KAUNO KOLEGIJOS
VEIKLOS VERTINIMO IŠVADOS

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INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW REPORT OF
KAUNAS COLLEGE

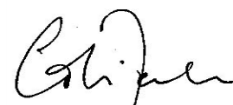|	
Grupės vadovas: Panel chairperson:	Prof. Colin Raban
Vertinimo sekretorė: Review secretary:	Ms. Sinéad O'Sullivan
Grupės nariai (kategorija): Panel members (category):	Prof. Laust Joen Jakobsen (academic)
	Prof. Dr. Lukas Scherer (academic)
	Ms. Gintarė Vaitkienė (social partner)
	Ms. Ieva Porutytė (student)
SKVC vertinimo koordinatorė: Review coordinator at SKVC:	Ms. Daiva Buivydienė

2022

Report language – English

CONTENT

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

Colin Raban

I. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

1. The purpose of the external review is to determine the quality of the performance of a higher education institution based on the findings of the external review, to create prerequisites for improving of the performance of a higher education institution, to promote a culture of quality, and to inform founders, the academic community and the society about the quality of higher education institutions.

2. This review report is based on the evidence given in the Self-Evaluation Report (hereinafter - SER), additional evidence requested by the Panel, information provided by the Centre for Quality Assessment in Higher Education (hereinafter – Centre, SKVC) and a site visit, where meetings with a wide range of stakeholders were held.

3. The panel was composed of six reviewers, following the Experts Selection Procedure approved by the Director of Centre for Quality Assessment in Higher Education on 31 December 2019 Order No. V-149. The members of the panel were:

> Prof. Colin Raban
>
> Ms. Sinéad O'Sullivan
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> Prof. Laust Joen Jakobsen (academic)
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> Prof. Dr. Lukas Scherer (academic)
>
> Ms. Gintarė Vaitkienė (social partner)
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> Ms. Ieva Porutytė (student)

4. As a result of external review **Kaunas College** is given a **positive evaluation**.

5. Evaluation areas:

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

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

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

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

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

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

6. **7** examples of good practices were found; **13** recommendations are made.

II. INTRODUCTION

2.1. Background of the review process

7. The external review of **Kaunas College** (hereafter referred to as KK or 'the College') was organised by the Centre for Quality Assessment in Higher Education and carried out in May 2022 by an Expert Panel of international experts (hereinafter – the panel). It was conducted in accordance with the *Procedure for the External Evaluation and Accreditation of Higher Education Institutions and Branches of Foreign Higher Education Institutions, Evaluation Areas and Indicators* approved by the Minister of Education, Science and Sport of the Republic of Lithuania (hereinafter – the Procedure) on 19 of December 2019 Order No. V-1529 and the Methodology for Conducting an Institutional Review in Higher Education approved by the Director of SKVC on 9 of March 2020 Order No V-32 (hereinafter – the Methodology).

8. According to the Procedure the external review consists of the following stages: submission of a self-evaluation report prepared by the higher education institution to the Centre; formation of an expert panel and analysis of the self-evaluation report; expert panel visit to the higher education institution; the preparation of the external review report, decision-making on the external review as well as accreditation and publication thereof; follow-up activities aimed at improving the performance of the higher education institution, taking into account the external review report.

9. At the preparatory stage of the external review, the panel received the SER with 16 annexes. SKVC provided to the panel additional information about the College, as set in the Methodology (Chapter 26), including statistical data on students and staff; financial data; institutional reviews and evaluations of research and development activities; State-budget allocations for research activities; information on violations of academic ethics from the Office of the Ombudsperson for Academic Ethics and Procedures of the Republic of Lithuania. After its initial review of the SER and associated material, the panel requested additional information which included procedural documentation from the quality assurance handbook, information on institutional structures and additional student data that had not been provided in the institutional profile or by the original documentation.

10. The site visit was undertaken after a training session organized by SKVC staff and preparatory panel meetings. The panel visited the College from the 10th-12th May 2022 where it had meetings with 85 internal and external stakeholders. Subsequently, the panel met both in-person and virtually to review and agree conclusions and recommendations. The review report was finalised by correspondence and submitted to the SKVC.

11. In line with the Procedure the external review focuses on four areas covered by the evaluation indicators and related criteria: **Management**, **Quality Assurance**, **Studies and Research (Art)** and **Impact on Regional and National Development**. In analysing the evidence collected, the panel also gave due consideration to the recommendations of the previous review held in 2014.

12. The review of a higher education institution assesses each of the evaluation areas and assigns one of five ratings: **excellent** – 5 points – the area is rated exceptionally well in the national context and

internationally; **very good** – 4 points – the area is rated very well in the national context and internationally, without any drawbacks; **good** – 3 points – the area is being developed systematically, without any major drawbacks; **satisfactory** – 2 points – the area meets the minimum requirements, and there are drawbacks that must be addressed; **unsatisfactory** – 1 point – the area does not meet the minimum requirements, there are fundamental drawbacks.

13. The decision on **positive** evaluation is made when none of the evaluation areas is assessed as unsatisfactory (2 points). The decision on **negative** evaluation is made when at least one of the evaluation areas is assessed as unsatisfactory (1 point).

14. In line with the Methodology the review report, prepared by the panel is reviewed by SKVC and sent to the higher education institution to submit comments on factual errors and the evaluations based thereon. The panel revises the report in response to the comments from the higher education institution (if applicable) and submits it to SKVC.

15. The panel received from the College three comments of a minor and factual nature. As a result, the necessary corrections were made to the report.

16. After the panel has considers comments from the higher education institution (if applicable) the finalizes it, the report is considered by the Commission of the Higher Education Institutions' Review (hereinafter – the Commission), set up by SKVC. On the basis of the proposal, made by the Commission, provisioned in the Commission's regulations and approved by the order of the Director of SKVC on 8 of January, 2020 order No. V-5, SKVC takes one of two decisions:

   - to evaluate the performance of the higher education institution positively;
   - to evaluate the performance of the higher education institution negatively.

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

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

17. On the basis of the external review decision, SKVC takes one of the following decisions on the **accreditation** of the higher education institution:

- to **accredit for a period of seven years** if performance of the higher education institution is evaluated positively;

- to **accredit for a period of three years** if performance of the higher education institution is evaluated negatively;

- to **provide no accreditation** if the repeated external review results of the higher education institution are negative.

18. SKVC announces the decision on the external review together with the conclusions of the external review and the decision on the accreditation of the higher education institution on it's website. The higher education institution respectively announces the decision on the review of the

higher education institution together with the external review report on it's website and maintains it until the next external review.

2.2. Background information about the institution

19. Kaunas College is a public higher education institution that is governed by *the Law on Higher Education and Research of the Republic of Lithuania (the Law on HE&R)* the strategic documents of Lithuanian higher education, the standards and frameworks of the European Higher Education Area, the College's *Statute*, and its *Strategy 2025*. The College's vision is of a sustainable European higher education institution that nurtures Lithuanian culture and traditions. Its mission is to provide innovation-based higher education focused on practical activities, and to promote applied science and art activities that contribute to the development of society at the national and international levels. 'Responsibility,' 'professionalism,' 'openness,' 'respect' and 'sense of community' encapsulate the College's values.

20. The College was established in 2000 by merging the Kaunas Further Education Schools of Economics and Technology, and it was accredited as a non-university higher education institution. In 2014, following an external evaluation by international experts, the College was re-accredited for a further 6 years. Kaunas College is now one of the largest higher education institutions in Lithuania, with a community of approximately 5,000 students including 32 international students. It has 782 employees of whom 528 are academic staff. Each year, the College community is supplemented by about 20 visiting international academics, some 120 exchange students, and approximately 100 academic staff members. The College has more than 32,000 graduates.

