



## ***LIETUVOS AUKŠTOSIOS JŪREIVYSTĖS MOKYKLOS VEIKLOS VERTINIMO IŠVADOS***

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### ***INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW REPORT OF LITHUANIAN MARITIME ACADEMY***

Grupės vadovas:

Prof. Dr. Stephane Lauwick

Panel chairperson:

Prof. Dr. habil. Anca Greere

Vertinimo sekretorius:

Dr. Markku Karkama (academic)

Review secretary:

Johanne Marie Trovag (academic)

Grupės nariai (kategorija):

Ala Minkevičienė (social partner)

Panel members (category):

Joshua Weygant (student)

SKVC vertinimo

Jolanta Revaitienė

koordinatorius

Review coordinator at

SKVC:

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## CONTENT

I. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY	3
II. INTRODUCTION	4
2.1. Background of the review process	4
2.1. Background information about the institution	5
III. ANALYSIS BY EVALUATION AREAS	5
3.1. Management	5
3.2. Quality assurance	13
3.3. Studies and research (art)	18
3.4. Impact on regional and national development	24
IV. EXAMPLES OF GOOD PRACTICE	27
V. RECOMMENDATIONS FOR ENHANCEMENT	28

I hereby certify that this is the final text of the institutional review report of Lithuanian Maritime Academy.

Stéphane Lauwick



## I. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

1. The purpose of the external review is to determine the quality of the performance of a higher education institution based on the findings of the external review, to create prerequisites for improvement of the performance of a higher education institution, to promote a culture of quality, and to inform founders, academic community and the society about the quality of higher education institutions.
2. This review report is based on the evidence given in the self-evaluation report, additional evidence requested by the panel and information provided by the Centre for Quality Assessment in Higher Education (hereinafter - SKVC), and a site visit, where meetings with a wide range of audiences were held.
3. The Panel was composed of the reviewers, following the Experts Selection Procedure approved by the Director of Centre for Quality Assessment in Higher Education on 31 December 2019 [Order No. V-149](#) and included the following members:

Panel chairperson:	Prof. dr. Stephane Lauwick
Review secretary:	Prof. dr. habil. Anca Greere
Panel members (category):	Dr. Markku Karkama (academic) Ms. Johanne Marie Trovag (academic) Ms. Ala Minkevičienė (social partner) Mr. Joshua Weygant (student)

4. As a result of external review of **Lithuanian Maritime Academy** is given a **positive evaluation**.
5. Judgment by the area:

Area	Assessment with points
MANAGEMENT	2
QUALITY ASSURANCE	3
STUDIES AND RESEARCH (ART)	4
IMPACT ON REGIONAL AND NATIONAL DEVELOPMENT	4

6. **Twelve** examples of good practices were found; **twenty nine** recommendations for improvement are made.

## **II. INTRODUCTION**

### **2.1. Background of the review process**

7. The external review of the Lithuanian Maritime Academy (hereafter referred to as LMA) was organised by the Centre for Quality Assessment in Higher Education and carried out by an Expert Panel of international experts (hereafter referred to as 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 referred to as ‘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](#) (the Methodology).

8. According to the Procedure the external review consists of the following stages: submission of a self-evaluation report prepared by a higher education institution to the Centre; formation of an expert panel and analysis of the self-evaluation report; expert panel visit to the a higher education institution; preparation of the external review report 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 LMA Self-Evaluation Report (SER) with annexes. In accordance with the Methodology chapter No. 26, SKVC provided the Panel with additional performance information about LMA, from SKVC, the Research Council of Lithuania, Government Strategic Analysis Centre and the National Agency for Education data. The Panel requested additional information, such as Quality Management System (QMS) document matrix, Marine Navigation documentation (study plan, calendar, learning outcomes etc), and access to the LMA intranet system, which LMA very promptly provided.

10. The visit was undertaken after two distinct training sessions organized by SKVC staff and preparatory Panel meetings. The Panel had meetings with internal and external stakeholders on 25-27 May 2021. **Due to the worldwide pandemic situation, the review visit was organised online using video-conferencing tool Zoom.** Subsequently, the Panel met to review and agree conclusions and recommendations. The review report was finalised by correspondence and submitted to the SKVC.

11. The Panel received and considered the response from LMA on factual errors. The Panel appreciated the detail of the response, and fully evaluated each point raised before finalising the report. The Panel believes that the statements made in this report are an accurate reflection of the institution as observed through the documentation received before the visit and the interactions during the visit. The report does not consider evidence generated or developments made subsequent to the visit.

12. In line with the Methodology, the external review focused 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 by SKVC completed in 2012.

13. The review of a higher education institution assesses each of the evaluation areas with one of five ratings: **excellent** – 5 points – the area is rated exceptionally well in the national context and internationally; **very good** – 4 points – the area is rated very well in the national context and internationally, without any drawbacks; **good** – 3 points – the area is being developed systematically, without any major drawbacks; **satisfactory** – 2 points – the area meets the minimum requirements, and there are drawbacks that must be addressed; **unsatisfactory** – 1 point – the area does not meet the minimum requirements, there are fundamental drawbacks.

14. The decision on positive evaluation is made when none of the evaluation areas is evaluated unsatisfactorily (1 point). The decision on negative evaluation is made when at least one of the evaluation areas is evaluated unsatisfactory (1 point).

15. On the basis of the external review report, SKVC takes one of the following decisions on the accreditation of the higher education institution: to provide accreditation for a period of 7 years if performance of the higher education institution is evaluated positively; to provide accreditation for a period of 3 years if performance of the higher education institution is evaluated negatively; to provide non accreditation if the repeated external review results of the higher education institution are negative.

## 2.1. Background information about the institution

16. LMA is a higher education institution founded by the Government of the Republic of Lithuania and exercises its rights and obligations as implemented by the Ministry of Education, Science and Sport of the Republic of Lithuania. The main activity of LMA is the implementation of college-level studies in higher education, specifically at bachelor level. It also offers continuous professional development training through vocational short courses for upskilling and reskilling seafarers. LMA is unique in the higher education landscape of Lithuania as the only institution which trains seafarers, specialists in the maritime and inland waterway transport sector.

17. The activities of LMA and the study and training programs carried out are accredited by the Lithuanian Transport Safety Administration (LTSA), positively assessed in 2019 by the European Maritime Safety Agency (EMSA), and the quality management systems' compliance with the quality standard ISO 9001:2015 is accredited.

18. In 2020-2021 LMA had 788 students, 30 of which are foreign students enrolled in full studies. LMA employs 60 lecturers, 30 instructors and 33 administrative staff members.

## III. ANALYSIS BY EVALUATION AREAS

### 3.1. Management

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

- *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;*

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

19. An updated LMA Statute has recently been considered and is pending approval by the Government. The Statute establishes the renewed mission of LMA to train highly qualified specialists in the maritime and inland waterway transport sector for successful professional activities and careers in the national and international maritime sectors, basing the studies, non-formal adult education and continuing vocational training on maritime culture and traditions, and by fostering respect for democratic values, responsibility and leadership. This corresponds with the activities at LMA organized across four components: maritime studies, qualification improvement of seafarers and training of inland water transport specialists, applied research that meet the needs of the water transport sector and fostering maritime culture.

20. The Panel found LMA to comply with the Lithuanian Law on Higher Education and Research by offering provisions for learning applied to maritime activities, the development of research applied to the maritime sector and, through the Seafarers Training Centre, the lifelong learning of seafarers. The Panel also noted that through its mission LMA acknowledges and responds to its social responsibilities linked with the region's sustainable development and, more broadly, that at national level.

