Education and Science:

- Approve the standard version of translating the name of a “college” into the English language so that the translation currently in use would not mislead the society and would not raise unreasonable expectations.
- Analyse possible benefits of authorising successful colleges of higher education to run programmes of levels 5 and 7 under the Lithuanian Qualifications Framework.
- When deliberating student enrolment criteria and procedures, the key focus shall be given to possibilities of students to derive benefit from their studies at the higher education institution.
- Statutory provisions regulating the field of higher education do not allow ensuring continuity of activities in the area of higher education. If higher education institution seeks to become effective, it needs a stable long-term higher education strategy and a more stable planning atmosphere. Under present circumstances, the existing planning is extremely intensive obliging higher education institutions to submit not only annual reports, but also reports covering the periods of ten, seven and three years. Such planning requirements are ineffective preventing from establishing an efficient and reasonable planning system.
- The Ministry should promote more professional guidance for pupils to boost their motivation to study technical sciences.
- The Ministry is recommended to investigate into possible ways to increase student participation in mobility programmes.
- In view of the fact that the qualification degree of MBA⁴ is highly popular and is usually the main area of activity of all international business schools, experts advise the Ministry to consider the possibility of conferring this qualification degree in higher education institutions of Lithuania.

⁴ MBA – more professional rather than academic qualification degree of business administration, which is not the part of Lithuania’s higher education system. Students graduated from the first cycle studies usually are enrolled to this kind of studies. MBA is designed to prepare for further professional activities. There might be set some requirements connected to the abilities of a student to conduct research activities for graduates of MBA attempting to enroll to doctoral studies.

SUMMARY OF SURVEY RESULTS OF HIGHER EDUCATION INSTITUTIONS

After completing the first cycle of institutional review, the Centre for Quality Assessment in Higher Education conducted an anonymous survey of higher education institutions. 30 higher education institutions participated in the survey: 17 colleges of higher education and 13 universities, 21 state and 9 non-state higher education institutions.

During the survey representatives of the administration of higher education institutions were requested to indicate the model used for their quality assurance systems, as well as reply to questions related to the process of institutional review and self-evaluation, review results and their impact on changes within various areas of institutional activity. Moreover, universities and colleges of higher education were requested to indicate which of the review results had the most significant impact on changes within the organisation, as well as score the statements that the external institutional review created a value-added in indicated areas of activity.

Quality assurance systems of higher education institutions

First of all, representatives of higher education institutions were requested to indicate the model used as the basis for their quality assurance system (Chart 10). It is noteworthy that as little as 29.4 percent of colleges of higher education indicated their quality assurance systems being based on a single model, whereas universities use a single model in 61.5 percent of all institutions. Colleges of higher education primarily use the ISO model. Quality assurance system of the European Foundation for Quality Management (EFQM) or internal quality assurance system based on the Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area (ESG) are also rather frequently used, whereas universities mainly use ESG followed by an ISO model for reference (which is three times less popular in universities compared to colleges of higher education).

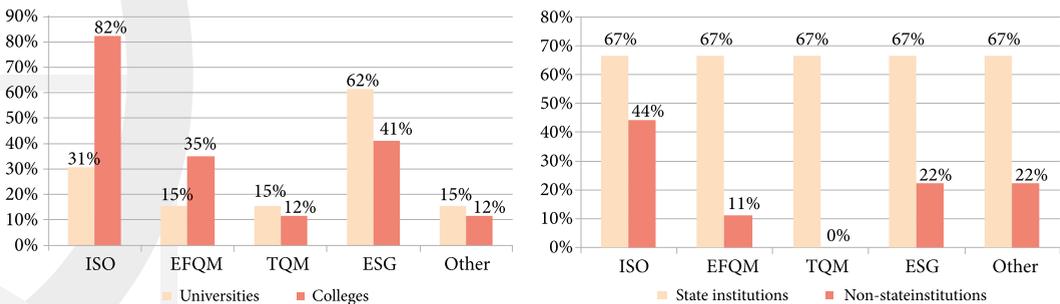


Chart 10. Basic model of quality assurance used in higher education institutions

State-funded higher education institutions use various quality assurance models far more frequently than non-state higher education institutions. When

referring to other model used, the institutions indicated their model developed in-house, the General Evaluation Model (GEM) which is not accredited. One state university stated that quality assurance system was non-existent in that establishment.

Evaluation of the process of institutional review

Higher education institutions were also asked to evaluate the process of institutional review from four aspects:

- Whether the composition of an expert team was adequate for the particular type and profile of that higher education institution.
- Whether the review process was clear (whether it was undertaken under the established procedure, whether the review stages, the course of the review and the roles of participating parties were clear).
- Whether meetings with target groups organised during site visits were useful for experts in order to get an objective view of activities in university or college of higher education.
- Whether review results encouraged to undertake improvements to the activities of the institution concerned.

A conclusion that follows from Chart 11 is that the external review was clear to higher education institutions, the composition of expert team was assessed as appropriate, meetings organised during site visits were useful, and expert reports contributed to positive institutional changes. Similar general conclusion can also be made in respect of the attitude of state versus non-state higher education institutions towards the institutional review.

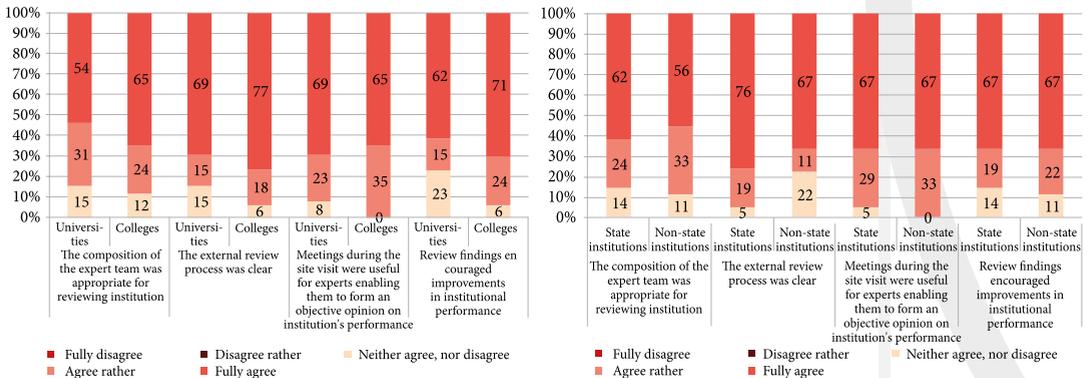


Chart 11. Evaluation of the institutional review

Self-evaluation process

During the survey, higher educational institutions were requested to indicate their evaluation of self-assessment process in terms of how well prepared it was, whether it involved the academic community, representatives of employers and students, whether self-evaluation results were presented to the academic community. Higher education institutions also indicated whether the areas

highlighted during the self-evaluation as areas for improvement corresponded with the expert recommendations, whether the self-evaluation process had any positive impact on performance improvement, and whether the self-evaluation has become a regular process undertaken not only before the external review.

As illustrated in Chart 12, colleges of higher education were more often inclined to agree to the given statements than universities. Some of the statements were fully shared by all colleges of higher education – this result demonstrates that self-evaluation is better planned, involving the academic community more efficiently, the results are discussed more broadly with the academic community. All colleges of higher education agreed that the self-evaluation process was useful for improving their performance and that it had become a regular practice. No significant differences between the attitudes of state versus non-state higher education institutions have been noted.