21. The College is managed by the Director, who is supported by the Vice Director and other senior staff. The College's other decision-making bodies include its Council (9 members), Academic Council (33 members), the Students' Representative Council, Trade Union, and the Labour Council.

22. Programmes of study are offered in four faculties: Business, Technology, Medicine and the Faculty of Arts and Education. There is also a regional division in the municipality of Tauragė. The College offers 34 fields of study and 49 study programmes which lead to professional bachelor's degrees. The applied science and art activities (hereinafter referred to as ASAA) conducted by faculty staff include research, publications, consultancy, and artistic creations.

23. The management of the College's strategic and operational activities is supported by two administrative divisions: *the Department of Studies and Applied Research*, which includes Units for Studies, Student Admissions, International Relations, Applied Research, and the Library and Information Resource Centre; *and the Department of Management and Quality* consisting of the Legal and Document Management and Human Resources Services, and the Quality Management and Project Management Units. Other support units include Information Technology, Marketing and Communication, Internal Audit, and Public Procurement Divisions, and the Cultural Activities and Sports Centre and the Career Centre.

24. Kaunas College cooperates with more than 260 international partners, 229 of them under the auspices of the European Union *Erasmus+* mobility programme. It is a member of a number of such European and international groupings as EURASHE (the European Association of Institutions

in Higher Education), EAIE (the European Association for International Education) and the United Nations Global Compact (an international network of organisations implementing social responsibility principles). The College is also a member of various international associations including 10 *NordPlus* networks with partners in the northern Baltic States and, in 2022, it applied to join the UNINOVIS network under the call of Erasmus+ University Alliances.

25. The College has been actively engaged in various international projects. Between 2016 and 2021 it has co-ordinated 89 national and international projects and has been a partner in a further 72 projects. The total value of these projects was more than €8.5 million with the support of EU and other funding sources. The College as the coordinator, is currently implementing 4 Erasmus+ funded projects worth more than €1.5 million.

III. ANALYSIS BY EVALUATION AREAS

3.1. Management

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

1.1. Compliance of the higher education institution's strategic action plan with the mission, assurance of its implementation:

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

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

1.1.3. Regular monitoring of the implementation of the strategic action plan is carried out and the results are used to improve performance management.

26. The College's strategic goals are to:

   a. implement practical and innovation-based higher education studies;

   b. develop applied science and art activities focused on the development of society at the national and international level;

   c. increase the efficiency of management and optimise the College's infrastructure;

   d. develop a sustainable community that nurtures the culture of a 'learning organisation.

27. *Strategy 2025* is consistent with national legislation and with policies relating to research and study activities. The College's strategic goals and objectives are coordinated with the aims and requirements set for collegial studies listed in Article 11 of *the Law on HE&R*, and the institution is committed to the integration of its science (art) and study activities with its provision for lifelong learning and social responsibility. The purpose of the Strategic Action Plan is to secure the

coherence of the College's science, art and study activities through professional internships, the active participation of staff and students in these activities and in contracted research and regional development projects. The College's commitment to social responsibility focuses on sustainable development working with local communities and with representatives of business and public bodies.

28. The panel is of the view that the strategic action plan is comprehensive and well-structured. Its implementation schedule, the assignment of responsibilities, and the success criteria and indicators are detailed and accessible. The panel also confirmed that the strategic action plan is monitored through an annual process of self-assessment involving all parts of the organisation. It is anticipated that this coherent and result-oriented monitoring will lead to improvements in performance management.

29. The self-assessment process includes an annual review of strategy leading to the submission of the Director's Report to Council. The team was assured by Council members that, notwithstanding the Strategy's complexity, it constantly monitors the implementation of the Plan. This process is supported by regular meetings between the Chair of Council, the Ministry, and the Director and by the incorporation within the KUAS Action Plan of 'the results of monitoring the implementation of the Strategic Action Plan.'

30. The College has set itself some ambitious targets, and several of them are contingent on the possibility that it might, in the future, be entitled to offer programmes as Masters level. The team sought to establish whether the complexity of the Strategy and the ambitious nature nature of its targets could act as a 'straightjacket,' limiting the College's ability to adapt in an agile manner to unforeseen changes in the institution itself or within its operating environment. Whilst the SER stated that 'adjustments' to the Strategy and Plan are 'made as necessary,' these could be merely incremental and minor. When it met the Council, the team was told that these changes could be significant, and they might include changes to the institution's goals following a process of consultation with work teams and with the Academic Council.

31. The College's approach to strategic planning has a number of commendable features. The panel noted, however, that the institution employs a total of 82 indicators to monitor and manage the implementation of its four strategic goals, and that responsibility for each indicator is assigned to a particular unit or individual. Whilst the College's key performance indicators are clear and measurable, it may wish to consider whether the large number of these indicators results in a degree of complexity that could impede the effective execution of the monitoring and implementation process.

32. The panel also noted that the implementation of the College's first strategic goal is at least partially dependent on its ability to offer professional master's degrees, and that the opportunity to offer programmes at this level is not currently available to non-university institutions. However, in the view of staff, social partners and graduates, the ability to provide master's programmes is a precondition for the success of the College's commitment to lifelong learning (See paragraph 121). This is a view with which the panel concurs.

33. Finally, the panel observed that the Strategic Activity Plan and its progress indicators suggest that the College defines a 'learning organisation' as one in which the competence of staff at all levels is subject to continuous development. Rather than defining the concept in a way that focuses on the quality of its staff, the College might benefit from an institution-wide debate on its implications for the institution's structure, culture, and preferred styles of management. The panel believes that this broader concept of a learning organisation would be consistent with the College's values (see paragraph 19, above).

1.2. Effectiveness of process management of the higher education institution:
1.2.1. A clear structure for governance, decision making, and distribution of responsibilities is defined; *1.2.2. Regular process management analysis is performed, preconditions for process improvement and risk management are planned.* *1.2.3. Stakeholders are involved in the management process at an adequate level.*

34. The panel gained from the self-evaluation report (SER) the impression that the complexity of the College could create difficult conditions for its governance. However, in the panel's discussions with staff and students it became apparent that the College's management arrangements work well, and that tasks and responsibilities are appropriately distributed. It was also apparent that the recent restructuring, which had reduced the number of deputy directors from three to one, had created a flatter management structure enabling more agile decision-making, particularly for those working within the faculties.

35. From its meetings with the staff and student members of Council, Academic Council, and the Study Field Committees the panel was able to establish that the roles and responsibilities of each of these deliberative bodies are well-known and understood. It was also apparent that they discharged their responsibilities effectively. The panel noted, however, that the College's statute states that Academic Council, and not the Director, has the authority to decide on the closure or suspension of study programmes. In other institutions or jurisdictions, decisions of this kind could be considered to be the prerogative of the executive branch, and the panel was concerned that a failure on the part of the Directorate to obtain Academic Council approval for a proposal to close a study programme could put the financial viability of the institution at risk. The panel was assured that Council would intervene if Academic Council and the Directorate were to reach an impasse on such matters.

36. Responsibility for the routine evaluation of Kaunas College's procedures and risk management arrangements lies with the Internal Audit Division (IAD). Reporting to the Director, the IAD provides an objective assessment of the College's performance, risk management and internal control. Audits are designed to focus on significant risks and the Division draws up an annual action plan which is approved by the Director. The Annual Action Plan may be adjusted during the year to consider newly emerging risks and the IAD monitors the implementation of the recommendations arising from its reports. External audits of the College's financial statements are also used to evaluate risk.

37. On the basis of the documentation submitted by the College, and from its meetings with stakeholders, it was apparent to the panel that staff, students, and social partners are fully involved in the management and governance of the institution. The development of *Strategy 2025* exemplifies the care that is taken to secure the active involvement of members of the wider College community. The panel took particular note of the involvement of students in the operations of the College. Their needs and inputs were represented in the construction of the strategy, and student representatives assured the panel that the management of the College is both approachable and responsive to their suggestions for improvement or change.