21. The strategic action plan relates across the four areas of relevance highlighted in the mission, is consistent with 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. However, the Panel found that supporting strategic documentation was often not sufficiently formalised or would be presented too succinctly in the form of a list of indicators (in the Strategic Action Plan of the LMA for 2021-2023), making it difficult to follow key action strands. The Panel found that objectives for the short and medium terms are not explicit and frequently demonstrated as not shared by the community (the meetings with the Institution's leaders, the council and stakeholders articulated differing strategic priorities for the institution) and difficult to monitor for achievement.

22. The management of the institution has taken stock of the challenges it faces in the near future, such as sharply decreasing student enrolment. The means by which objectives are to be achieved also need more detail and clarity in allocation: the budgetary forecast for 2022 and 2023 expressed in the Self Evaluation Report express the management's confidence that it has identified ways and means to address the fall in resources yet does not indicate them explicitly, making it difficult for the team to ascertain if resource allocation is most efficient under the current situation and future perspectives.

23. LMA indicated that monitoring of strategic goals is obtained through a review from the management regarding the progress of the activity plans from the departments and through submissions of the annual reports to the LMA Council. However, the Panel found that after the report is submitted to the LMA Council it does not appear that explicit follow-up actions are instituted and, systematically monitored for implementation.

24. The Council also reviews the key performance indicators (KPIs) during the mid-terms and final-terms in order to verify that they align with the strategic plan. The Panel found it difficult to ascertain if the corpus of KPIs is sufficiently linked to strategy, and whether it sufficiently supports strategic developments. Additionally, the QMS seemingly generates a great amount of data corresponding to these KPIs and the Panel believes efficiencies can be made to increase fitness-for-purpose of strategic use of data collected. Fewer KPIs could be more relevant in scope and more specifically linked to the institution development strategies, which would also align with “Priority Activity #5” of the Strategic Action Plan *“To improve the management of LMA by optimising the management structure and increasing the efficiency of the quality management system”*.

25. Overall, the Panel took the view that management staff focused on detailed operational implementation more than taking an overarching strategic approach. The Panel concluded that there was a sense that each structure articulated and gave attention to its own priorities rather than there being a systematic overarching approach driven by and in alignment with institutional strategic objectives set. Systems are in place and they guide implementation of individualised actions; however, the Panel observed that LMA did not effectively demonstrate a unified approach which could have the potential to consolidate long-term goals and could take the institution strategically into the future. The Panel believes it is important for such unity to exist to ensure that the whole LMA community can develop a sense of shared direction and can consolidate its contribution in a relevant way by relating to institutional priorities rather than departmental or individual priorities.

26. The Panel acknowledges the efforts made in relation to the various research activities developed, however in regards strategic research activities, the Panel found that a clear strategy is lacking in regards research aims, and discussions of research opportunities seemed more ad-hoc following emerging industry opportunities than guided by strategic decision-making. The institution should examine ways of linking KPIs to its strategic goals in a more focused way. Additionally, the Panel found a lack of clear strategy in relation to the development of their staff for research purposes and the Panel noted the differences between the qualification/competence levels amongst the various departments without being able to gain full understanding of how and when these differences are planned to be addressed to ensure that research capacity, and qualification/competence levels become comparable across the institution.

27. Similarly, the Panel recognises the progress made in implementing various activities which have the potential to support internationalisation aims, however the Panel found that a clear, explicit internationalisation strategy is lacking. Internationalisation priorities are articulated around staff and student mobility, the offering of English-medium programs and the securing of international students. However, internationalisation-at-home activities could become part of strategic thinking, as could the strengthening of international collaborations which LMA engages in. A unified approach promoted strategically by the institution could allow all departments to formulate actions systematically within the broader institutional framework (also refer to 3.3).

*Effectiveness of process management of the higher education institution:*

- *A clear structure for governance, decision making and distribution of responsibilities is defined;*

- *Regular process management analysis is performed, preconditions for process improvement and risk management are planned;*
- *Stakeholders are involved in the management process at an adequate level.*

28. LMA's organizational arrangements are clearly presented in the documentation received by the Panel. The functions, duties and attributions of the different bodies (LMA Council, Academic Council, Directorate) are defined in the Statute of LMA and the director is defined as the sole governing body, which acts on behalf and represents LMA. The Statute generally provides a clear and unambiguous description of each of the constituent bodies. Additionally, the functions of the departments are also defined in the statute and the meetings with staff members representing the different departments, i.e. teachers, researchers and administrative staff, supplied proof that they had a clear view of these responsibilities.

29. In spite of the clear policies presented, when the different structures were probed during the visit meetings, the Panel could not gain clarity on where final sign-off for decisions would lie and who would take full responsibility for the actions approved and implemented, making it difficult to ascertain how policy arrangements are applied in practice. LMA described to the Panel the strategic management structure as involving a collegial approach amongst the Council (11 members), the Academic Council (15 members), and the Director, all contributors to the decision-making processes, all advising towards the decision-making process. However, this approach was not backed by clarity in terms of which decisions were actually implemented as final and, during the visit it became evident that the Director, as well as LMA Council, perceived their role as being responsible for strategic decisions for LMA. This presented a contradicting view to the Panel. The Panel was of the opinion that the multitude of QA processes displayed by the institution (see also above aspects related to fitness-for-purpose of KPIs, in para. 24) could, and were generating confusion and misunderstandings regarding distribution of responsibilities and final decision-making authority.

30. In the recent restructure only one Deputy Director post was retained. The rationale for this, as explained to the Panel, was that it allowed LMA to direct gained resources to the implementation of a new department tasked with focusing on operationalising research activities. However, the need for steering and management has seemingly not decreased by a corresponding measure. From the interview meetings the Panel was able to identify the heavy responsibility burden which is allocated to the post of Deputy Director, which oversees multiple areas of implementation including Quality Assurance, Research, etc. The Panel believes that concentrating many functions in one post, and, hence, one individual holding the post, can pose a strong risk to the institution.

31. Stakeholders are involved in the management process and represented in different bodies. Employers, teaching staff and students are part of the LMA Council. Additionally, lecturers (including researchers) and students are also represented in the Academic Council. However, from the meetings with social partners it appeared they were not directly involved in strategic decisions. Additionally, it was also evident that the exchange between social partners and LMA is not characterised by clear structures but rather by informal exchanges (phone calls, emails etc.). While this approach seems to be working for now, there is a risk to consistency and relevance of engagement in the long-run and in respect to the directions of expansion proposed by LMA (including internationalisation, research and short-course intensification).

32. LMA has 5 academic units (Navigation, Marine Engineering, Port Economics and Management, Science and Studies Innovation Departments (SSID) and Seafarers Training Center (STC), 6 non-academic departments of Studies, Library, Career and Communication, Personnel, Accounting, Infrastructure.

33. The Panel found that the Departments (SSID and STC) are bringing benefit to LMA and allowing it to come closer to its declared mission while broadening its appeal and relevance. These departments expand institutional scope to support the development of vocational training to a wider audience, while the department of Port Management is relevant to students and seafarers alike and broadens the attractiveness of the institution considerably in a context where graduates often leave their sea-going positions after some years at sea. It also highlights the institution's ability to anticipate and counteract the negative effects of falling enrolment.

34. The Panel would like to acknowledge that LMA has brought the recommendations of the previous SKVC assessment into its action planning and has effectively given attention to all areas in need of improvement recommended by the previous SKVC assessment panel. Though the previous assessment was in 2012, some elements are still timely and senior management confirmed that these are still being prioritised for further enhancement.