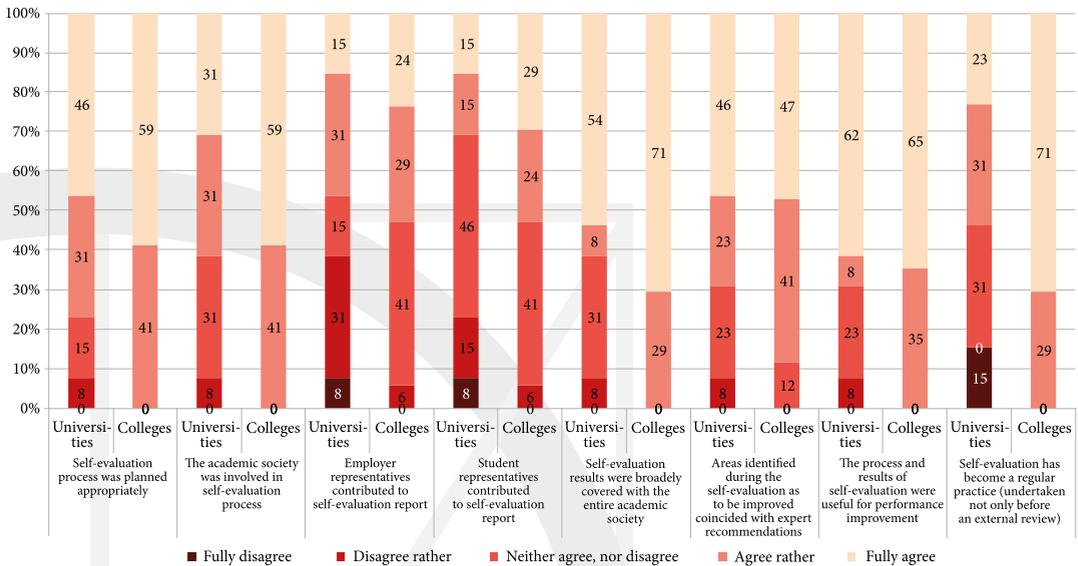


Chart 12. Assessment of self-evaluation process in universities and colleges of higher education

Evaluation of the impact of the review results on institutional changes

During the survey higher education institutions were also requested to evaluate the impact played by the external review on institutional changes (Chart 13).

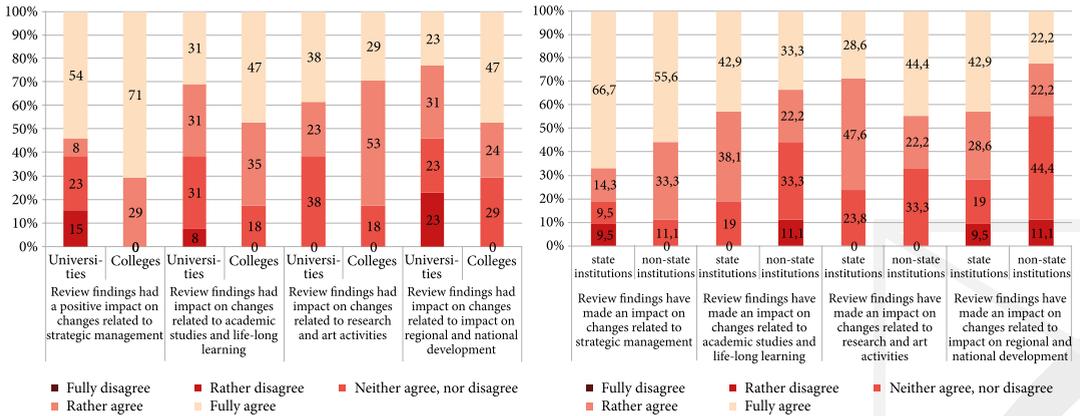


Chart 13. Evaluation of the impact of the review's results on institutional change (1)

The results obtained illustrate that, according to colleges of higher education, the review had a large impact on changes within strategic management with all colleges of higher education agreeing to the statement, whereas only 62 percent of universities opting for “rather agree” or “fully agree”. Moreover, colleges of higher education had a more favourable attitude towards the impact of review results on academic studies and life-long learning, with 82 percent of colleges of higher education and 62 percent of universities agreeing to the statement, whereas as many as 39 percent of universities had doubts or were not sure about the benefit of external review in the area of academic studies and life-long learning. The impact of review results on the area of research and art activities was also more positively assessed by colleges of higher education (with 82 percent of them agreeing or fully agreeing with that impact) rather than universities (with 61 percent of universities agreeing or fully agreeing with the impact). The impact of the review results on the fourth evaluation area – impact to regional and national development – again was more favourably evaluated by colleges of higher education – 71 percent of colleges of higher education and 54 percent of universities agreed with the statement, whereas one fourth of universities disagreed with the statement that the external review had been beneficial at all for the given area.

State and non-state institutions similarly evaluate the impact of review results on institutional changes in the areas of strategic management and research and art activities; while state institutions saw a larger impact on academic studies and life-long learning (81 percent of state institutions positively evaluated the impact on institutional changes) as well as on regional and national development (with 72 percent of the respondents being positive about such impact on changes) than non-state institutions (56 and 14 percent, respectively).

After receiving the review results, higher education institutions are obliged to draw up a follow-up plan to improve their activities. When asked whether this plan is beneficial for improvement of institutional performance, all colleges of higher education indicated that they saw the benefit of the follow-up plan to improve institutional performance, whereas the percentage of universities thinking likewise was only 69 percent (Chart 14).

Colleges of higher education (83 percent agreed) and universities (77 percent agreed) more or less agreed to the statement that the institutional review reflected the real situation within institutions. Moreover, 83 percent of colleges of higher education and 70 percent of universities believed that the external review of higher education institutions was beneficial for the entire system of higher education.

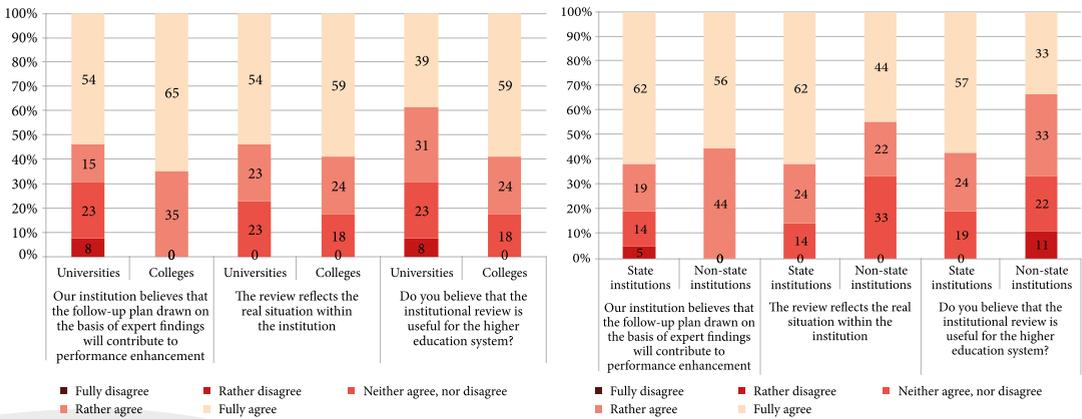


Chart 14. Assessment of the review results on institutional changes (2)

Non-state higher education institutions have a more favourable opinion of the impact of the follow-up plan on the institutional performance (100 percent of non-state higher education institutions supported the statement), with 19 percent of institutions in the state sector were in doubt or did not see any benefit at all.

One third of non-state institutions doubted whether the external review truly reflected the real situation at the time of the review, with as little as 14 percent of state institutions sharing similar doubts.

State institutions appreciated more the benefit of the institutional review of higher education system (81 percent agreed) compared to non-state institutions (66 percent agreed).