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

1.3.1. Systematic collection and analysis of the performance data, results (including student employment and graduate career monitoring) is in place, data is used for the improvement of performance of the higher education institution.
1.3.2. Information on the performance of the higher education institution is clear, accurate and accessible to the academic community and the public and is provided regularly to the founders and members of the legal entity.

38. As outlined above (paragraphs 28-29), the College employs a self-assessment procedure to monitor progress against its strategic plan. The same process is used for improvement and enhancement purposes at individual, departmental and faculty levels, and for assessing the quality of the College's study programmes. The institution collects a comprehensive range of data to analyse and improve its performance. This includes data on student performance, the qualifications and performance of staff, staff publications, the reasons for student dropout, staff and student mobility, graduate outcomes, the results of stakeholder surveys data etc., etc. The College also makes use of available national data from official sources. The collection of data has been made possible through recent investments in the College's information system and this has enhanced the self-assessment process.

39. The dissemination and publication of information, both within the institution and to its external target audiences, is conducted in accordance with the College's values of openness, transparency, and accountability. The College publishes detailed information on the outcomes of student surveys and the actions it has taken in response to student feedback. This is available for each semester and includes actions taken at institutional and faculty level. Data are published by a variety of means, including the College's intranet and website. The panel's meetings with staff, students and social partners confirmed the effectiveness of the College's arrangements. The clarity and comprehensiveness of the information produced and published by the institution, and its commitment to transparency as a means of fostering two-way communication with its stakeholders were also apparent to the panel.

1.4. Effectiveness of human resource management:

> *1.4.1. Clear and transparent principles and procedures for the formation, management, evaluation of academic and non-academic staff are established and applied.*
> *1.4.2. The higher education institution has sufficient academic (in-house academic staff) and non-academic staff to meet its operational objectives.*
> *1.4.3. The qualifications of the academic and non-academic staff are appropriate for the purposes of the higher education institution.*
> *1.4.4. Conditions are created for the academic staff to improve the knowledge and skills required for teaching and research activities.*
> *1.4.5. Conditions are created for non-academic staff to develop competencies.*

40. The Human Resources Strategy is an integral component of the College's overall Strategy. In 2018, the College prepared and since then has been guided by its own *Human Resources Policy. Strategy 2025* devotes a separate strategic activity programme to human resources management with a goal of 'establishing and maintaining a sustainable community that nurtures the culture of a learning organisation' (see paragraph 33, above). The related objectives and measures focus on the long-term planning of human resource needs, increasing employees' satisfaction with working conditions and remuneration policy, improving the competences of academic and non-academic staff, and enhancing staff well-being.

41. The procedures for the recruitment of the Director are set out in the Kaunas College Statute. The main requirements for the qualifications of academic staff are defined by *the Law on HE &R*, *the Description of the general requirements for implementing studies*, *the Kaunas College Statute*, and *the Principles for selecting and assessing Kaunas College employees*. *The Description of the procedure for organising a competition to hold a position and certifying Kaunas College academic staff* sets out the qualification requirements for applicants for academic positions, and the qualification requirements and minimal performance indicators for an academic staff member during his or her five-year term of office. Compliance with these policies ensures that the College employs appropriately qualified staff.

42. Between 2016 and 2021, the number of staff positions decreased by an average of 14.6 per cent, i.e., 9 per cent for the academic staff, 13 per cent for the administrative and study service staff, and 28 per cent for other staff. This reduction in staff numbers is due to wider demographic changes within Lithuania and the decline in the number of students entering higher education in the country as a whole.

43. The proportion of full-time relative to part-time faculty members is below the Lithuanian average. This has however, increased since 2020/21 from 13% to 24% (the national figure for 2021/22 is 26%). Part-time staff bring with them the current and practical knowledge required for practice-based education and their presence can add to the entrepreneurial spirit of an institution. However, assuring the continued alignment of part-time faculty with College policies and procedures as well as ensuring that they possess appropriate pedagogical skills is time-consuming and challenging. To address these challenges, KK integrates part-time staff in a number of ways. These include the practice of team teaching where the part-time member of staff is supported by a group of full-time colleagues and study programme managers. The College provides preparatory training courses which sets out the requirements of the College with respect to programme delivery

and assessment. One measure of the College's success in supporting and retaining these staff is the high proportion of part-time faculty who remain with the College for periods of more than five years.

44. According to the SER the general requirement for the delivery of study programmes is that at least ten percent of courses within a field of study must be taught by researchers or recognized artists. The number of academics with a research degree was 21% in 2021. In 2021 43% of the College's in-house academic staff possessed a degree, and the corresponding figures for guest lecturers and recognised artists was 71% and 21% respectively. The requirement that lecturers' appointments be confirmed every five years enables the College to monitor staff qualifications thereby ensuring that they are aligned with the needs of its study fields. 87% of the academic staff have more than three years of practical work experience, supporting the College's vision of practice-oriented institution. Although this figure is quite high, the College will wish to keep this indicator under review and ensure that the proportion of staff with practice experience increases rather than decreases over time.

45. The SER provided data relating to the College's lecturer-student ratio in each field of study. On average there are 9.5 students per lecturer. This ratio is low by international standards and the panel has some reservations about its long-term affordability.

46. It was apparent to the panel that there is a close relationship between staff and students. This is achieved by a variety of means, including the routine administration of satisfaction surveys, round table discussions, the work of the students' union, and an open-door policy to facilitate direct contact with members of the Directorate, study programme managers and the College's administrative staff. The equally close relationship between the College and its social partners enables the College to gather information on market trends, threats, and opportunities, and to obtain suggestions for new programmes and projects.

47. According to the SER and confirmed by the panel's meetings with staff, there is a wide range of in-service training opportunities for all employees, academic as well as administrative and managerial. The self-assessment process and the annual action plans of divisions make a significant contribution to planning the College's provision for the in-service training of academic and non-academic staff. The action plans together with the five yearly certification process provide an effective framework for ensuring and developing the competences of academic staff. In addition to attendance at internal and external in-service training events, courses, conferences and seminars, support is provided for academic and non-academic staff to obtain academic qualifications at bachelors, masters, and doctoral levels. The College's readiness to train its non-academic as well as its academic staff is welcomed by the panel as evidence of the institution's adherence to its values of 'respect' and 'a sense of community' (see paragraph 19, above).

1.5. Efficiency of financial and learning resource management:
1.5.1. Financial resources are planned, allocated and used rationally;   *1.5.2. Various financial resources for the implementation of higher education activities are attracted;*

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

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

48. Ensuring financial sustainability is a strategic objective for the College and financial resources are managed in accordance with its procedures for the distribution and use of state budget funds, and for budget formation and implementation. The SER stated that the College's budget is managed in a decentralised manner. This prompted the panel to enquire into the budgetary procedure for distributing funds between faculties. The panel was assured by Deans that the process works efficiently. From an overview of the available funds in 2022, it is apparent that the College's revenues are derived from state funds, its own funds, targeted (project) funds and borrowing. On the basis of its discussions with staff, the panel concluded that there is a strong focus on attracting funding from a variety of sources.

49. The College's intention is to finance 84% of its strategic activity programmes from its state budget appropriations and the income derived from Erasmus programmes. The remaining 16% is from project activities. This is a forecast and the College will need to manage the challenges of increased competition for students and for project funding. The panel was confident that the College will continue to analyse its operating environment focusing on the financial sustainability of its provision and its ability to respond to changing market conditions.

50. The College monitors the needs of its study fields and faculties to inform its decisions on the procurement of library materials, access to databases, infrastructure and other teaching resources. With help of the EU Structural Funds, the College has been able to renovate and modernise its existing facilities and develop new ones. The College has a modern library that is well-equipped and well-stocked with publications, including access to databases and electronic resources. The library also contains work spaces for individual and group study and the College's teaching accommodation offers technologically well-equipped classrooms, lecture halls and laboratories. Student accommodation and access to a well-equipped sports hall and gym are also provided.