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

- *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;*
- *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.*

35. LMA collects data in a systemic manner and each year a plan is approved to measure the performance of the QMS process. Based upon this process the expected operational risk is measured on a scale from 1 to 9 and measurable KPIs are determined. Hence, a risk based approach is installed. On the department level gathered data is analyzed by the head of the department and quantitative data is generated with Google surveys. The departments themselves are reviewed twice a year. Satisfaction of the students with the study programs are measured twice per year by conducting an anonymous survey electronically and also the lecturers can give feedback. Collected data is compared with the results from previous years. Also, due to the size of the institution, there is a close relationship between lecturers/staff and students, which leads to informal information exchanges. LMA also collects employment information of their graduates.

36. It is clear that data is collected systematically and analyzed, however the Panel investigated if the multitude of processes in place are all necessary and if the data collected can all be analysed and its usefulness has been tested. Although LMA claims that all its processes are fit-for-purpose and fully scaled down to the needs of the institution size, the Panel believes that QA processes in place would benefit from an efficiency testing to ensure no overlap is carried forward into the new structure.

37. The information offered on the performance of the institution and its accessibility to the public is suitable. However, from the meeting the Panel learned that some students need to drop out, because they do not pass a medical examination, which is required for sea-going practices. The Panel believes LMA should make it transparent to interested potential students that this test will be a requirement later in their studies and that there is the likelihood that the test may not be passed resulting in disenrollment. Additionally, the Panel learned that some students drop out due to incorrect expectations about their study program. While questionnaires probing their interest and expectations are sent to interested potential students, no student is rejected based upon the questionnaire. The Panel believes that this type of information may need to be made more explicit and is recommending an optional second step as part of the admission process, which may involve an interview or face-to-face interaction to manage expectations and increase the chances of fewer drop-outs. Also, the Panel believes that alternative study programs may be offered or specific counselling should be made available to enable students to still find an appropriate pathway leading to a qualification within the maritime sector.

*Effectiveness of human resource management:*

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

38. Recruitment of new employees is clear as governed by the QMS-8 procedure Personnel Management 75. The Panel heard that recruitment of new staff members is planned in accordance with changes proposed which align with objectives set out in the Strategic plan.

39. Teaching staff are recruited to key lecturing positions through open competition in accordance with the LMA Regulations for Certification of Lecturers and Competitions. Lecturers without such competition are admitted for a maximum period of 2 years under fixed-term employment contracts. Many of the lecturers have professional experience which proves invaluable to their teaching, and LMA offers lecturers with less professional experience or wanting to get an update the opportunity to be aboard in a ship/vessel for a number of days/weeks.

40. Staff are evaluated on a regular basis, with certification of lecturers taking place every 5 years. In total there are 23 certified lecturers at LMA, with 60 lecturers (of these 2 professors, 17 doctors of science, and 16 holding a maritime CoC). Professional work of lecturers and practical work experience correspond to the taught study subjects, and represent more than 50% which is the minimum requirement. As presented in the SER, 81-100% of lecturers have more than 3 years of practical work experience in the maritime transport and maritime business sector.

41. LMA offers opportunities for professional development, both academic and professional. Teaching staff wanting to develop their competencies are given time and support to further their

studies to gain a Master's degree or start work on a doctoral dissertation. Professionally-oriented training is also made available to staff who want to enhance their maritime experience: this can take the form of prolonged experience at sea or embedding in a port operation organisation. However, much of these opportunities, the Panel learned, are driven individually, and LMA did not demonstrate that development needs are evaluated through strategic objectives and that staff development actions are relevantly aligned with strategic aims.

42. Given the institution ambitions to intensify its higher education provision and, possibly, move into master's level education, it becomes imperative that a greater part of staff is trained to contribute to the research agenda. Moving forward, teaching staff recruitment should aim to secure researchers with a proven track record in research, and more flexible arrangements to be instituted and applied in cases where current staff are seeking to achieve higher qualifications such as Master's and PhD.

43. LMA applies a system of incentivizing staff for institutional contributions.

*Efficiency of financial and learning resource management:*

- *Financial resources are planned, allocated and used rationally;*
- *Various financial resources for the implementation of higher education activities are attracted;*
- *Learning resources for provision of studies and research (art) activities are planned and used rationally;*
- *Learning resources for conducting studies and research (art) activities are appropriate, sufficient and available.*

44. Financial resources are planned, allocated and used rationally. The staff and the head of the department identify the needs for development and material resources and discuss them during their meetings. Then, the plan needs the agreement from the directorate and the director. While the number of students is decreasing, LMA still has adequate funding. To counteract decreasing funds for students LMA increased their applied research performance indicators. Also, since LMA is the only institution in Lithuania to provide maritime education it offers additional training to generate funding. External projects generate further income. From the online visit it became evident that funding is secured across the provision. There are enough financial resources for the library and for publications, visiting conferences, etc. Funds required for research projects are comparably small, but reliable and predictable. Thus, the Panel sees the financial situation as solid.

45. The present funding provision for research seems to be dependent on external stakeholders and may therefore be too limited in scope (<https://www.lajm.lt/lt/apie-lajm/projektai.html>): the institution should explore the possibility of creating and availing dedicated funding for short-term, project-based research contracts. For the future, it could be beneficial for the institution to take into account funding and HR limitations in order to define and prioritise the general themes of research it wants to concentrate on within its local, national and international ecosystems, with LMA possibly wanting to make budgeted researcher positions available for competition.

46. **In summary**, the Panel recognises that LMA has been able to evolve over time to respond to changing external conditions while remaining true to its mission. The recent changes are suitable for the size of the institution and the Panel believes the balance between higher education activities

and vocational courses allows the institution to compensate for risks, including financial. The operational implementation of its activities was found suitable by the Panel, however there are particular recommendations made below which relate to the strategic component which in the view of the Panel requires closer attention. These relate to: clarifying final authority, reducing the complexity of processes, determining fit-for-purpose usage of KPIs and data collection, a more appropriate distribution of functions across management roles and clear responsibilities applied across the decision-making bodies, and better monitored workload and more strategic development of competences for staff. These recommendations are made to improve the management system applied and to ensure appropriate streamlining across the various functions which have strategic implications.

47. **Judgment:** the area *meets the minimum requirements, and there are drawbacks that must be addressed* and is given 2 point(s).

48. **Recommendations for the area:**

- to clarify any confusion over the roles and responsibilities amongst the three decision-making structures, so that final approval rests with one entity alone;
- to shift attention more strongly from operational implementation to strategic developments and to promote a unified approach which the whole community can share and contribute to;
- to ensure that the institution has clear goals which everyone can subscribe to and develop a clear vision and a common understanding of long term strategic ambitions and how these can be achieved
- to fully formalise its strategic documentation to ensure key action strands are clear to all stakeholders and can be systematically implemented and efficiently monitored;
- to formally evaluate whether its processes are sufficiently streamlined and fit-for-purpose;
- to formally evaluate whether the KPIs used are useful and the data collected can inform relevant changes that could drive strategic development;
- to develop the strategy so as to formulate clear directions about research, which relevantly differentiate between scientific and applied research
- to develop an overarching strategic approach for internationalisation and clearly establish priorities and allocate resources against these
- to evaluate the new structure, including the Deputy Director post, to ensure that workload is manageable and there are not too many functions concentrated within one position;
- to develop research capability at strategic organizational level and ensure research activities are distributed across the institution equally
- to ensure staff development activities are systematically guided by strategic objectives rather than individual staff priorities, and that qualification/competence differences can thus be levelled out across the different departments
- to better manage drop-outs by exploring all points at which students become vulnerable and offering counselling for alternative pathways still within the maritime sector

- to develop more varied mechanisms by which external stakeholders become even more involved in management activities

### 3.2. Quality assurance

*Implementation and effectiveness of the internal quality assurance system:*

- *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;*
- *Internal quality assurance measures of planning, implementation and improvement are appropriate, applied periodically and ensure the involvement of the whole institution and stakeholders;*
- *Processes for planning, implementation, monitoring, periodic evaluation and development of activities are specified;*
- *Students and academic and non-academic staff of the institution receive effective support;*
- *Provisions and procedures for academic integrity, tolerance and non-discrimination, appeal and ethics are specified and applied;*
- *The results of the external review are used to improve the performance of the higher education institution.*

49. LMA has made information publicly available on its webpage about its Quality Management System (the corresponding subpage). The Quality Manual, Organizational structure of LMA and LMA Quality Management System process scheme are downloadable. The Quality Manual, Organizational structure and process scheme have been approved by Director of LMA (on 29/01/2021 Resolution No. V-13; LMA Council 15, September 2020 m. Resolution No. TN-2; and 25th May 2018 order No. V-93 respectively).