Impact of the external review on areas of activity

During the survey higher education institutions were requested to evaluate whether they believed that the institutional review of higher education institutions had any impact on specific areas of activity. Almost half of all universities (Chart 15) indicated that the review had a larger impact on changes within their strategic plans (54 percent), monitoring of the strategic plan implementation (54 percent), setting of quantitative and qualitative indicators for the implementation of the strategic plan (47 percent). College of higher education representatives more often emphasised on the impact in the given areas – 77, 82 and 71 percent, respectively. No such significant differences have been observed between state and non-state sector institutions: the impact of review results on strategic plan was noted by 66 percent of non-state and

67 percent of state higher education institutions, on the monitoring of strategic plan implementation – 55 percent of non-state and 77 percent of state higher education institutions, on setting of quantitative and qualitative indicators for the implementation of the strategic plan – 44 percent of non-state and 66 percent of state higher education institutions.

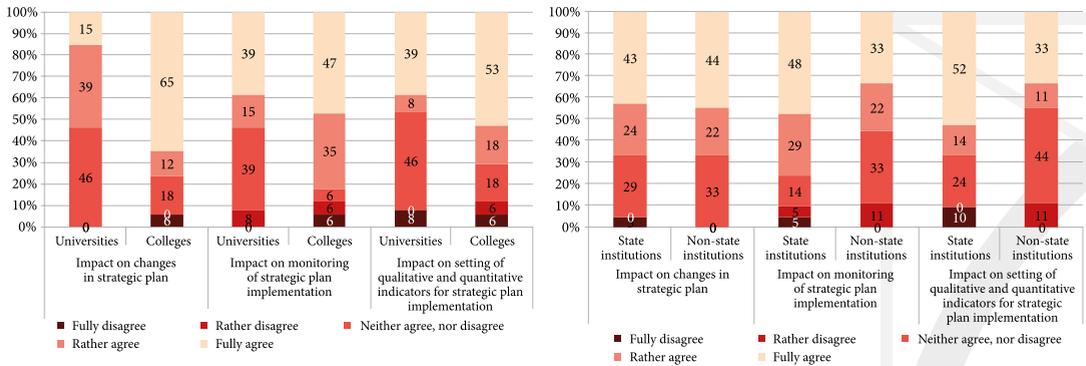


Chart 15. Impact of the review results on strategic planning

Similarly, colleges of higher education institutions more often emphasised the benefit of the review on risk and change management: 65 percent of colleges of higher education institutions and 39 percent of universities agreed to the statement that the external review was beneficial for risk management (it is important to underline that none of the university noted as fully agreeing with the statement). A positive impact of the institutional review was seen by 70 percent of colleges of higher education institutions and 31 percent of universities. There are no major differences in evaluation of this statement either in state or non-state sector – 44 percent of non-state and 57 percent of state higher education institutions agreed with the statement on the risk management impact, with 44 percent of non-state and 57 of state higher education institutions supporting the statement in the impact on change management.

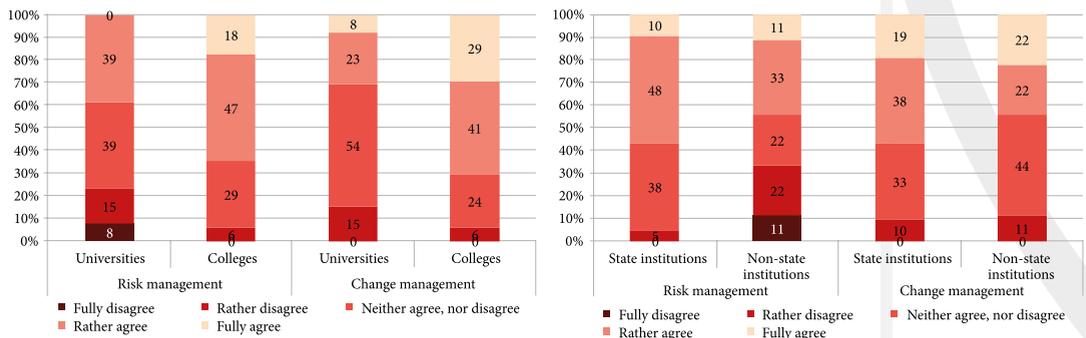


Chart 16. The impact of the review results on risk and change management

The analysis as to whether the review had any positive impact on improvements to the internal quality system and academic ethics, significant

differences can be observed in the responses on the impact on improvements to the internal quality system among universities (34 percent) and colleges of higher education institutions (88 percent) (see Chart 17). 66 non-state and 81 percent of state higher education institutions agreed with the statement that the review had a positive impact on improvements to their internal quality systems. 23 percent of universities and 41 percent of colleges of higher education institutions, or 33 percent of both state and non-state institutions agreed to the statement on the impact of the review on academic ethics.

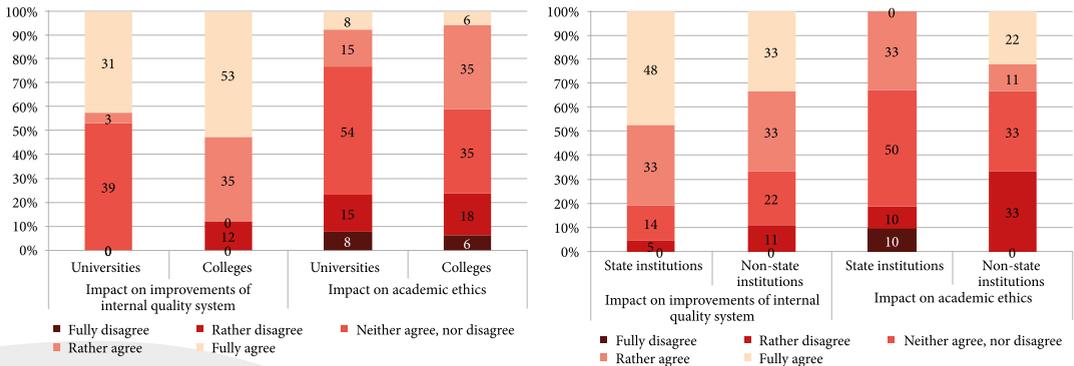


Chart 17. Impact of the review results on improvements of the internal quality system and academic ethics

In principle, no huge differences were noticed among universities and colleges of higher education in terms of their assessment of the review’s impact on the distribution of administrative functions and inter-departmental cooperation (Chart 18), although it can be seen that a much larger proportion of state (52 percent) compared to non-state (22 percent) higher education institutions believed the review to have had an impact on improvements to inter-departmental cooperation.

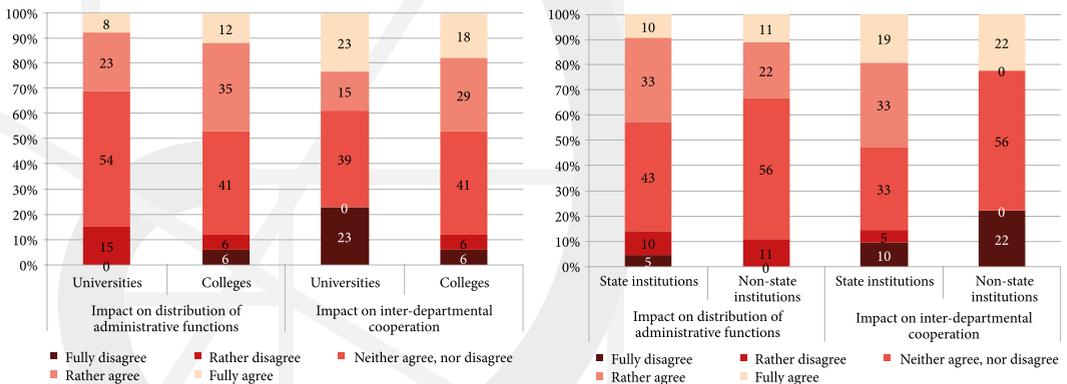


Chart 18. Impact of the review results on distribution of administrative functions and inter-departmental cooperation

The most obvious difference in evaluation of whether the external review had any impact on human resource management was noticed among universities

and colleges of higher education (39 percent of universities and 59 percent of colleges of higher education agreed with the statement) (see Chart 19). In the opinion of colleges of higher education, the review had also had a larger impact on management of learning resources (47 percent of colleges of higher education and 31 percent of universities agreed with the statement). No such striking differences between state versus non-state sector have been observed.