51. Cooperation with external stakeholders facilitates access to specialist laboratories and environments to support studies and research. The College is the coordinator of a partnership with institutions in Finland, the United Kingdom, Spain and Croatia formed for the purpose of implementing an *Erasmus+* project aimed at improving the quality and credibility of virtual studies. The project's outcomes will add significantly to the College's capacity to develop, deliver and quality assure online learning.

52. The implementation of *Strategy 2025* includes the development of an equal opportunities and diversity programme for staff and students. The programme defines the objectives and actions required for the development of a support system that will identify individuals with fewer opportunities to take part in college activities, identify individual study and work needs and the adaptations required to meet those needs, develop a support system for those who experience social exclusion, and assist staff and students in combining work/study with their family commitments. The College's participation in the State Studies Foundation project "Increasing

Access to studies," and the respective attendance of faculty members in this 32-academic-hours training, confirms its commitment to achieving greater diversity within its study body.

53. **In summary,** the College is a cohesive community, based on an embedded culture that comprises a strong sense of inclusivity, ownership and a College-wide commitment to the institution's well-being. The institution embodies its values and, notwithstanding its complexity, it is a well-functioning organization. Staff are aware of the College's responsibilities to the local community and there is a strong commitment to working closely with outside organisations and the business community. The effectiveness of the College's management arrangements gives grounds for confidence in its ability to meet the challenges that lie ahead for all higher education institutions within Lithuania and further afield.

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

55. **Recommendations for the area:**

- The College may wish to consider whether its approach to strategic planning results in a degree of complexity that could impede the effective execution of the monitoring and implementation process.
- The College might benefit from an institution-wide debate on the implications for its structure, culture, and preferred styles of management of the concept of a 'learning organisation'.

56. **Good practice examples:**

- The care taken by the College to secure the full and active involvement of its staff, students and social partners in the management and governance of the institution.
- The commitment to transparency as a means of fostering two-way communication between the institution and its stakeholders, and the open and transparent manner in which the College has published on its website student survey results and details of the actions taken.
- The provision of a modern library and the quality of the resources it offers, including well-equipped study spaces for group work and individual study.

3.2. Quality assurance

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

2.1. Implementation and effectiveness of the internal quality assurance system:
2.1.1. The higher education institution has approved and made publicly available internal quality assurance documents that are consistent with the Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area. *2.1.2. Internal quality assurance measures of planning, implementation and improvement are appropriate, applied periodically and ensure the involvement of the whole institution and stakeholders.* *2.1.3. Processes for planning, implementation, monitoring, periodic evaluation, and development*

> *of activities are specified.*
> *2.1.4. Students and academic and non-academic staff of the institution receive effective support.*
> *2.1.5. Provisions and procedures for academic integrity, tolerance and non-discrimination, appeal and ethics are specified and applied.*
> *2.1.6. The results of the external review are used to improve the performance of the higher education institution.*

57. The key features of the College's quality assurance system are set out in its Quality Policy and Strategy and this, in turn, builds on the institution's values. The overall approach to quality assurance is consistent with *the Law on HE&R*, *the College's Statute*, its *Policy on Studies and Applied Science and Art Activities*, and its *Human Resources Policy*.

58. The College's SWOT analysis identified as one of the institution's strengths its 'effective internal study quality assurance system based on the ESG guidelines (*Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area*).' This claim is consistent with the findings of the 2014 Institutional Review Report in which the College was said to have undertaken 'active and engaged development work' in quality assurance processes that were 'aligned appropriately to the ESGs'.

59. The SER for the current review gave particular emphasis to the College's continuing adherence to *the Standards and Guidelines*: 'the strategic provisions for improving the quality of activities' are said to be 'based' on *the Guidelines* and the system itself is described as being 'compliant' with the ESG. This prompted the team to enquire as to whether this meant that the College was intent on conforming to practice elsewhere in the country's higher education sector rather than establishing its own distinctive approach to quality management.

60. The guideline supporting the first ESG standard states that an institution's quality assurance system 'forms a cycle for continuous improvement and supports the development of quality culture in which all internal stakeholders assume responsibility for quality and engage in quality assurance at all levels of the institution.' The College's policy for quality assurance places a similar emphasis on the promotion of a quality culture and on 'mutual responsibility' for the quality of the institution's provision. Its approach is distinguished, however, by the importance it attaches to transparency and to the mutual accountability of its stakeholders, including the accountability of senior staff to their more junior colleagues.

61. The panel confirms that the College's quality assurance arrangements are consistent with the *Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area*, and with the relevant articles in *the Law on HE&R*. The operation of these arrangements is distinguished by the College's adherence to its values (see paragraphs 19, 47 and 53 above). In continuing to develop its approach to quality assurance, the College might wish to consider the panel's suggestions for enhancement (see paragraphs 66-70).

Processes for Planning, Monitoring and Evaluation

62. The Quality Manual provides a summary of some 18 procedures, the majority of which deal with management functions that do not have a direct bearing on the quality of the institution's academic activities. There is a separate set of documents, including flow charts, in which each procedure is

described in detail. The Quality Management Unit is responsible for the procedures for self-assessment, and for the development and revision of the College's strategy. There is a close inter-relationship between these two procedures.

63. It was confirmed in discussion with staff that annual self-assessment is the principal means by which the College assures the quality of its activities. Self-assessment is undertaken at all levels of the institution, drawing upon a comprehensive range of qualitative and quantitative indicators. The process culminates in the annual submission to Council of a College-wide self-assessment report.

64. Self-assessment reports draw upon feedback from the College's internal and external stakeholders. This feedback is normally, but not exclusively, obtained by means of surveys. Student response rates are high, and the College has achieved some success in improving the response rates of staff, although the participation rates of graduates and employers remains a matter of concern for the College. One of the strengths of the College's feedback arrangements is the way in which the design of the questionnaires for first and final year students, and for graduates, is tailored to their particular concerns and circumstances. Another positive feature of the College's arrangements is the publication of survey results on the College's website, and the use of round table and other meetings to discuss the action that is being taken in response to survey outcomes.

65. The Panel noted that survey response rates, and the character and quality of the feedback provided through the self-assessment process, would depend on the extent to which the College is successful in establishing 'a quality culture' in which staff and students are encouraged and enabled to express their views in a frank and critical manner. The team considered that if, as the College claims, it secures 'accountability at all levels' and if this includes the accountability of senior staff for supporting the efforts of those at department level, the self-assessment process should make a powerful contribution to the development of a positive quality culture. The Panel also concluded that the comprehensive nature of the self-assessment procedure (as a discipline that engages staff at all levels and in all parts of the College) is a commendable feature of the College's quality assurance system.

66. Article 46[4] of *the Law on HE&R* states that academic activities 'must be continually improved by periodically conducting self-evaluation and considering the results of external review…'. This could be interpreted as meaning that an institution can discharge in full its responsibilities for the quality of its provision by responding to the outcomes of external reviews outcomes and by installing a self-assessment procedure. The College undoubtedly meets this requirement. However, the Panel considered that there is scope for the enhancement of the College's quality assurance system to exceed its legal obligations. Thus, the Panel identified four opportunities for the development by Kaunas College of sector-leading practice in assuring the quality and standard of its provision.

67. The Panel noted that the SER made little reference to the assurance of academic standards and the means by which the College ensures its conformity to the Lithuanian Qualifications Framework. The Panel understands that this assurance is obtained, at least in part, by the College's participation in the SKVC procedure for programme accreditation. The College could, however, take more responsibility for the setting of its standards by involving external academic experts, alongside

social partner representatives, in the approval by Study Field Committees of new programme proposals. The College could also build on the practice of some of its faculties by instituting College-wide requirements for the moderation or second marking of students' assignments as recommended by ESG guidance 1.3.