50. The Panel was exposed to different versions of the scope for QMS as evidenced by comparing statements made on the webpage (some outdated, as e.g the QMS presentation linking to the 2018 version of the Quality Manual), the self-evaluation report, and the current Quality Manual presented as annex to the self-evaluation report. The Panel believes this can be confusing to stakeholders and anyone visiting the website. An approved scope for QMS should be communicated clearly and used consistently to drive quality assurance initiatives and to allow for prioritisation of such actions across various (possibly limited) resources. Additionally, the Panel notes that incremental changes to QMS, made as and when required, can pose a risk to their reception and application by stakeholders. External requirements permitting, LMA may wish to ensure changes exhibit a level of regularity, triggered cyclically, and are clearly communicated, with sufficient notice, to allow stakeholders to make effective use of QMS guidance for their daily responsibilities. LMA must ensure that the publicly available information on QMS is always up-to-date and that any changes are duly communicated (including through prompt website updates) to those impacted by the changes. LMA may also wish to complement its public information with news and evidence on continuous development of the QMS and consequently, LMA's activities in general.

51. LMA has an approved and published policy for quality assurance, which is supplemented by the Strategic Action Plan and Quality Manual. Improvement of the QMS forms one of LMA's

strategic programs together with improvement of the management structure. Thus, LMA's policy for quality assurance forms a part of its strategic management. Compliance is demonstrated with the requirements of the ISO 9001 standard and the provisions and guidelines for quality assurance of the European Higher Education Area and various QMS documentation presented to the Panel demonstrates references to these standards.

52. In the QMS, risk management as a part of planning is designed to identify the main threats to LMA's operations and the associated risks that the organization may face in its operations and to apply measures to keep the risks within tolerable risk limits. Furthermore, *LMA distinguishes 3 types of risk impact: impact on reputation, impact on the amount of funds allocated from the state budget, impact on the amount of financial resources earned by the Academy*. The Panel found that these impacts could be more explicitly articulated as connected to, e.g. the study and research processes, and possibly make more use of the KPI of quality management system process performance and risks analysis for 2020 where more relevant risk factors are included such as decrease in the number of students admitted to the LMA and student drop-out. This could lead to more practical action being generated.

53. In the QMS process scheme, planning is mentioned in two processes, namely Strategic planning and Study process planning. Elsewhere in the QM, planning comprises risk management, actions on risk and mitigation and thirdly, QMS planning and change management. Procedural documents offer a fuller view of the processes for planning, implementation, monitoring, periodic evaluation and development activities, as follows: Activity planning processes are described in the procedures Planning of the Study Process (QMS-16) and Planning of the Activities of the Department (QMS-17). The implementation of activities are covered by the following main processes: Organization and Administration of Studies (QMS-10), Organization and Administration of Training Courses and Consultancy Activities (QMS-12), Management of Research Activities (QMS-13) and other administration processes. Periodical assessment and improvement processes are covered by the following procedures: Monitoring, Analysis and Assessment of Activities (QMS-15), Internal Audit of the QMS and Non-conformity Management (QMS-2), Management of Relations with Stakeholders (QMS-15).

54. The Panel found that QMS documents cover the necessary processes in principle, addressing both studies, research and other administration processes. However, some of the documents may be partly outdated and need full alignment across all QMS components. For example, QMS-16 seen in eKVS is dated as Version 1 in April 2018, prepared on 4 April 2011 and within the document, the strategic action plan for 2015–2019 is referred to, instead of the current one. Furthermore, in September 2020 the LMA Council issued Resolution No. TN-2 approving new LMA organizational management structure and the Science and Studies Innovation Department (SSID) was established. As seen in eKVS, QMS-13 on Management of Research Activities is dated 10 April 2018, i.e. at the time when the SSID did not exist. As the activity scheme of the SSID shows, the scheme covers, e.g. scientific projects, commercialization of research and scientific committee for scientific activities, and the Panel has queried whether the SSID's role, responsibilities and activities are taken into consideration in QMS-13.

55. LMA assesses internal and external factors by using SWOT and PEST methods. Study courses are surveyed regularly and the results are discussed with the students. Students are encouraged to participate in the self-organization of LMA and also in the QA system. While students elect their representatives in the student bodies, which nominates students for various higher bodies (Council

etc.), it became clear during the site visit that students involved in QA on the department level are selected by the Head of the department instead of voted/nominated by the students themselves. To enhance the quality of the internal QA, the Panel believes that LMA should let the students decide who participates in those bodies to increase motivation and responsibility.

56. According to SER, LMA provides the students with academic, social and organizational support by informing in many ways about, e.g. study programs and innovations therein, further studies, international exchange programs, internships, career opportunities and research opportunities. Furthermore, social support comprises opportunities to sports and healthy living, as well as cultural events. In particular, the on-campus sports facilities seen on LMA's presentation video were impressive.

57. Study arrangements are adapted also to accommodate special needs of, e.g. advanced, disabled and child-raising students. However, the second floor is still inaccessible to persons moving in wheelchairs. Despite the valuable remedial actions taken, LMA may wish to consider appropriate technical solutions to move persons in wheelchairs to and from the second floor.

58. LMA has a wide offer of scholarships, bonuses and other financial support for the students, also for the socially sensitive student groups identified by LMA. The above is a non-exhaustive description of support available for the students.

59. During the site visit it became clear that there are strong and close relations between the students and the staff/lecturers of LMA. Lecturers are very supportive towards the students and it is easy for the students to reach out to them. Additionally, LMA implemented a mentoring system, which connects students from higher semesters to students in the first semester, which allows clarity for the students in relation to whom they need to contact in given situations where they may need support.

60. Psychological support and counselling for students was highlighted in the previous institutional assessment as an area which LMA understood important to be strengthened. Consequently, the Panel focussed specifically on its implementation. LMA reported having addressed this in various ways. The interviewed students confirmed that psychological support is available. Management also confirmed that the students have a psychological counsellor available and lecturers are also very supportive and are asked to look out for any psychological issues. On the other hand, LMA has identified weaknesses related to student support, i.e. *psychological support* actions and support are not systematized, therefore the support measures provided by LMA may not be available to some students and secondly, insufficient information about the *academic support* provided to LMA students. These are covered in LMA's SAP Measure 1.1.1.6. but not in the relevant the names of goals, objectives and assessment criteria and measurement units. This raises the question in relation to the efficiency of monitoring by LMA systems of the development actions implemented on student support, and how it may close the feedback loop. The Panel acknowledges the challenges of monitoring psychological support and some other activities which would relate to qualitative phenomena that cannot easily be quantified. Nevertheless, there should be a suitable means to monitor and measure any key action(s).