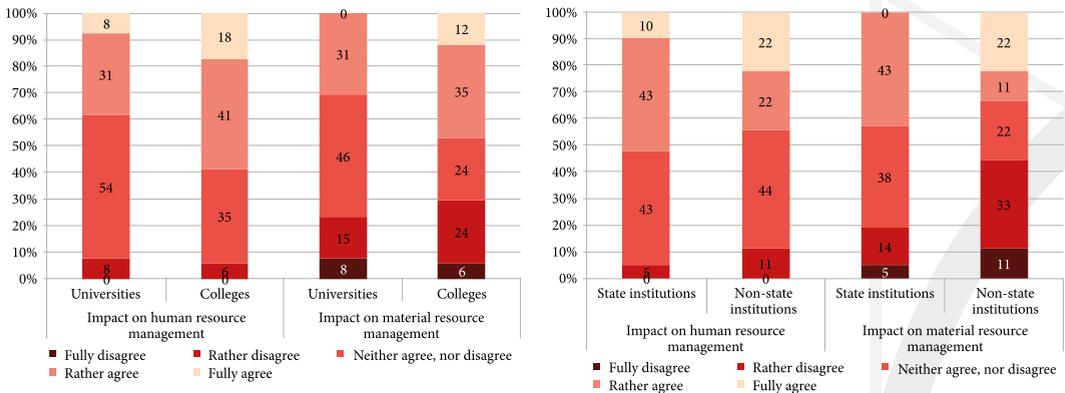


Chart 19. Impact of the review results on management of human and material resources

Profound differences of opinion were observed in the evaluation of the contribution the external review has made on the diversity of forms and possibilities of life-long learning – 23 percent of universities and 59 colleges of higher education, 22 percent of non-state and 52 percent of state institutions agreed to this statement. In terms of the impact on improvements to the alumni employment possibilities and the career path monitoring system, no striking differences among universities and colleges of higher education or among non-state versus state sector were noticed; 46 percent of universities and 64 percent of colleges of higher education, as well as 33 percent of non-state and 67 percent of state higher education institutions believed in the benefit of the institutional review for cooperation with external partners.

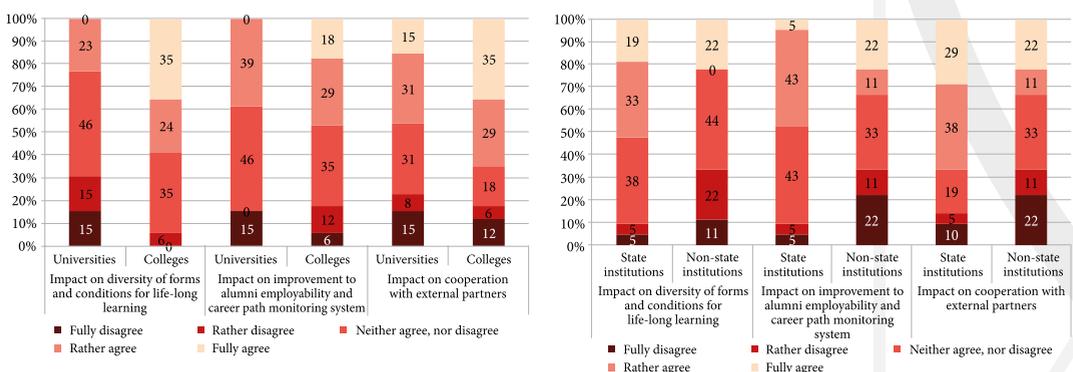


Chart 20. Impact of the review results on the diversity of forms and possibilities of life-long learning, career path monitoring of the alumni and cooperation with external partners

A greater planning efficiency of research and/or art activities after the recommendations given in the external review results were noted by colleges of higher education (65 percent) rather than universities (15 percent) and more by state (57 percent) rather than non-state (22 percent) higher education institutions (see Chart 21). The statement on the review's impact on involvement in international research and/or art activities was upheld by 15 percent of universities and 59 percent of colleges of higher education, 22 percent of non-state versus 47 percent of state higher education institutions.

Many more colleges of higher education (65 percent) compared to universities (15 percent) supported the statement that the review results had made an impact on international (both, in-coming and out-going) mobility of teaching staff, researchers and students. State higher education institutions agreed to this statement much more frequently than in non-state higher education institutions (52 and 22 percent, respectively).

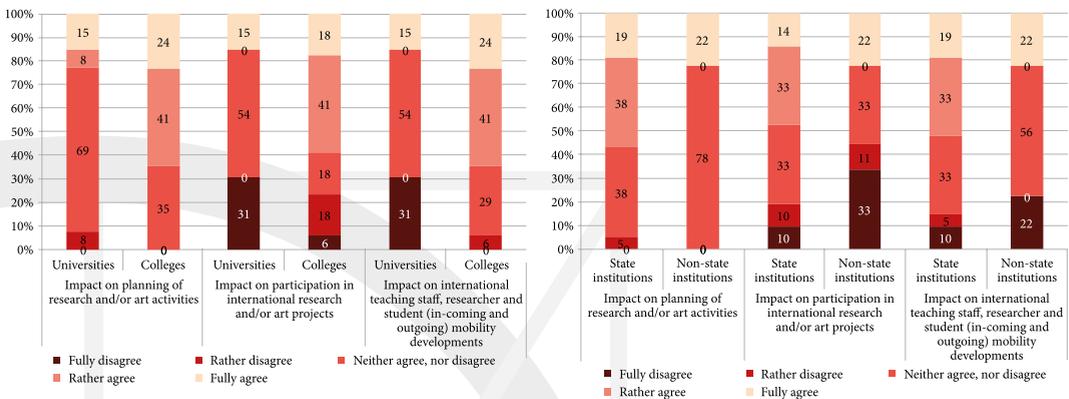


Chart 21. Impact of the review results on research and/or art activities

As far as the impact of the external review on institutional documented measures for regional and national development is concerned, it was regarded as useful by 65 percent of colleges of higher education and 15 percent of universities, as well as by 22 percent of non-state and 52 percent of state higher education institutions. 30 percent of universities and 53 percent of colleges of higher education or, likewise, 22 percent of non-state and 52 percent of state higher education institutions believed that the institutional review contributed towards efficient implementation of specific measures of regional and national development. 23 percent of universities and 47 percent of colleges of higher education or, alternatively, 22 percent of non-state and 43 percent of state higher education institutions claimed that, by means of drawing on the expert recommendations, they were able to include relevant regional and national topics into practical training and final theses of students.