68. ESG standard 1.5 states that 'institutions should assure themselves of the competence of their teachers' by applying fair and transparent processes for the recruitment and development of (their) staff.' While the Panel is satisfied with the rigour of the College's procedures for staff recruitment, selection, and development, and with the effectiveness of annual planning based on the self-assessment process, these serve only as indirect methods for assuring and enhancing the quality of teaching. Thus, the second opportunity for the further development of the College's quality assurance system would be to build on its team-teaching arrangements by introducing a procedure for the peer observation of teaching. This could be either voluntary or mandatory and in either case it would entail the provision of confidential feedback for enhancement purposes by one colleague on the quality of the teaching of another.

69. The report of the 2014 institutional review offered two recommendations relating to the development and approval of 'joint study programmes' The College has responded appropriately to the recommendation that it incorporate within its quality manual procedures and regulatory requirements for the development of joint study programmes. The 2014 report also recommended that the College undertakes risk assessment and due diligence analyses prior to the commencement of its international agreements. The team was supplied with a generic document entitled *'Risk Management Plan for Joint/Double Degree Programmes'* and it was informed that the Plan is accompanied by a questionnaire for completion by staff during the negotiation of an agreement. The team considered that the further development of the due diligence and risk assessment procedure, building on best practice in other European countries including the United Kingdom, would present a third opportunity for enhancing the College's quality assurance arrangements.

70. The College takes great care to ensure that its students are involved in the institution's quality assurance processes. This includes the membership of students on such committees as the Academic Council and Study Field Committees. When the team enquired into the support provided for student representatives, it was informed that, while they do not receive formal training for the role, one of the Deans provides a briefing on the papers that will be considered at forthcoming meetings. Building on this good practice by establishing a programme of training for student representatives represents the fourth opportunity for the College to enhance its quality assurance (and, in this case, its governance) arrangements.

71. The report of the 2014 institutional review recommended that the Quality Manual should 'integrate the key aspects of the annexes to the main body of the text so that the procedures and steps to be followed by users of the quality system are set out clearly and are more readily accessible'. The College responded to this recommendation by including within the Manual summaries a wide range of management procedures (see paragraph 62, above). The Panel was also informed that there are templates and forms that accompany, but which are published separately from the various procedures.

72. The Quality Manual sets out the general principles that inform the development and operation of the College's quality assurance system, and the procedural documents are written in a regulatory language that might be inaccessible to staff and students. It is recommended therefore that the College considers the desirability of re-casting its Quality Manual to provide a user-friendly and comprehensive guide for staff and students, justifying and explaining the significance of each procedure and providing detailed step-by-step instructions on how they should engage with it. The Manual could usefully incorporate the College's various forms and templates, including its due diligence questionnaire.

Support for Staff and Students

73. The College provides students with a comprehensive range of support services to meet their academic and personal needs. Academic support includes advice on study issues, the support provided by the Careers, Library, and Information Resource services, and by the Language Centre. There is non-academic or personal support for financial, accommodation and psychological needs together with various sports and leisure services. The College also provides for the particular needs of international and students with additional needs. The Panel concurred with the College's own assessment of the effectiveness of the personal and academic support it provides for students and the positive impact that this has had on dropout rates. The Panel also commends the College for its involvement in a national initiative which is addressing student retention and sharing practice among Lithuanian institutions.

74. There is support for staff in the form of training, financial assistance and healthcare. Earlier in this report it is suggested that the College might consider how it could present its Quality Manual in a form that would be more supportive of staff, and that it might also consider the introduction of a peer observation scheme as a means of supporting staff in developing their pedagogical skills (see paragraph 68 and 72, above). There may also be a particular need to provide support for the large contingent of part-time staff employed by the College (see paragraph 43 above) and, in addition to the provision of training sessions, support to foster staff understanding of, and engagement with the College's commitment to innovation-based higher education (see paragraph 87 below).

Academic Integrity

75. The team judged the College's arrangements to ensure academic integrity, equal opportunities, and ethical practice to be appropriate and consistent with practice in other European institutions. It also noted that the incidence of appeals and complaints seemed low for an institution of Kaunas College's size, and that the College has attributed the high incidence of appeals in 2021 concerning the organisation of studies were prompted by national level decisions for the management of the pandemic. The College may consider the development of programme level handbooks, virtual or otherwise, as a location where students can refer to institutional policies, procedures, and requirements for such topics as academic integrity.

Response to External Review

76. The College was last reviewed in 2014. The review panel made a total of 18 recommendations, five of which relate to the College's quality management arrangements. The panel recommended

that the College should set out its QA procedures in a 'readily accessible' form, include within its Quality Manual a section describing its procedures and regulatory requirements (including the commissioning of due diligence analyses) for the development of joint study programmes, improve the College's response to issues raised in student surveys, and extend the role and functions of the Competence Development Centre 'to include the enhancement of learning and teaching and to broaden the understanding of the various dimensions of student-centred learning'. While the panel was satisfied that the College had responded appropriately to these recommendations, this report suggests some ways in which it could build on its responses to develop its own sector-leading practice and arrangements (see paragraphs 66-70, above).

77. **In summary,** the College's quality assurance arrangements are consistent with legal requirements and with the ESGs. The particular strength of these arrangements is the thorough and comprehensive nature of the College's procedures for self-assessment, feedback and student involvement. These procedures owe their effectiveness to a management culture which places a strong emphasis on the mutual accountability of the institution's internal stakeholders. As it continues to develop its approach to quality assurance, the College might consider the various enhancements that are suggested in this report. These include the measures that it might adopt to assure academic standards, the training of students who serve as representatives on the College's committees, and the opportunity to build on the good practice adopted in one or two faculties to assure and enhance the quality of teaching.

78. **Judgement:** The area is being developed systematically, without any major drawbacks and is given 3 points.

79. **Recommendations for the Area:**

- The College should consider the opportunities (identified in paragraphs 66-70 of this report) to develop sector-leading practice in assuring the quality and standards of its provision, aided by a closer engagement with European institutions and colleagues.
- The College should consider whether its Quality Manual might be enhanced to provide a more user-friendly and comprehensive guide for staff and students.
- The College might consider the development of a programme level handbook, virtual or otherwise as a specific location where students can refer to institutional policies, procedures, and requirements for such topics as academic integrity.

80. **Good Practice Examples:**

- The collegial qualities of the institution which, together with the emphasis on mutual accountability, ensures the effectiveness of its comprehensive arrangements for self-assessment and annual review.

3.3. Studies and research (art)

Studies and research (art) area is being analysed in accordance with the following indicators and criteria, set up in the Methodology.

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

3.1.1. The study and research (art) activities carried out and their results are consistent with the mission and strategic aims of the higher education institution;
3.1.2. The level of research (art) activities is sufficient for the ongoing studies of the higher education institution;
3.1.3. Studies are based on research (art);
3.1.4. Consistent recognition of foreign qualifications, partial studies and prior non-formal and informal learning is performed.

81. The College's mission is to provide innovation-based higher education studies focused on practical activities and it has to achieve this mission whilst operating in a challenging environment. The College is faced with competition from other institutions for a nationally decreasing number of traditional students, the pressure of digitalisation and the need to internationalise by promoting staff and student mobility. However, on the basis of its discussions with staff, students and social partners, it was evident to the panel that the College's entrepreneurism and its commitment to preparing students for the national and regional labour markets should enable it to meet these challenges.

82. The College offers 49 study programmes in 34 fields of study. Enrolment on some programmes is very low and their continuation is dependent on their being subsidised by other programmes. While understanding the case that might be made for the continuation of these programmes, the Panel recommends that the College considers the development of criteria to govern decisions on the retention of programmes with low or declining student enrolments. Apart from financial viability, these criteria are likely to include academic viability (small class sizes may not provide an appropriate learning experience for students) and the social or heritage needs of the College's region.