61. Regarding support for academic and non-academic staff, the previous institutional assessment report included a recommendation to continue providing support to teachers and auxiliary staff, who are learning maritime English, so that eventually at least one degree awarding program could be offered in English. LMA demonstrated having taken several steps to enhance the lecturers' and

other staff's language skills, and in 2020 LMA started to provide four study programs in English (and Russian), e.g. Port and Shipping Management, which the Panel found as a positive development.

62. According to SER, personnel groups are provided with internal and external training, as well as project trainings. There are opportunities to study doctoral studies and participate in research, internships, projects and other means to develop themselves professionally and academically. LMA has listed the main events for the improvement of the staff qualifications during 2016 – 2020, comprising improvement of didactic competencies, researchers' competencies, subject competencies and digital competencies. During the interview with teachers and researchers, the interviewees referred to the QMS procedure on staff's capacity building, as well as practical examples on expressing and fulfilling their needs for capacity building. Regarding the growing need for English language skills, they mentioned also the LMA strategy to address this need.

63. Indeed, insufficient level of English proficiency of teachers and trainers/instructors was classified as a weakness in LMA's strategic action plan. Accordingly, program 1, Training of highly qualified specialists of the maritime transport sector includes the objective 1.1.2 to develop didactic, digital, *language*, applied research and subject competences and skills of teachers and trainers/instructors and there is also a corresponding assessment criterion and its measurement unit and value for the years 2021–2023. The Panel acknowledges that the insufficiency of the English language skills may be relative, i.e. their skills may well have improved even substantially but the growing internationalization may have caused a situation where the amount of sufficiently versed staff is still lagging behind the need.

64. Academic integrity is visible in LMA's Strategic action plan (SAP) for 2021–2023. The LMA mission includes the principle to train highly qualified specialist by, e.g. *developing respect for democratic values, responsibility and leadership*. This is repeated in the goal of the program 1, *Training of highly qualified specialists of the maritime transport sector* but is not covered by the program's objectives and assessment criteria for the years 2021–2023. Still, recruitment of new staff members is planned in order to achieve the objectives set out in the SAP, including the above mentioned principle. In this connection, the SER referred to April, 2020 when a training vessel specialist position was introduced.

65. According to SER, issues of academic integrity, tolerance and non-discrimination, appeal as well as ethics are included in the periodic surveys of students on the assessment of teaching quality. A real occurrence of intolerable behaviour of a lecturer and the steps taken afterwards are also depicted. Furthermore, the related provisions and procedures and their usage are described. Students are informed about plagiarism in early semesters and they are aware their grade will be reduced if they cheat on an exam. Additionally, information can be found on their website or is given orally. However, the Panel found that there is no systematic approach to ensure in-depth information about the phenomenon and its consequences, and that no formal training is given. The Academic Council's interview revealed that some study programs include aspects of ethics (but some seem related to professional ethics rather than academic ethics). In addition, the Panel was informed that the lecturers check the students' texts manually for plagiarism and there is no detection software available for that purpose. Although the Panel recognises that bachelor programs are professionally focussed and research essays are not the norm in assessment, given the graduation thesis and the articulation into possible Master's programs, the Panel believes that there is a risk to not focussing more attention on academic integrity and plagiarism issue to ensure

full understanding of students and consistent treatment of plagiarism cases by lecturers. The lack of plagiarism offence systematisation as part of QMS also impacts this area negatively.

66. Regarding the examples of addressing the recommendations of the previous institutional assessment's report discussed above and the other recommendations covered by LMA, the Panel notes that LMA has given them due attention. Specifically, the recommendation about a comparison of Part 1 of the Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area (ESG) with the LMA Quality Management System (QMS), based on the requirements of ISO 9001:2008, is reported as completed. QMS includes a document matrix between the different QMS documents and standard requirements (ISO 9001: 2015), QMS Document Matrix, version 2, 25 June 2020. A similar matrix, a cross reference table or any systematic presentation with references to the ESG Standards for internal quality assurance could make it even easier for staff to control and understand how and to which extent LMA's QMS covers the ESG standards and guidelines for internal quality assurance.

67. The Panel recognises that digitalization has largely driven LMA to keep up with the development of society and educational activity at large by enhancing, in particular its library services during the recent decade. In addition, LMA has utilised simulators in teaching for a long time and has updated them in many ways during 2016–2020. In the interview of the Administrative staff, the Panel was informed that LMA's Navigation and Engine Room simulators can be interconnected to enable joint deck-engine simulations and joint simulations can be arranged simultaneously also with simulators located in some foreign Maritime Academies, too (e.g. Latvia). The Panel was also informed that LMA was capable of arranging remote teaching already before Covid-19. Furthermore, from 2017 LMA started to systematically apply the tools of distance learning and this has helped lecturers and students to successfully continue their distance learning in 2020 during quarantine. The seafaring students have benefited from part-time studies, enabling them to combine their seafaring career at sea with their studies at LMA. LMA has indicated these and related developments as having put them in a good position when the pandemic move to online became an imperative.

68. **In summary**, the Panel sees that LMA has good experience in establishing, using and developing their quality management system. Furthermore, LMA demonstrates a strong commitment to quality. However, simultaneous or consecutive factors such as changes in the operational environment, growing number of study programs and restructured organization of LMA, as well as the enlarged scope of the quality management system can constitute challenges. Nonetheless, the Panel is confident that LMA has the will, resilience and prerequisites to address challenges and keep on developing its quality management system.

69. **Judgment:** the area is *being developed systematically, without any major drawbacks* and is given 3 point(s).

#### 70. **Recommendations for the area:**

- to maintain its public information in relation to QMS up-to-date and accurate, at all times
- to institute a cyclical system to make changes to QMS so that stakeholders can contribute effectively and consistently to areas which impact their activities
- to streamline risk management across the various QMS documentation to ensure relevant risk factors are identified and mitigated equally across the areas of provision

- to ensure its system of monitoring QA actions is applied consistently, is itself tested for fitness-for-purpose and renders relevant results which can, indeed, drive improvement
- to consider introducing formal training on plagiarism, acquiring a plagiarism detection software to ensure lecturers are consistent in their treatment of plagiarism, and systematically collecting and analysing cases of plagiarism as part of QMS
- to consider instituting a system to allow for students in all bodies to be nominated or elected by students and not selected/appointed by LMA staff without student endorsement

**71. Good practice examples:**

- demonstrated ability to improve based on external QA recommendations
- strong commitment to operationalising quality processes

### **3.3. Studies and research (art)**

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

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

72. LMA is the only Lithuanian HEI conducting maritime studies, including training of specialists in the maritime transport sector. The educational programs marine navigation and marine engineering qualifies for pursuing the highest maritime Certificate of Competency and a career as master or chief engineer on vessels. Programs within other relevant maritime areas such as management, finance and information systems (e.g., Port and Shipping Management, Finance of Port and Shipping Companies, etc.) are offered at LMA as the only such type HEI in the Klaipėda region.

73. LMA as a maritime education and training (MET) institution is equipped with necessary educational infrastructure as required for the maritime programs adhering to international regulations through the International Convention on Standards of Training, Certification and Watchkeeping for Seafarers 78 as Amended (STCW), and this equipment is on several occasions described as very good. Also the video replacing the Panel's physical tour of the campus indicates that LMA is well equipped with regards to simulators and other necessary and relevant infrastructure.

74. Several study programs, including programs where practical training on board or within relevant businesses is not a regulation, have practice or internships as part of the education. This is perceived as very valuable of several of the interviewed groups as well as from the Panel's perspective. Giving the students practical training and relevant practical insight is positive for both

the students' competence and their job prospects, which was highlighted in some of the meetings during the institutional visit.