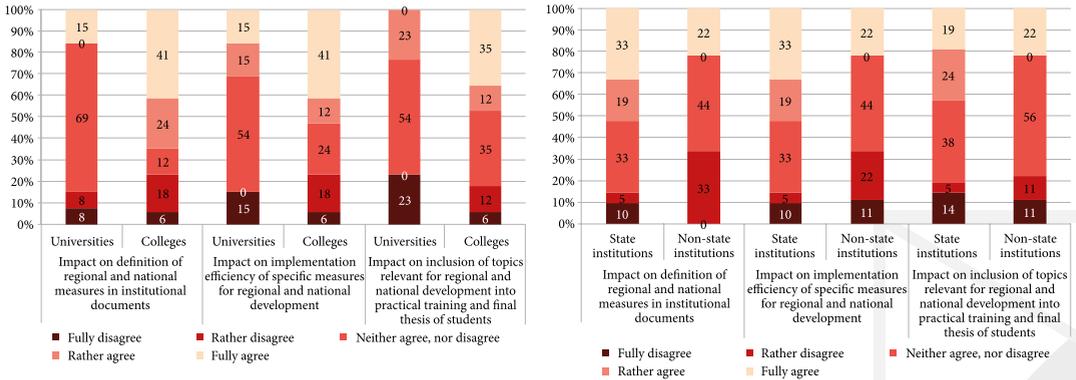


Chart 22. Impact of the review results on the regional and national development

Presentation of the review results

One of the key conditions for the institutional review is the publicity of the review results. Higher education institutions were asked if they had presented the results to the Council, external partners, students and academic community (Chart 23).

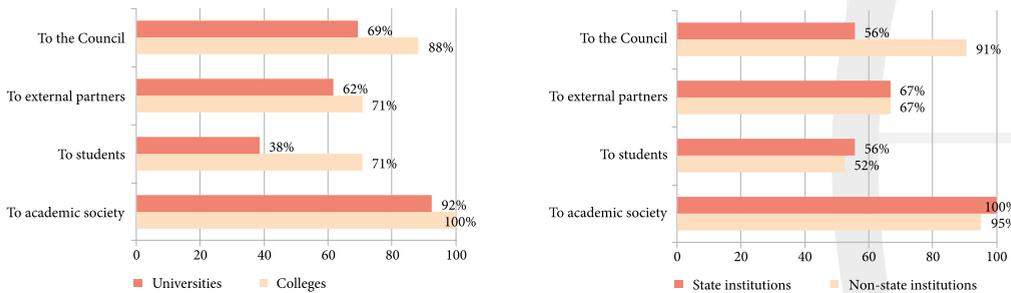


Chart 23. Publicity of review results

It is important to note that despite a rather similar percentage of universities and colleges of higher education presented the review results to individual target groups, colleges of higher education were more active. A larger discrepancy was only observed in presentation of the results to students – 38 percent of universities and 71 percent of colleges of higher education did that.

As regards any differences between state and non-state sector, these were also minimal. A more vivid discrepancy was noticed in the percentage of higher education institutions which presented the results to the Council, i.e., to their supreme governing body – 56 percent of non-state and 91 percent of state institutions did that.

Impact of the review on change

Representatives of higher education institutions were also requested to indicate to what extent the self-assessment and external review results affected operational changes within institutions (Chart 24).

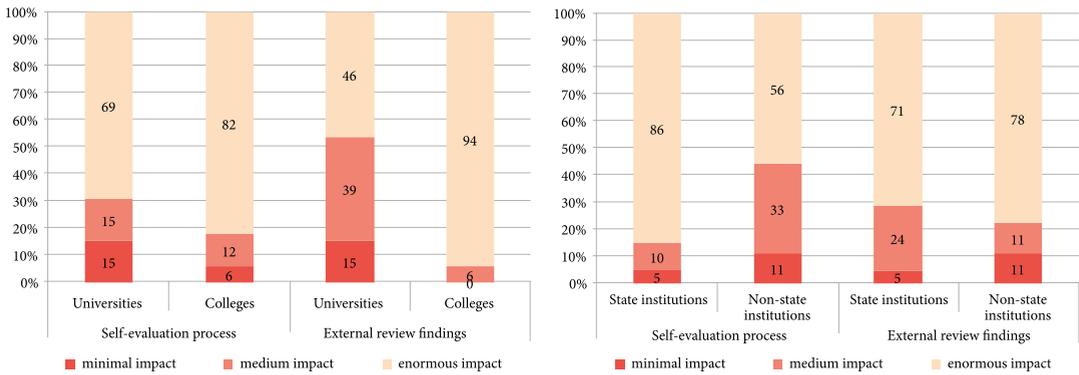


Chart 24. Impact of self-evaluation and external review

A larger percentage of colleges of higher education (82 and 94 percent) argued that drafting of self-evaluation documents and the external review results affected major organisational changes, with 69 and 46 percent of universities ascertaining a large impact of these factors.

State and non-state higher education institutions similarly assessed the impact of self-evaluation and external review results on organisational changes; it shall be stressed, though, that state universities and colleges of higher education saw a much higher relevance of a self-evaluation (86 percent) than non-state higher education institutions (56 percent).

Value-added created by the institutional review

Universities and colleges of higher education were requested to assess the value-added (if any) created by the institutional review on the good reputation of the higher education institutions, on student enrolment figures and international partnerships (Chart 25).

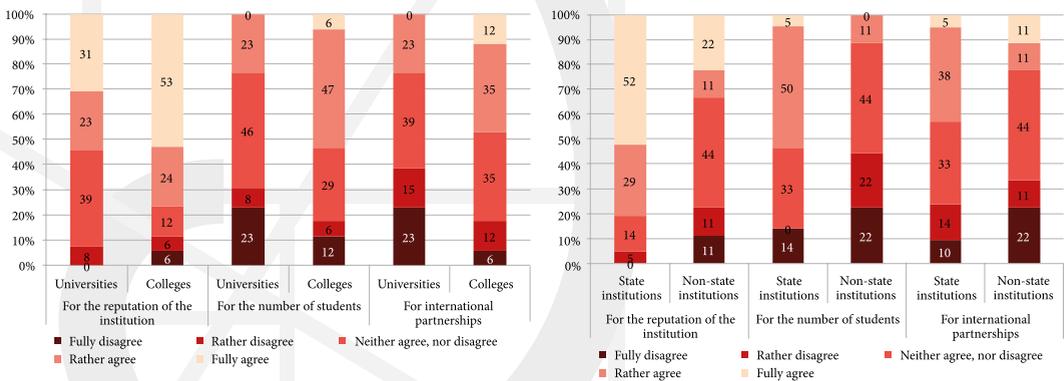


Chart 25. Value-added created by the institutional review

As demonstrated by the survey results, colleges of higher education saw a much higher relevance of the institutional review for a good reputation of an institution (with 77 percent of colleges of higher education and 54 percent of universities agreeing to the statement), for changes in student numbers (with

53 percent of colleges of higher education and 23 percent of universities agreeing to the statement), for international partnerships (with 47 percent of colleges of higher education and 23 percent of universities agreeing to the statement). The majority of universities and colleges of higher education believe that the highest value-added of an institutional review is created for the good reputation of the higher education institution, and the smallest value-added – for international partnerships.

Moreover, it may be argued that state higher education institutions saw a higher value-added created in the given areas by the institutional review than non-state institutions. State universities and colleges of higher education saw a larger value-added of the institutional review on the good reputation of the higher education institution (with 81 percent of state and 33 percent of non-state higher education institutions agreeing to the statement) and on changes in the number of students (with 55 percent of state and 11 percent of non-state higher education institutions agreeing to the statement), and on international partnerships (with 43 percent of state and 22 percent of non-state higher education institutions agreeing to the statement). The majority of non-state and state institutions believed that the highest value-added of the institutional review was created for the good reputation of the higher education institution.