83. There is an appropriate procedure for the approval for a new programme. This is a two-stage process, culminating in the consideration of proposals by Academic Council before they are forwarded to SKVC for external accreditation. Programme and module specifications are created in accordance with SKVC requirements.

84. As recommended by the 2014 review, each programme is overseen by a Study Field Committee and, in some cases, by a Study Programme Committee. The terms of reference of the Study Field Committee include a responsibility for ensuring 'the relevance of the aims of the study field and the quality of their implementation by coordinating the opinions of stakeholders, integrating best practices, and ensuring alignment with strategy.' The effectiveness of Study Field Committees was apparent to the panel having considered the evidence provided by several of the stakeholder groups that it met during the visit.

85. Practical training accounts for at least one-third of study programmes. The organisation, assessment, and quality assurance of students' internships are regulated by the Procedure for organising students' internships. Internships may be undertaken in the College or in an external organisation (in Lithuania or abroad) and are subject to a contract. The internship placement is

usually provided by the academic department. However, some academic departments encourage students to find their own placements. Placements are advertised on social media or at career events.

86. According to the College's social partners that met the panel, students are well-prepared for work and as a result many find employment shortly after graduation. This is borne out by the data provided by SKVC which show that the College's graduate employment rate is 2% higher than the national average (at 46%) for higher education colleges. Social partners confirmed that the contribution of students during their internship was valued, and that the College's graduates are held in high esteem. An entrepreneurial spirit was observed in some of the students met by the panel: for example, some had set up their own businesses or were planning to do so. Students and graduates reported that the College supports students in enhancing their employability. This support is both formal (for example, by providing help in finding internships and inviting employers to final thesis presentations) and informal through the provision of advice and assistance on employment contracts and business start-ups.

87. Whilst noting the College's commitment to 'innovation-based higher education', the panel also observed the implications of this commitment were unclear. Specifically, it was not clear whether innovation-based approaches were to be adopted by all, or just by some of the College's study programmes; the panel was also unable to determine the extent to which the College intended to promote innovative approaches to the design and content of curricula, or to pedagogy and the delivery of its programmes. Given the importance of this strategic goal and recognising that the aspiration to be innovation-based could encompass a variety of options, it is recommended that each study field should be charged with the responsibility for defining the meaning and implications for its programmes of the commitment to innovation-based higher education.

Research Activities are Sufficient

88. KK is one of three leading colleges in Lithuania with respect to the demand for research and development (R&D) related services and it is ranked second according to the points allocated for R&D works. KK's research and artistic activity is closely linked to practice as is appropriate for this type of institution. In response to a recommendation of the 2014 review, the College has defined what it means by research in The Program of Applied Science (Art) Activities of Kaunas College. This distinguishes between experimental (social/cultural) development, applied research, consultancy, scientific publications and artistic activity. Staff and students participate in applied research, art projects, contracted research and consultancy activities. This document also outlines a financial reward system for staff members involved in research, one that is designed to incentivise participation in scientific publications, conferences and dissemination events.

89. The panel was provided with data on the range of research undertaken by staff and students. Applied research and dissemination activities are supported by an allocation of 33% of the working hours of associate professors and of 15% for lecturers. The panel was also able to establish that the College's publications and intellectual contributions (monographs, research publications, visual art creations etc.) have been accepted for dissemination by international databases and repositories.

90. As a college, KK is at a strategic disadvantage (compared with Lithuanian universities) with respect to its funding. The panel was concerned therefore that the goal of increasing contracted research by a multiplier of 3.6 may be over-ambitious – a goal that the College plans to achieve by attracting nationally and internationally funded projects. Whilst the Panel appreciates the need for KK to generate additional income, the College should be alert to the possibility that the diversion of staff time to contract research could have a negative impact on both teaching and curriculum development, and on staff engagement with applied research.

91. Members of Council play an active role as ambassadors for the College, enhancing its reputation and credibility with external stakeholders. This prompted the panel to consider whether KK could take additional action to promote its capabilities, working from the premise that this might encourage external stakeholders to invest in, cooperate and co-create with the College's researchers and consultants. The panel concluded that the College could define its unique selling propositions so as to be more effective in marketing its research specialisations. In this context, the College's intensified networking in national and international research communities and the participation of its staff in international conferences and forums is to be welcomed.

92. The Panel is of the view that the level of research and related activities is compatible with its status as a college within the Lithuanian higher education system. The quality, level and number of applied research (art) projects, conferences and events provided by KK, the contributions of its staff to ranked and peer-reviewed publications, and the College's engagement in contracted research is to be applauded.

Studies based on Research

93. The College invests in scientific research in support of new study programmes and to maintain the quality of its established programmes. The involvement of social partners and graduates in the programme development process provides the College with further insights into the needs of employers and the region. It was evident that the College is eager to learn from its external stakeholders when it pilots new courses, ensuring that they are aligned with the evolving needs of the labour market.

94. Lecturers may be allocated to teaching and teaching-related activities for up to 50% of their time, the remainder being available for research and further activities. The results of the latter activities contribute to the development and delivery of study programmes, ensuring that students are informed of current practice within their field, and that they acquire skills that are relevant to their future employment. Students participate in mixed research teams in a range of disciplines such as software engineering, tourism and leisure, business and design. The involvement of students in applied research projects to enhance their curricula vitae and increase their employability, is noteworthy.

Recognition of Learning

95. The College has policies and procedures for the recognition of formal and non-formal learning and, since 2021, it has been granted the right to recognise prospective students' prior qualifications and education including qualifications acquired by attending the educational programmes of

institutions in other countries. The policies for the recognition of prior learning are consistent with the expectations of the panel and in the case of recognition of non-formal learning, allow applicants to submit evidence of their learning through a variety of methods such as reports, videos and photographs. By employing an Assessment Committee to review applications for non-formal learning, the College ensures a consistent application of these procedures. In all cases, evidence is assessed against the learning outcomes of the modules. Statistics provided in the SER indicate that a relatively constant number of applications (250-350 each) for recognition of partial studies and previous studies has been assessed since 2016. There has been a slight decline in 2021, with 82 applicants having been made for recognition of non-formal studies since 2016. The number per year has declined from 20 in 2017 to 4 in 2021. In general, however, these numbers indicate that applicants are aware of and make use of the opportunities available to them.

> ### 3.2. Internationality of studies, research (art):
>
> *3.2.1. The higher education institution has a strategy for internationalisation of research (art) and study activities (including indicators of internationalisation), means for its implementation, and measurements of the effectiveness of these activities are performed (not applicable to colleges unless provided for in its strategic documents);*
> *3.2.2. The higher education institution integrates aspects of internationalisation into the content of studies and research (art) activities.*

96. The College participates in a variety of renowned international associations and networks, coordinates six partnerships which themselves comprise 37 international cooperation agreements, and under Erasmus+ it has 218 signed institutional agreements with institutions in 38 countries.

97. The internationalisation of Science (Art) Activities and Studies features prominently in the College's former (2020) and current (2025) strategies. The first two goals of *Strategy 2025* have a number of indicators and targets that are relevant to the internationalisation of research and study and responsibility for each target is assigned to a specified individual or unit. The College strategy places special emphasis on 'the preparation of research and development and art development projects to obtain additional funding from various international and national research programmes as well as increasing the internationalisation of applied research and art.

98. The mobility of students and graduates is governed by a College procedure. This sets out the general requirements for the organisation of students' and graduates' mobility under international exchange programmes and procedures for organising the selection of candidates, processing documents, awarding grants and accounting for student participation in mobility activities. Although, the College has set a target of 20% mobility, on average only 6-7% of students go abroad.