75. Interviews with Council members and students suggested that the institution has drawn very close links with its socio-economic partners, allowing it to provide guidance for students who are seeking internships. Students generally find such internships themselves but the institution can provide extra guidance to find relevant work experience. The strategy consists in identifying one resource person working with major internship providers, be it with shipping operators or port and logistics companies, to identify and fulfil the needs of both students and companies in terms of internships. The institution has the relevant digital tools to provide support to interns, even when they are at sea, and students have reported positively about such support.

76. LMA has a strong policy of acquiring, maintaining and improving a large fleet of simulators. Seen together they allow students and trainees in the STC to benefit from world-class equipment that shows that the institution is aware of the ship-in-school concept. The School is able to target enough funding for the maintenance of this equipment. Its policy includes the establishment of specific working relations with the providers of software, thus securing its access to world-class equipment.

77. There has been a decrease of about 50% in the number of students studying at LMA during the last 5 years. LMA has initiated four international programs, in order to stabilize the student mass, and in 2020, 30 international students were admitted to international programs. This coupled with increase in drop-outs will mean that LMA needs to concentrate attention on areas of vulnerability. The Panel explored such areas and found that expectations of candidates on admission sometimes are misplaced and LMA could do more to clarify academic and professional requirements. The Panel is recommending a supplementary step be introduced with a face-to-face interview as part of the admission process. Additionally, the medical test which can happen only after enrolment sometimes results in a fail and generates drop-outs. The Panel is recommending that more clarity is provided about this step and possible alternative study programs recommended to students for transfer to safeguard their academic status. Thirdly, some students find the preparation of the graduation thesis difficult, and the Panel recommends some variability be instituted with more practice-based options.

78. The Panel noted that the majority of students on degree programs are highschool graduates and believes that LMA may wish to consider adapting their educational offer to attract more mature persons to the study programs. Such re-organisation could also counter the steep decrease in youth overall and the dropouts LMA has been experiencing.

79. LMA graduates completing their studies in time make up 43% –77% of all students in the field. Those who graduated on time constitute a smaller group of about 50% in the technology, business and public management fields. LMA sees that management programs are usually not completed on time due to parental leave, emigration, for or economic reasons. In the field of engineering and management, number of students graduating on time increased in 2020 during the period of distance studies. As per SER, the trend for numbers of graduates shows a 31% decrease since 2017. For comparison, the LMA 2020 Activity report displays that the number of students in total have decreased by 26% from 2018, the number of students per 1<sup>st</sup> of October (admitted) have decreased by 3,5% from 2018 and the number of graduates has decreased by 23% in the same

period. There is a noticeable difference between programs, as the full time programs had a 17% decrease and the part time programs had a 42,5% decrease.

80. The Panel noted that graduation requirements involve a research thesis. Given the professionally-oriented nature of the studies, the Panel would believe it could be beneficial to LMA to consider introducing an alternative which would allow the use of case study or project-based reports for students who prefer to engage with practical developments more than the academic/research specific. This could also be a measure to stimulate graduation rates and thereby reduce the dropout rate as a consequence of students not being able to complete the graduation thesis. If implemented, LMA should ensure marketing of this information to potential candidates while candidates are considering whether to apply to the institution or not. The Panel believes this could make a difference in how candidates evaluate their chances of successfully completing the degrees.

81. LMA is involved in various research activities, from seminars on applied science to publishing of scientific articles in peer reviewed journals. The number of research activities has varied somewhat during the last five years, for several reasons e.g. number of staff, Covid-19, etc. In the last few years, the number of student publications has increased but still only about 5% of the students are involved in research activities. The main areas of the LMA applied research portfolio lie within the areas of technology and social sciences that include research on water transport and related sectors. The total research activity is sufficient, but LMA faces some challenges as e.g., 84% of LMA publications are prepared by staff in the Department of Port Economics and Management. Such a difference between departments seems to be connected with the large difference in numbers of lecturers with academic degrees in the different departments where the department of Port Economics and Management has 10 associate professors (12 lecturers with scientific degrees), the department of marine engineering has 4 associate professors and the department of navigation has 1 associate professor. This uneven distribution of research competence is from the Panel's perspective seen as a challenge for LMA, and it may also lead to greater future challenges if LMA does not manage to level out these differences. In the SER and the visit meetings, the Panel saw several local actions taken to build competence, e.g. informal mentorship from one member of staff to another, courses, training and consultation in house, etc., but the research capability needs to be developed at strategic organizational level and there need to be systematic activities which are distributed across the institution and have the capacity to build research competence at institutional level equally.

82. In 2020, the LMA Council established the Science and Studies Innovation Department in order to develop and manage the applied research activities, as the 2020 activity report for LMA stated that the scientific activity of LMA was not sufficient. During the visit meetings, the Panel noticed that LMA needs to define research for their applied sciences institution, as LMA demonstrated little differentiation between scientific and applied research.

83. On average 40% of the staff prepare and supervise students preparing scientific publications and projects and about 5% of the students prepare scientific publications. During the institutional visit it also became apparent that the difference in scientific competence in the staff also gives differences in student's involvement in research. The Panel heard examples of student involvement in relation to specific projects but believes it would be beneficial for LMA to more systematically include students in their research activities.

84. The SER states that the LMA lecturer's involvement in research is determined by the position/job description, pedagogical work in study program, content of the taught subject and need for renewal, changes in the maritime sector, LMA projects, personal initiative, etc. Both the SER and the institutional visit have shown the Panel that the content of the study program is in line with industry needs and relevant regulations, such as the International Convention on Standards for Training, Certification and Watchkeeping for Seafarers 78 as Amended, instead of research driven. Due to the nature of the institution and expected level of professional bachelor programs, the Panel do not see the lack of research-infused teaching to be highly problematic as the emphasis on professionalisation should prevail. This is in line with the LMA Council view, which expressed that the mission of a maritime academy is to prepare skills and that the current level of scientific activity is sufficient.

85. Research activities in the different courses and study programs seem to be very much a result of the individual lecturer's own interest for and involvement in research. Research topics appear to be planned by the academics themselves and included in the Department's activity plan. Topics can develop from industry or be proposed by lecturers/departments. More strategically driven research could prove beneficial for LMA and would allow it to invest in research outcomes derived from its own strategic drivers, more so than individually formulated.

86. Students are encouraged to participate in applied research by preparing student research projects, scientific publications and participating in seminars and conferences. The students also mentioned that they got information on research in different topics, and that they had to write reports, presentations, that they were given the opportunity to go deeper into topics and that they could participate in projects. As still only 5% of students prepare scientific publications, there is a lot of unrealized potential connected to involving students in research activities, including reaching the LMA strategic goal of increased research activity. Given the strategic goal of LMA to increase their research output, it is important for LMA to seek to increase this number by establishing ways/processes to systematically motivate and enable more students to participate in research actively.

87. The earlier mentioned difference in research activity for staff from different departments is assumed to affect the research-based studies within the same departments. Even though all study programs are within the given limits for percentage of lecturers with academic degrees, the program with the highest competence rate has 36% involvement from lecturers with academic degrees, whereas the marine navigation program has 16% involvement from lecturers with academic degrees. These differences between programs are expected to affect the extent to which the different study programs are based on research. This also came forward in the institutional visit where some of the students had not been given any training in academic ethics, except for being told that they had to avoid plagiarism and where it was stated that students' involvement in research is "*a bigger problem within the navigation and engineering departments*".