Summary of the results of survey of higher education institutions

In summary, the survey of higher education institutions allows drawing up the conclusion that, in general, the institutions positively evaluated the process of institutional review, and saw the benefit of self-evaluation and external review results on their activities. According to the institutions, the largest impact of the review results was made on changes in the area of strategic planning and follow-up monitoring, on setting of quantitative and qualitative indicators, on improvement of internal quality system.

Similarly, colleges of higher education and universities saw the relevance of presenting the external review results to the academic community, students, and external partners. Moreover, they also claimed that self-evaluation and external review had made an impact on institutional changes. According to higher education institutions, the highest value-added of the external review was created for the good reputation of the institution, and a lower value-added – on changes in the number of students and international partnerships.

It is important to note that almost all aspects listed in the survey were more positively assessed by colleges of higher education rather than universities, and by state institutions rather than non-state institutions. The fact that colleges of higher education were more inclined to give credit to the institutional review and were more successful at implementing the experts recommendations might have resulted from the fact that colleges of higher education had already been familiar with an external review process.

Considering that all higher education institutions indicated that the review reflected their current situation within their respective institutions, a conclusion can be drawn that an institutional review was, in principle, an objective process creating the conditions for further improvement of the performance of higher education institutions.

REVIEW OF THE EVALUATION OF LEARNING RESOURCES IN HIGHER EDUCATION INSTITUTIONS

The evaluation of compliance of learning resources of higher education institutions to the baseline quality requirements applicable to conditions of academic studies and organisation thereof was launched in 2011. Learning resources were assessed in 4 areas of reference. In 2012 and 2013 the learning resources were analysed on the basis of the Methodology provision whereby an area under review failing to comply with the baseline requirements indicated under the Methodology in 50 percent or more of indicators shall be assessed negatively, and, where at least one area under review was assessed negatively – the learning resources of the higher education institution should be assessed negatively.

In summary, the following trends in review of learning resources of higher education institutions were identified:

- The review results of learning resources of higher education institutions had been improving every year. Non-compliances were detected in individual areas where higher education institution was offering academic studies in two or more study areas.
- There was a **growing number of study programmes** with the number of students **enrolled through LAMA BPO** (the Lithuanian Association of Institutions of Higher Education, General Admission Organisation) **with an enrolment score below the baseline value** set in the Methodology (for universities – 1.8 grade, for colleges of higher education – 1 grade) of 5 percent from the general number of student enrolment. In 2014 out of 46 higher education institutions 21 institutions complied with this requirements stipulated in the Methodology (indicator 16.3 “Cut-off marks of first degree and integrated studies entrants according to study programmes”). This trend was observed in higher education institutions of all types.
- **A larger proportion of state-funded students enrolled in the third cycle did not complete their studies within the given period.** In 2014 in 8 out of 14 universities the number of students awarded with the doctoral degree of science (art) was below the baseline requirement under the Methodology (Indicator 17.4 “The percentage of students enrolled in state-funded third cycle of studies and awarded with the doctoral degree in science (art)”).
- Some non-state universities had **a higher percentage of teaching staff not holding any scientific degrees** (acknowledged artists) and of teaching staff for whom it was **a secondary employment** (indicator 15.3 “The ratio between the number of positions filled by teaching staff holding a scientific degree (Acknowledged Artists) and the Total Number of Positions Filled by Teaching Staff” and indicator 15.4 “the ratio between the number of positions filled by teaching staff working in sec-

ondary employment, i.e. in their free-time from major employment, and the total number of positions filled by teaching staff”). 6 out of 8 non-state universities were not offering third cycle studies.

- In some of state universities **the number of students enrolled in the third cycle studies was decreasing** compared to the number of students enrolled in the second cycle and integrated studies; the number of state-funded students enrolled in the second cycle of studies with awarded qualifications was decreasing compared against the overall number of students upon enrolment into state-funded second cycle studies (Indicator 16.2 “The ratio between the number of students enrolled in third cycle studies and the number of students in second cycle and integrated studies” and Indicator 17.3 “Percentage of the second cycle students in state-funded places awarded with qualification degree of higher education to the number of students enrolled into state-funded places in second cycle studies”).
- During the evaluation in some of state and non-state colleges of higher education **a larger proportion of administrative staff and other staff positions** filled to the number of positions filled by teaching and research staff was identified. This negative trend was brought about by a more rapidly decreasing number of teaching staff with research staff (Indicator 15.5 “The ratio between the number of positions of administrative and other staff filled in to the number of positions of teaching and research staff filled”).

A full analysis of learning resources is available on the official website of MOSTA (www.mosta.lt) and the Centre for Quality Assessment in Higher Education (www.skvc.lt).

CONCLUSIONS

During the institutional review which took place from 2011 to 2015 international expert teams reviewed all higher education institutions in the Republic of Lithuania and submitted recommendations on how to enhance their performance. On the basis of the review results, high education institutions were accredited either for 3 or 6 years (one institution terminated its operation).

As can be seen from the results of the survey of higher education institutions, colleges of higher education saw a higher value-added in terms of the impact of the institutional review on the good reputation of the institution (76 percent of colleges of higher education and 54 percent of universities agreed to the statement), on the change in the number of students (53 percent of colleges of higher education and 23 percent of universities agreed to the statement), and to international partnerships (47 percent of colleges of higher education and 23 percent of universities agreed to the statement). The majority of universities and colleges of higher education believed that the institutional review made the greatest impact on the reputation and the lowest value-added created for international partnerships.

In conclusion, it can be stated that higher education institutions feel the benefit of institutional review, consider it as being objective, experts – appropriate, the process – clear and agreed with the statement that the review results stimulated further improvement of institutional performance, created added value for the good reputation of the institution and enhanced the overall reliability of higher education in Lithuania. Positive moves in these directions were noticed during follow-up visits in which actions to be taken were analysed.

Summary of the areas reviewed

Strategic management

During the institutional review the area of strategic management most probably received most of experts' attention. When evaluating strategic management, experts made quite a few observations about strategic management in higher education institutions noting on the lack of clarity, precision or comprehensiveness. The majority of institutions reviewed, i.e., 61 percent of universities and 100 percent of colleges of higher education, agreed to the statement that the review results would feed into the changes in strategic management.

As far as strategic management in colleges of higher education and universities is concerned, the experts noted in both sectors the following trends – higher education institutions give a lot of attention to and efforts in implementing individual items of strategic management, but while doing so they do not follow an all-inclusive strategic thinking and planning. Colleges of higher education and universities alike received quite a few expert recommendations on strategic management, implementation of quality assurance systems, operational efficiency and appropriate evaluation of human resources. Experts noted that both sectors experienced difficulties when

An all-inclusive and hollistic strategic planning is missing

Absence of risk management strategy and planning

drafting effective strategic plans, when setting and verifying qualitative and quantitative performance indicators (46 percent of universities and 71 percent of colleges of higher education agreed to the statement that the external review recommendations would facilitate them to do this).

During the review it was often noticed that higher education institutions do not have a risk management strategy; 39 percent of universities and 65 percent of colleges of higher education were planning to implement it with the help of the external review recommendations.

In universities and colleges of higher education, setting of clear priority targets and implementation of the PDCA (plan-do-check-act) cycle were often lacking. Hence, it can be concluded that despite the fact that almost all higher education institutions have developed their strategic plans, they are regarded as a purely formal document rather than a document to be used as the basis for working, monitoring, analysing and improving.