99. Opportunities for student mobility include partial studies, professional internships or graduates' internships under *Erasmus+*, *NordPlus* programmes and bilateral cooperation agreements. Information about these opportunities is made available to students on the College website and through social networks. There are also information events and advertising campaigns in which students share their experience of studying abroad.

100. Academic mobility and the participation of academic staff in international conferences (153 in 2021) has led to the development of study programmes and modules through integration of new perspectives and wider internationalisation. The recent pandemic necessitated the adoption of an 'internationalisation at home' strategy in which students were able to participate virtually in international activities. There is scope for the College to maintain this initiative post-pandemic, ensuring that internationalisation continues to be firmly embedded in the curricula of study programmes. Although the pandemic led to a significant decrease in faculty mobility in 2020/2021, some of the College's international activities (both teaching and research) were delivered virtually.

101. Despite the range of available opportunities, the number of students who participate in mobility programmes is lower than in comparable institutions. Whilst the recent pandemic has contributed to this, the College has identified a general reluctance on the part of some students to engage in mobility programmes and this is thought to be due to the demands of employment and family circumstances. This notwithstanding, it seems that there is an appetite among students to take advantage of the opportunities to travel abroad for work-placements, and staff have expressed the view that shorter mobility opportunities may be more attractive than a full semester or year abroad.

102. Although the institution's ability to enhance competences through international travel and staff exchanges was impeded by the Covid-19 pandemic, the panel is confident that the mobility of full-time staff in particular will increase thereby realising the College's commitment to internationalisation, enhancing staff competences and exemplifying for students the advantages to be gained from such opportunities. To enhance the College's internationalisation strategy and to benefit from knowledge sharing, the panel encourages the College to continue in its efforts to actively recruit foreign lecturers to serve either as visiting or as permanent staff.

103. In order to attract international students, programmes are offered in English and in Russian. As the College has itself identified, the number of programmes offered in English is limited. However, the panel is of the view that there may be a significant market for Russian speaking students from such countries in the wider region, as well as those who are living in Lithuania whose first language is Russian.

104. **In summary,** the College is a modern, entrepreneurial and practice-oriented institution facing competition from other colleges and universities as well as having to operate in a reduced funding environment. The College has developed a clear and viable strategy for its study and research activities, and has set quantitative and qualitative targets for these areas. The College's research and study activities meet the requirements of a college of higher education in respect of their nature and quality. However, the target of achieving a 360% increase in research funding is challenging and may prove to be unrealistic, and the provision of programmes in 34 fields of studies is large and diverse for an institution of the College's size. The College has a viable and largely successful approach to the internationalisation of its study and research activities and it has the potential to benefit in the future from the actions it took to sustain these activities during the pandemic.

105. **Judgement:** The area is being developed systematically, without any major drawbacks and is given 3 points.

106. **Recommendations for the area:**

- Each study field should define the meaning and implications for its programmes of the commitment to innovation-based higher education.
- The College should consider whether it would be advantageous to develop criteria to govern its decisions on the retention of programmes with low or declining student enrolments.
- In monitoring its progress towards the goal of achieving a 360% increase in funding for contract research, the College should be alert to the possibility that a diversion of staff time to this activity might have a negative impact on teaching and curriculum development, and on staff engagement with fundamental/basic research.
- The College is encouraged to develop and apply its concept of 'internationalisation at home', whilst continuing in its efforts to promote the value of mobility to its students and staff.
- The College might consider increasing the number of programmes offered in Russian and in English to attract students from Eastern and Southern Europe.

107. **Good practice examples:**

- The support provided for students, especially the financial and academic support for those in critical need.
- The strong practice-orientation of staff, and their active engagement in the College's academic activities.

3.4. Impact on regional and national development

Impact on regional and national development area is being analysed in accordance with the following indicators and criteria, set up in the Methodology.

4.1. Effectiveness of the impact on regional and national development:
4.1.1. The higher education institution carries out an analysis of national and (or) regional demands, identifies the needs to be met and foresees the potential impact on national and (or) regional development.   *4.1.2. The monitoring, analysis, and evaluation of the effectiveness of the measures on national and (or) regional development are performed.*

108. *Strategy 2025* proposes various actions based on the College's analysis of national and regional needs. According to the SER and confirmed at meetings, external stakeholders were actively involved in the development of the current strategy and the panel was provided with evidence on research activities which demonstrated that they were categorised according to their economic (e.g., optimisation of business processes), social (e.g., research on patients with Parkinsons disease) or ecological impact on the region (e.g., research on packaging). Those actions and their effectiveness are evaluated on an annual basis in reports on the performance of the faculties and of the College as a whole.

109. On the basis of the evidence obtained from its meeting with social partners, the panel is able to state with confidence that one of the College's strengths is its active and regular communication with alumni, employers, and social partners within the Kaunas region and in the municipality of

Tauragė. The relevance and currency of these relationships enables the institution to focus on the priorities of these regions, and local employers see themselves as working with the College to create a talent pipeline.

110. By developing these deep relationships with external stakeholders, the College aims to ensure that its activities meet the needs of the regional labour market. As mentioned earlier in this report, external stakeholders participate in study field committees, provide internship placements for students, participate in the evaluation of final theses, give lectures, and participate in joint research projects. This was identified as a strength in the College's SWOT analysis. Furthermore, in the meetings held during the site visit it was apparent that regional and local social partners were not just aware of the College's mission and strategy but had developed a shared approach to regional development.

111. The Kaunas Free Economic Zone lies in close proximity to the College and fosters the establishment of new companies and the creation of new jobs. To support development in the region, the College has identified the need to have more evidence-based monitoring of the professional needs of local organisations. The panel endorses this initiative as representing a systematic approach to the analysis of education and training needs that will both enable the College to lead the development of new programmes and services and serve the specific professional development needs that are identified by employers. This could provide an additional benefit to the region and to the College through the provision of short continuous professional development courses. In addition to technical skills, language courses could also be provided for those who need to develop their skills in languages other than Lithuanian or for those who have come from outside the country (see paragraph 103 and associated recommendation in paragraph 106, above).

112. The College monitors graduate employment on an annual basis. A year after their graduation, there is a survey of ex-students' professional readiness for and integration into the labour market. When requested by the panel, the College provided data on the specific impact of its programmes in the Tauragė region where, over a five-year period (2016-2021), 88% of graduates of the programmes offered on the Tauragė campus continued to be employed in the region. In order to enhance the College's ability to focus on its impact on this and other regions, the Panel recommends that the College analyses the data that it collects to monitor the impact of its graduates and research activities in meeting regional and national objectives. A broader analysis of the extent to which the labour market is served by graduates from other institutions would also be useful.

113. According to the SER, the Strategic Development Plan of Tauragė District Municipality highlights the importance of the College's Tauragė Division. This is identified as a strength of the district because it provides opportunities for young people to acquire higher education without leaving the area. The perspective of the Tauragė Municipality and the possibilities for its future relationship with the College were confirmed by the KK's senior staff and the Mayor of Tauragė.

114. This relationship with the Tauragė Municipality is being further developed not only through the provision of specific programmes to support employment in the region but also by research in such areas as the sustainable development of the public transport system. This relationship is a potential

model for the further development of the College's regional engagements and the panel recommends that the College consider the possibility of building on the relationship it has established with the Tauragė Municipality to explore opportunities for cooperation with its neighbouring districts.

115. The panel's meeting with social partners highlighted their contribution to the cultural life of Kaunas. They confirmed the particularly active and significant participation of the College community in an important regional event. Many art activities were carried out at the College. These included exhibitions, plein-airs, symposia and other forms of artistic expression, organised or attended by academic staff and students. Virtual events were also organised.