88. LMA has procedures for crediting partial studies, foreign qualifications and prior non-formal and informal learning through documents such as "*Description of the Procedure for Crediting Partial Study Results of LMA*" and "*Description of the Procedure for Assessment of Competences Acquired through Non-formal and Informal Education of LMA*". These documents are also published in the LMA web site and in the eQMS. As per the SER, the procedures are widely applied in the recognition of acquired competencies. The study coordinator and the head of the department supervising the study program are responsible for the quality of the process of crediting

partial study results. The Deputy Director for Academic Affairs is responsible for the admission process for international students. The admission procedure for international students also includes information on how foreign students may get an assessment from SKVC in order to obtain a certificate of recognition of the conformity of qualifications.

89. Foreign qualifications, for example courses finished by students during their Erasmus exchange at a foreign university, are recognized if the courses are similar to theirs at LMA. For LMA students going on exchange, the differences in credit systems and content of studies between LMA and the foreign HEIs seem to have given some of the students' challenges, as several students mentioned that they had to take extra exams at LMA when returning from their exchange period. For some, this resulted in having just a few weeks to prepare for an exam which the rest of the students had prepared for the whole semester. In the Panel's view this learning debt hinders student mobility and leads to additional workloads for the student, and it becomes imperative for LMA to address this issue.

90. Graduates from LMA are awarded a maritime qualification as a professional bachelor's degree. From the visit it appeared that graduates are highly accepted in industry in various fields. Social partners and industry think that graduates are highly qualified and from the visit, the Panel learned that most graduates are employed after graduating, which indicates that the study programs aligns with the needs of social partners/industry. The Panel recognizes the ties to industry and social partners as a clear strength of LMA.

91. The Social Partners who the Panel met had pertinent ideas about developing programs further with a view to the novel professions being promoted currently in the industry. However, they expressed to the Panel that they had not been invited on curriculum evaluations, nor had they been asked to guest lecture to students on some areas of immediate topicality. The Panel, of course acknowledges that it only met a small sample of the social partners LMA collaborates with and had confirmation from LMA that guest lecturing was a feature they promoted on a number of programs. LMA also confirmed that they agreed with social partners about more contributions to curriculum developments being desirable. The Panel emphasises that social partners have a potential to drive the curricular offering further and LMA is right to consider wanting to further tap into this potential. Equally, intensifying guest lecturing and other engagements from social partners would continue to benefit LMA.

#### *Internationality of studies, research (art):*

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

92. As per LMA strategic plan, internationalization is not included in their four priority activities of LMA, but LMA has articulated in meetings priorities related to internationalization as it aims to further increase the number of international students from 30 today to at least double by September/October this year.

93. LMA has activities towards international collaboration, students' and lecturers' exchange and somewhat towards internationalization-at-home. LMA encourages lecturers to participate in international exchanges and cooperates with 57 HEIs and research institutes. Evidence is found that several actions are taken to ensure students going on exchange and for internationalization-at-home for students at LMA, however there seem to be few courses where international students are in class with Lithuanian students and only when in small groups thus making a cultural exchange difficult. The Panel believes there is a missed opportunity here where students could learn from their international colleagues skills related to intercultural mediation, communication and relationship management.

94. As articulated to the Panel, LMA's priorities towards internationalization include providing international studies, increasing collaboration with foreign HEIs and companies and academic exchange and projects. Departments activity plans include internationalization activities and include e.g development of distance learning opportunities to increase availability for foreign students, e-library and e-service systems, establishing of development of digital laboratories, development of complete study programs in foreign languages, foreign guest lecturers, etc. The activities described are varied and aimed at different goals. The Panel, thus, sees potential for improvement towards the amount of intercultural courses as the one-hour course is not sufficient for the highly international professional environment in which the students take part both through practice periods (sea service) and in their future work. The Panel also noticed that exchange seems to be Erasmus only, and suggests options to be increased. It is also apparent that more uniform approaches across departments in relation to internationalization activities could highly benefit the institution in its strategic directions. The Panel concluded that an overarching approach to internationalisation would be beneficial to LMA to clearly establish its actions and allocate resources against these. This should look to cover a broader concept, not restricted to staff and student mobility and promotion of English-medium programs.

95. The Panel, also, did not find sufficient proof that the institution was making full use of its teaching and research expertise to envision internationalisation in a holistic way. Joint research programs may provide the institution with opportunities for links in tuition, just as cooperations developed for student mobility may lead to new research opportunities.

96. The Panel found few activities in support of internationalisation-at-home, generally covering delivery in English, and found that LMA was only partially using the opportunity to expose students to international realities without students needing to travel abroad.

97. **In summary**, to the Panel, LMA comes across as an institution with long traditions of maritime education and a unique position within the Lithuanian landscape of higher education institutions as the only provider of maritime higher education. The Panel's assessment is that LMA is in line with the regulations, but there may be some unrealised potential for LMA.

98. **Judgment:** the *area is rated very well in the national context and internationally, without any drawbacks* and is given 4 point(s).

99. **Recommendations for the area:**

- to consider adding, as part of the admission process, interviews (face-to-face) to better manage student expectations about academic and professional requirements
- to strategically consider expanding their degree offer to more mature students

- to ensure that clear information on medical requirements is given to candidates for seafaring programs, e.g. through the study program description in the LMA website, in order to reduce or prevent drop-out due to medical reasons
- to consider varying graduation requirements to give students more options and support higher graduation rates
- to more systematically include students in their research activities in order to increase the level of student participation in research activities
- to address the issues students are experiencing on return from study exchanges in respect credit recognition so as to minimise student academic debt, and to expand possibilities for exchange beyond Erasmus arrangements
- to enhance the intercultural learning experience of students by increasing the volume of intercultural training as part of the programs, and facilitating better integration between Lithuanian and international students
- to expand internationalisation-at-home activities, such as, but not limited to, including shorter project-based collaborations with partners, applied research activities involving students and staff
- to continue to invest in support for English language skills development, especially in light of strategic internationalisation aims also regarding English-medium programs.

#### **100. Good practice examples:**

- holistic approach to the curriculum
- positive development in student mobility from 2018 (until Covid-19).
- active use of practice in study programs, including through simulations and internships
- opportunities for staff to gain or update practical experience on board social partners' vessels
- supportive teachers, also when students are at sea performing internships
- good employability rates for graduates with graduate competencies appreciated by employers and many graduates being employed in high-ranking positions
- introduction of international English-medium programs and enrolling of international students

### **3.4. Impact on regional and national development**

*Effectiveness of the impact on regional and national development:*

- |  |
|--|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>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;</i></li> <li>• <i>The monitoring, analysis and evaluation of the effectiveness of the measures on national and (or) regional development are performed.</i></li> </ul> |
|--|

101. LMA clearly states the documents they are following in order to be in line with the needs regionally and nationally. The strategic plan of LMA provides a view on tasks and measures how LMA impacts on the development of the region and the country. The objective also encompasses non-formal adult education and continuing vocational training activities.

102. The representatives of the Council and Social Partners confirmed that LMA meets the needs regionally and nationally in regards strategic objectives. Both the Council and Social Partners expressed very positive views about the educational programs and the competencies of graduates. LMA following regional and national trends has identified further initiatives to be introduced in regards of programs so as to satisfy the needs of the market. For this reason, LMA has recently instituted 12 programs for in-land water businesses' needs, as the focus is moving strongly towards in-land water developments and LMA has recognized the growing need for education and training.

103. In regards the internationalization dimension, that meeting with Council confirmed that LMA's position to become more internationalized is the strategy for the future. LMA aligns not only with Lithuanian academic and professional requirements, but also international since seafarers are qualified under international requirements systems. That makes them strong competitors in the employment market worldwide. As desired by LMA, it will aim to further expand its international position building on the developments during the last years when international students from Latvia, Ukraine, Belorussia, Cameroon and other countries have become full-time students on newly promoted LMA English-medium programs.