In almost all institutions note was taken of the lack of focus on ESG during the development of internal quality assurance systems. Despite the fact that the results of the survey of higher education institutions demonstrated adherence to the Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area by the majority of institutions in their internal quality assurance systems (62 percent of universities and 41 percent of colleges of higher education) rather often the ESG were tuned with ISO standards (31 percent of universities and 82 percent of colleges of higher education). Experts believe that higher education institutions shall investigate into the ways to enable a more effective compliance with the ESG rather than ISO 9001 standards in their activities because this is a model setting up the requirements for organisational quality management system and is dedicated to increase the efficiency of the Quality Management System taking into account the needs of the client. Application of this standard in higher education institutions received a lot of criticism across the world, because it suggests regarding the higher education process as some sort of a production process which is standardised, but does not reflect the spirit of higher education (individualised teaching, application of innovative empirical tests, etc.). Most often this standard is applied to some of the administrative functions within an institution (support for students, libraries or IT services), but not to the major functions – academic studies and research. Hence, universities and colleges of higher education must improve their quality assurance system through a higher focus on ESG, formalisation of the quality system, and involvement of social partners. 35 percent of universities and 88 percent of colleges of higher education argued that improvements in this area would be made and implemented on the basis of external review results.

Moreover, a note was taken of the fact that higher education institutions have to put considerable efforts into strategic institutional management and quality assurance processes through a better involvement of external partners and students. The necessity for further improving involvement of social partners and students was attested by the results of the public survey of higher education institutions which demonstrated that, for instance, only 38 percent of universities

Insufficient focus on ESG

External partners and students need to be involved in strategic management and internal quality assurance

and 71 percent of colleges of higher education presented the external review results to their students, and 62 percent of universities and 71 percent of colleges of higher education presented the results to external partners.

According to the experts, bureaucratic and cumbersome managerial structures still prevail in the majority of larger institutions. Acting on the experts recommendations, 30.8 percent of universities and 47.1 percent of colleges of higher education were planning to improve distribution of administrative functions, 38.5 percent of universities and 47 percent of colleges of higher education were planning to improve inter-departmental cooperation.

Higher education institutions often do not have an all-inclusive human resources management system – staff motivation programmes and training strategies are non-existent (38.5 percent of universities and 58.8 percent of colleges of higher education claimed their readiness to fill in the gaps with the help of the external review reports). One of the key results is that the staff proficiency system shall be better linked with strategic management and resources. When this link is missing, general performance results in the area of academic studies are not consistently good or very good, and instead are more dependent on managerial or administrative initiatives of specific departments, thus failing to ensure sustainable continuity.

Experts often emphasised that higher education institutions must find the ways how to improve academic competences of their teaching staff as well as competences related to student-centered teaching. Notwithstanding the fact that many institutions received comments from experts on enhancement of academic competences of teaching staff, a number of best practices were also observed in this area, when institutions themselves were looking for the ways that would help to ensure continuous proficiency enhancement of their teaching staff and which understood that the teaching staff is the part of the staff with the largest impact on the quality of teaching (learning) and academic studies.

Experts of the external review of higher education institutions also emphasised the insufficient level of internationalisation in colleges of higher education. 47 percent of colleges of higher education believe that the level of internationalisation and involvement in international partnerships would be improved with the help of the external review reports.

It is important to stress that the key negative causes which contributed to a negative evaluation of the strategic management area in higher education institutions were as follows:

- absence of internal quality assurance system or major deficiencies therein,
- insufficiently elaborated strategic plan, not covering the analysis of external and internal factors or strategic targets.

Moreover, the institutions whose strategic management areas were evaluated negatively received a number of comments on missing competences of self-evaluation. This factor may be regarded as a reflection of a broader problem – only in the case of a few higher education institutions their self-evaluation reports were regarded as analytical rather than descriptive, with loads of information and data given, but not analysed.

Complicated managerial structures are prevalent

No human resource management systems in place

Academic competences of teaching staff to be improved

Low level of internationalisation

Lack of analysis

In conclusion, it can be said that colleges of higher education and universities do not differ much as far as progress in strategic management is concerned, but on the whole the area of strategic management was more frequently assessed negatively in universities rather than colleges of higher education (in 13 percent of colleges of higher education and 26 percent of universities reviewed the area of strategic management received a negative evaluation).

Academic studies and life-long learning

The area of academic studies and life-long learning in higher education institutions were **assessed positively**, with only one institution receiving a negative assessment.

As far as academic studies are concerned, experts praised many institutions for their focus on best student experience within an institution, focus on good relations with students, attention to student needs, as well as a continuous updates in the curricula of study programmes. Albeit a positive evaluation of academic studies and life-long learning in higher education institutions, the majority of institutions (62 percent of universities and 82 percent of colleges of higher education) believe that the expert reports would contribute to further improvements in this area.

Overall, with regard to shortcomings identified in this area, the majority of institutions received comments on insufficient assurance of the quality of academic studies, with one the most frequent observations being the lack of a more active cooperation with external partners while improving study programmes. Nevertheless, 46 percent of universities and 65 percent of colleges of higher education believe that improvements in this area would draw on the recommendations of the expert report. Moreover, higher education institutions were given observations on the insufficient degree of internationalisation of academic studies. A striking difference was observed in the interpretation of the review results on international mobility of teaching staff, researchers and students by two sectors – this statement was supported by 65 percent of colleges of higher education and only 15 percent of universities.

Experts also drew attention to the fact that universities in particular did not demonstrate a sufficient degree of life-long learning possibilities, but only approximately one fourth (23 percent) of universities believed that the expert reports would contribute to further expansion of such possibilities. Colleges of higher education received quite a few comments on insufficient communication with the alumni, but only 47 percent of institutions believed the review reports would contribute to a better monitoring of employability and career path of the alumni.

In universities experts more often identified problems atypical for colleges of higher education, such as insufficiency of placements for practical training of students or life-long learning opportunities. In universities and colleges of higher education alike the experts underscored the prevalent student drop-out problem, failure to ensure a student-centered teaching, deficiencies in the curricula and many overlapping similar study programmes in large institutions,

Insufficient quality assurance of studies and internationalisation

Lack of more active cooperation with external partners

Life-long learning possibilities lacking

in particular. Moreover, it was noted that higher education institutions continuously lacked policies on recognition of earlier studies. Problems related to the implementation of the model of learning outcomes, reduction of student drop-out levels and ensuring possibilities of life-long learning were noted more frequently in the public sector, whereas non-public sector had its fair share of challenges related to student placements for practical training and employment of teaching staff on full-time basis.

Research and/or art activities

In universities and colleges of higher education alike, research and/or art activities were found as compliant with the national and/or regional economic, cultural and social development priorities, but the areas of strategic management, quantity and quality of research activities, number of publications in international scientific journals, and the level of internationalisation were regarded as areas calling for improvement.

Many colleges of higher education ensure at least a baseline number of teaching staff with doctoral degrees, with roughly 20 percent of colleges of higher education facing the challenge of maintaining them or encouraging them to undertake research. Part of universities, but a smaller one, are facing a similar continuous challenge of the shortage of researchers.

Lack of funding was singled out as one of the main root causes preventing colleges of higher education from undertaking research. By appreciating the fact that in difficult economic times it was hard to attract additional funding, experts, nevertheless, advised on a further consistent expansion of this strategic path not only in the direction of effective fund raising, but also in the following areas:

- Focus on the areas that the institution is the best and which comply with regional priorities;
- Identify clear niche areas in order to reinforce its position on a national and international scale;
- Enhance closer cooperation with social partners;
- Focus on the quality rather than quantity of research;
- Define clear research strategies and deliver on them effectively;
- Set clear competences and responsibilities;
- Get engaged in pro-active rather than reactive policy of commissioned research studies. Experts believe that striking a good balance between reactive and pro-active attitude would contribute to the development of an exclusive identity of a research activities within an establishment.