116. The SER emphasises the College's impact on the protection of the regional and national environment. When it developed *Strategy 2025* the College considered various European and national documents on sustainable development. The measures taken by the College focus on protecting the environment and resources. For KK, the rational use of energy resources is a key objective. Changes to the College's infrastructure were initiated in 2016-2021. A modern Centre for Studies and Information Resources was constructed, academic buildings and sports complex were renovated, laboratories were refurbished, a comprehensive programme for improving the living conditions in dormitories was implemented, a programme for energy saving was expanded, and environment-friendly criteria are applied in the procurement of goods and services. The success of the College's endeavours in this area was apparent to the panel when it visited its physical facilities.

117. The College promotes volunteering by its students and staff. Students are provided with an opportunity to take part in volunteering activities, and this allows the knowledge acquired during the study process to be integrated into these activities. Students can also take part in volunteering activities that do not require specific skills. The panel's meeting with students and staff provided examples of examples of volunteering in pre-schools, Covid pandemic projects and with Ukrainian war refugees. To enhance the impact of volunteering, the College could consider the possibility of introducing service-learning modules into study programmes if allowed within the legal requirements, where students can gain credit for their volunteering activities.

4.2. Assurance of conditions for lifelong learning:
4.2.1. The higher education institution monitors and analyses the need for lifelong learning;   *4.2.2. The higher education institution anticipates the diversity of forms and conditions of lifelong learning and ensures their implementation;*   *4.2.3. The higher education institution performs the evaluation of assurance of conditions for lifelong learning.*

118. The College's Strategy 2025 emphasises the need for a broad range of studies that meet the needs of society and the labour market, the development of distance and virtual learning, and the expansion of opportunities for the individualisation of studies. One of the Strategy's projects is the sustainable development of non-formal education with the intention of increasing enrolment in this area by 20% by 2025. The strategic plan also foresees the further development of the College's

arrangements for assessing and recognising prior learning (including non-formal and informal learning).

119. KK has developed a range of programmes to be delivered in a flexible manner. Students can attend programmes on a full- or part-time basis. If needed, both study modes are supported by individual study plans with the possibility of distance learning and the online provision of learning materials. Studies are organised in a way that meets the needs of part-time students, for example at weekends and combined evening and weekend classes. Depending on their individual preferences, part-time students are allowed to attend certain classes with their full-time counterparts. As described above, it was evident to the panel that the College is developing its capacity to deliver online, blended and hybrid programmes, by investing in its learning technologies (paragraph 50), developing its virtual learning environment and building the capacity of staff through the Quality of Virtual Learning project (paragraph 51).

120. The College has developed a range of courses, seminars, in-service training, etc., for business enterprises, public and state institutions. The panel was advised that between 2016-2021, 6,795 people benefited from non-formal education programmes and improved their competences at the College. In addition to offering study programmes that are relevant to the needs of the labour market, the College fulfils its lifelong learning ambitions by offering training and in-company training appropriate for adults, recognition of prior learning as outlined above and by offering micro credentials. To date, non-formal adult education programmes have been designed and implemented according to stakeholder requirements. However, as noted above, the College has recognized a need for more systematic evaluation of the requirements for programmes that will support upskilling of population.

121. As mentioned in paragraph 32 of this report, the College's ability to meet lifelong learning needs is hampered by the fact that institutions of its kind cannot currently offer masters programmes or modules at EQF Level 7. In the panel's meetings with staff, it was confirmed the College offers modules from its current programmes which can be taken for credit by those wishing to upskill or to acquire new specialisms without having to complete a full academic programme. This facility and mode of flexible learning is viewed as particularly important by some of the social partners, emphasising the need for institutions like KK to develop students who are, as described by one employer "able to learn and are prepared to be lifelong learners." Although this option is advertised on the College's website, a number of students and the social partners met by the panel were unaware that they could take modules in this way. The panel was of the view that this opportunity and the range of modules available could be better advertised to graduates and social partners.

122. **In summary,** the Panel considers that Kaunas College has a positive impact on regional and national development and no major drawbacks were found in this area. The College has longstanding and meaningful relationships with its stakeholders and is well-placed, using the model that it has developed with the Taurage Municipality, to provide programmes and research that are relevant to these stakeholders' needs. That the College values its role in providing an environment that supports lifelong learning is evidenced by its provision of programmes using a range of delivery modes and by various other actions set out in Strategy 2025. The College also promotes Lithuanian national culture and traditions through its involvement in social and cultural events.

123. **Judgement:** The area is being developed systematically, without any major drawbacks and is given 3 points.

124. **Recommendations for the area:**

● The College should systematically analyse the data that it collects to monitor the impact of its graduates and research activities in meeting regional and national objectives.
● The College should consider using the model of relationship building that it has established with the Tauragė Municipality to explore opportunities for cooperation in other parts of the region.
● The College should embark on a proactive marketing campaign to raise graduates' and social partners' awareness of the opportunities to take individual credit bearing modules for continuous professional development purposes.

125. **Good practice examples:**

● The opportunity for students to take individual credit bearing models as a model for skills development or enhancement after graduation.

IV. EXAMPLES OF GOOD PRACTICE

The Panel identifies the following examples of good practice in:

Management:
● The care taken by the College to secure the full and active involvement of its staff, students and social partners in the management and governance of the institution.
● The commitment to transparency as a means of fostering two-way communication between the institution and its stakeholders, and the open and transparent manner in which the College has published on its website student survey results and details of the actions taken.
● The provision of a modern library and the quality of the resources it offers, including well-equipped study spaces for group work and individual study.

Quality assurance:
● The collegial qualities of the institution which, together with the emphasis on mutual accountability, ensures the effectiveness of its comprehensive arrangements for self-assessment and annual review.

Studies and research (art):
● The support provided for students, especially the financial and academic support for those in critical need.
● The strong practice-orientation of staff, and their active engagement in the College's academic activities.

Impact on regional and national development:
● The opportunity for students to take individual credit bearing models as a model for skills development or enhancement after graduation.

V. RECOMMENDATIONS FOR ENHANCEMENT

The Panel's recommendations for further enhancement are:

Management:

● The College may wish to consider whether its approach to strategic planning results in a degree of complexity that could impede the effective execution of the monitoring and implementation process.

● The College might benefit from an institution-wide debate on the implications for its structure, culture, and preferred styles of management of the concept of a 'learning organisation'.

Quality assurance:

● The College should consider the opportunities (identified in paragraphs 66-70 of this report) to develop sector-leading practice in assuring the quality and standards of its provision, aided by a closer engagement with European institutions and colleagues.

● The College should consider whether its Quality Manual might be enhanced to provide a more user-friendly and comprehensive guide for staff and students.

● The College might consider the development of a programme level handbook, virtual or otherwise as a specific location where students can refer to institutional policies, procedures, and requirements for such topics as academic integrity.

Studies and research (art):

● Each study field should define the meaning and implications for its programmes of the commitment to innovation-based higher education.

● The College should consider whether it would be advantageous to develop criteria to govern its decisions on the retention of programmes with low or declining student enrolments.

● In monitoring its progress towards the goal of achieving a 360% increase in funding for contract research, the College should be alert to the possibility that a diversion of staff time to this activity might have a negative impact on teaching and curriculum development, and on staff engagement with fundamental/basic research.

● The College is encouraged to develop and apply its concept of 'internationalisation at home', whilst continuing in its efforts to promote the value of mobility to its students and staff.

● The College might consider increasing the number of programmes offered in Russian and in English to attract students from Eastern and Southern Europe.

Impact on regional and national development:

● The College should systematically analyse the data that it collects to monitor the impact of its graduates and research activities in meeting regional and national objectives.

● The College should consider using the model of relationship building that it has established with the Tauragė Municipality to explore opportunities for cooperation in other parts of the region.

● The College should embark on a proactive marketing campaign to raise graduates' and social partners' awareness of the opportunities to take individual credit bearing modules for continuous professional development purposes.