The lack of funds was also noted in universities, but to a less severe extent than in colleges of higher education. Despite the fact that a long-term and effective financial planning is relevant for all universities, experts recommended reinforcing it in those universities pursuing the aim of becoming global level players. Non-state universities which are not beneficiaries of state funding for research activities, are facing considerable challenges in raising the necessary funds for an appropriate development of a research infrastructure.

**Lack of funding
for research
in colleges of
higher education**

It is noteworthy that the larger proportion of universities (62 percent) and colleges of higher education (82 percent) believe that the expert reports had made a positive impact change related to research and/or art activities. More striking differences became apparent when analysing attitudes of higher education institutions towards the review results in greater detail – 23 percent of universities and 65 percent of colleges of higher education claimed that the review reports would help them improve their research and/or art activities, 15 percent of universities and 59 percent of colleges of higher education ascertained that the results would have a positive impact on the involvement of the institutions in research and/or art projects, and 59 percent of colleges of higher education and 15 percent of universities were convinced of a greater mobility of teaching staff, researchers and students.

Impact on regional and national development

Cooperation with external partners to be expanded

Although a larger proportion of universities and colleges of higher education play an important regional and national role and their impact in most of the cases is efficient and relevant, both sectors were, nevertheless, recommended by experts further expanding this area. Colleges of higher education and universities alike were recommended turning their cooperation into a more systemic and formal process, with many more recommendations given on a more broader cooperation with external partners. Improved cooperation with other institutions was in particular relevant for colleges of higher education not benefitting from state funding for research, because such cooperation might attract more partners able to finance their research activities.

Planning, monitoring and evaluation of regional and/or national impact was identified as a weakness in both universities and colleges of higher education, with a larger number of colleges of higher education being recommended to improve this area. It is noteworthy that 15 percent of universities and 65 percent of colleges of higher education believe that the expert reports of the external review will be useful while documenting measures aimed at regional and national development, with 53 percent of colleges of higher education and 31 percent of universities being certain about the use of the recommendations on the overall efficiency of implementation of these measures.

With regard to approximately one third of universities and half of colleges of higher education deficiencies in the publicity of the impact were noted. There were some contextual differences of those recommendations: universities were recommended improving their marketing strategies to better align the image with the general achievements, whereas colleges of higher education should advertise themselves more in order to increase student enrolment figures and bridge the gap between business partners.

Overall, despite rather numerous observations by the experts on regional and national impact, this may be expected to demonstrate positive results – 54 percent of universities and 71 percent of colleges of higher education were certain that the review reports had or would have an impact on changes related to regional and national impact.

ANNEX.

INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW RESULTS

The results of state universities review

The name of the HEI	Strategic management	Academic studies and life-long learning	Research and/or art activities	Impact on regional and national development	MOSTA evaluation of learning resources	Overall judgement	The year of accreditation
Aleksandras Stulginskis University	positive	positive	positive	positive	positive	positive	2013
General Jonas Žemaitis Military Academy of Lithuania	positive	positive	positive	positive	positive	positive	2014
Kaunas University of Technology	positive	positive	positive	positive	positive	positive	2015
Klaipėda University	positive	positive	positive	positive	positive	positive	2012
Lithuanian University of Educational Sciences	negative	positive	positive	positive	positive	negative	2015
Lithuanian Academy of Music and Theatre	positive	positive	positive	positive	positive	positive	2013
Lithuanian Sports University	negative	positive	positive	positive	negative	negative	2012
Lithuanian University of Health Sciences	positive	positive	positive	positive	positive	positive	2014
Mykolas Romeris University	positive	positive	positive	positive	positive	positive	2014
Šiauliai University	negative	positive	positive	positive	negative	negative	2013
Vilnius Academy of Arts	positive	positive	positive	positive	positive	positive	2013
Vilnius Gediminas Technical University	positive	positive	positive	positive	positive	positive	2014
Vilnius University	positive	positive	positive	positive	positive	positive	2014
Vytautas Magnus University	positive	positive	positive	positive	positive	positive	2014

The results of non-state universities review

The name of the HEI	Strategic management	Academic studies and life-long learning	Research and/or art activities	Impact on regional and national development	MOSTA evaluation of learning resources	Overall judgement	The year of accreditation
The Branch of the University of Białystok „Faculty of Economics and Informatics“	positive	positive	positive	positive	positive	positive	2015
European Humanities University	negative	positive	positive	positive	positive	negative	2015

ISM University of Management and Economics	positive	positive	positive	positive	positive	positive	2012
Kazimieras Simonavičius University	positive	positive	positive	positive	negative	negative	2013
LCC International University	negative	positive	negative	positive	positive	negative	2013
Academy of Management and Business	negative	negative	negative	negative	negative	negative	2012
International Business School at Vilnius University	positive	positive	positive	positive	negative	negative	2012
Telšiai Bishop Vincentas Borisevičius Priest Seminary	positive	positive	positive	positive	positive	positive	2015
Vilnius St. Joseph Seminary	positive	positive	positive	positive	positive	positive	2015

The results of state colleges of higher education review

The name of the HEI	Strategic management	Academic studies and life-long learning	Research and/or art activities	Impact on regional and national development	MOSTA evaluation of learning resources	Overall judgement	The year of accreditation
Alytus College	positive	positive	positive	positive	positive	positive	2012
Kaunas College of Higher Education	positive	positive	positive	positive	positive	positive	2014
Kaunas College of Forestry and Environmental Engineering	positive	positive	positive	positive	positive	positive	2014
Kaunas Technical College	positive	positive	positive	positive	positive	positive	2014
Klaipėda State College	positive	positive	negative	positive	positive	negative	2014
Lithuanian Maritime Academy	positive	positive	positive	positive	positive	positive	2012
Marijampole College	positive	positive	positive	positive	positive	positive	2014
Panevezys College	positive	positive	positive	positive	positive	positive	2013
Siauliai State College	positive	positive	positive	positive	positive	positive	2014
Utena College	positive	positive	positive	positive	positive	positive	2012
Vilnius College of Higher Education	positive	positive	positive	positive	positive	positive	2015
Vilnius College of Technologies and Design	positive	positive	positive	positive	positive	positive	2015
Zemaitija College	negative	positive	positive	positive	positive	negative	2013

The results of non-state colleges of higher education review

The name of the HEI	Strategic management	Academic studies and life-long learning	Research and/or art activities	Impact on regional and national development	MOSTA evaluation of learning resources	Overall judgement	The year of accreditation
Kolping College	positive	positive	positive	positive	positive	positive	2014
Lithuanian Business College	positive	positive	positive	positive	positive	positive	2013
Northern Lithuania College	negative	positive	negative	positive	positive	negative	2015
College of Higher Education of Social Sciences	positive	positive	positive	positive	positive	positive	2014
St. Ignatius Loyola College	negative	positive	positive	positive	negative	negative	2014
International School of Law and Business	positive	positive	positive	positive	positive	positive	2013
V.A. Graiciunas School of Management	positive	positive	positive	positive	positive	positive	2013
Vilnius College of Design	positive	positive	positive	positive	positive	positive	2015
Vilnius Cooperative College of Higher Education	positive	positive	positive	positive	positive	positive	2014
Vilnius Business College	positive	positive	positive	positive	positive	positive	2014