104. LMA has constant cooperation with social partners. During the meeting with Social Partners this aspect was confirmed as very strong: all the participants indicated that they offer internships for LMA students and provide jobs for LMA graduates as their competencies are of the right level. Also, some companies established scholarships for students. There is constant communication with social partners. There are cooperation agreements signed based on the needs of the stakeholders. Representatives of stakeholders serve as guest speakers during different study sessions. Having constant cooperation and communication with the social partners allows LMA to spot program changes that are necessary to be effective. Surveys are used to identify satisfaction of stakeholders, the needs, and ideas in relation to the direction LMA should consider developing in. Monitoring of engagement with social partners happens in accordance with QMS, currently main communication with stakeholders is in digital format due to the pandemic. However, social partners have indicated that it has been equally efficient and there have been no moments of lapses.

105. Importantly, not only private ownership companies benefit from employment of LMA graduates, but also the Lithuanian Navy. There is close cooperation with the Navy's Training Center and LMA. The Navy commanders can study at specialization courses at LMA. Regional stakeholders are willing to take part in growth of graduates through concrete investments in scholarships.

106. Social Partners also suggested that further unrealized potential could be explored through mechanisms that enforce communication to prospective students by engaging more strongly employers in educational marketing campaigns, thus increasing awareness of LMA for expanded markets. The Social Partners confirmed to the Panel that they were willing to contribute more time and effort towards marketing initiatives alongside LMA.

*Assurance of conditions for lifelong learning:*

- *The higher education institution monitors and analyses the need for lifelong learning;*
- *The higher education institution anticipates the diversity of forms and conditions of lifelong learning and ensures their implementation;*
- *The higher education institution performs the evaluation of assurance of conditions for lifelong learning.*

107. LMA implements life-long learning through the continuous organization of training programs and certification of maritime qualifications, which correspond to international standards. There are also activities of assessment of seafarers competences to maintain currency in relation to skills promoted by requirements set nationally and internationally. Such training targets reskilling and upskilling approaches.

108. The study programs implemented by LMA include mainly the training of specialists in the maritime transport sector. The variety of study fields and programs enables to be flexible and prepare the necessary specialists for the labour market. The forms of training and learning mainly consist of: distance learning, on-site learning, blended learning (theory online and practice on site), recognition of foreign qualifications and learning outcomes of part studies, recognizing outcomes under coordinated and uncoordinated programs, informal learning, seagoing service.

109. The need for life-long learning is determined by close cooperation with various stakeholders in the current market. The research studies and virtual tests carried out by LMA are proactive actions to determine the need for training. The research on the waterborne transport market and the training services market was also carried out in cooperation with stakeholders. The meeting with Social Partners confirmed close cooperation in regards of life-long learning needs (including use of surveys as part of QMS-15). Social partners indicated that they have open conversation about their needs and are satisfied with the quality and level of LMA provided life-long training. The SER indicates that LMA has an impressive range of programs: 7 college study programs, 69 qualification and retraining programs, 1 internship module for maritime academy staff, and continues to develop programs upon request. The license to train pilots and captains of inland waterway specialists and motor pleasure craft, opened more opportunities for LMA and 12 new training programs were launched. Reacting to the need of the market - creation of Klaipeda city Dangė River port, demand by stakeholders in inland water transport, new fishing companies in Lithuania, projects implemented by Inland Water Transport Directorate - LMA increased the number of short vocational courses by 30% during the last 5 years.

110. LMA providing life-long training opportunities systematically carries out surveys of training participants to receive feedback on quality of the training, also with the purpose to identify strengths and weaknesses of the programs. Feedback received is used to update training content and training schedules, competencies of instructors are also improved. Meeting with Social Partners and representatives of regional and national stakeholders confirmed that they regularly receive surveys. Their feedback helps LMA to update the programs and stay in demand for their services.

111. A strong technological base, recognized as a sufficient base by Social Partners, allows LMA to organize studies with a variety of tools: ship power equipment simulator, computer classroom, high voltage laboratory equipment, updated equipment for tanker course, DNT simulator, a fire-

fighting laboratory, a 15-seater high-speed lifeboat with all needed equipment, a life raft and others. During conversations with the Council and other stakeholders the Panel was told that existing simulators cover all the training needs and are sufficient. Constant update of software of simulators allows LMA to keep abreast of novel trends on the market and offer training which is constantly aligned and up-to-date with market developments. Financial resources received through STC allow LMA to update technological base.

112. Stakeholders are involved directly in quality assurance process, as they are members of study program supervision committees, self-governing bodies, members of lecturer certification commissions. Surveys are also conducted frequently and always after STC training is completed. During 2016 -2020 there were 25 measures implemented to adapt to the needs of the regional and national market. Meeting with stakeholders/social partners confirmed that the measures taken in relation to the courses offered through STC worked well and satisfy their needs. However, there were some aspects that they recommended for inclusion in the bachelor level programs.

113. **In summary**, LMA is in a unique position as the sole maritime institution offering higher education in Lithuania. It is for this reason that it has the strong support of from stakeholders and businesses. It is also this position which allows it to be visible internationally and to set up various collaborations, including with social partners, which benefit maritime professions, both on sea and land. The Panel found that LMA is consistently working to promote its reputation and that of maritime professions and it is strategically addressing regional and national requirements and focusing internationally on aligning with emerging trends and responding agilely to the needs arising.

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

115. **Recommendations for the area:**

- to consider involving social partners more strongly in marketing initiatives to allow for admission expectations to be better calibrated by prospective students.

116. **Good practice examples:**

- strong collaboration and constant interaction between LMA and relevant stakeholders;
- agility and professionalism with which LMA responds to market needs in relation to designing and implementing vocational lifelong learning training for upskilling and reskilling for maritime professions;
- modern technological base used in collaboration with social partners.

## IV. EXAMPLES OF GOOD PRACTICE

The Panel identifies the following examples of good practice in the Lithuanian Maritime Academy:

- demonstrated ability to improve based on external QA recommendations;
- strong commitment to operationalising quality processes;
- holistic approach to the curriculum;

- positive development in student mobility from 2018 (until Covid-19);
- active use of practice in study programs, including through simulations and internships;
- opportunities for staff to gain or update practical experience on board social partner's vessels;
- supportive teachers, also when students are at sea performing internships;
- good employability rates for graduates with graduate competencies appreciated by employers and many graduates being employed in high-ranking positions;
- introduction of international English-medium programs and enrolling of international students;
- strong collaboration and constant interaction between LMA and relevant stakeholders;
- agility and professionalism with which LMA responds to market needs in relation to designing and implementing vocational lifelong learning training for upskilling and reskilling for maritime professions;
- modern technological base used in collaboration with social partners.

## **V. RECOMMENDATIONS FOR ENHANCEMENT**

The Panel's recommendations for further enhancement to the Lithuanian Maritime Academy are:

- to clarify any confusion over the roles and responsibilities amongst the three decision-making structures, so that final approval rests with one entity alone;
- to shift attention more strongly from operational implementation to strategic developments and to promote a unified approach which the whole community can share and contribute to;
- to ensure that the institution has clear goals which everyone can subscribe to and develop a clear vision and a common understanding of long term strategic ambitions and how these can be achieved
- to fully formalise its strategic documentation to ensure key action strands are clear to all stakeholders and can be systematically implemented and efficiently monitored;
- to formally evaluate whether its processes are sufficiently streamlined and fit-for-purpose;
- to formally evaluate whether the KPIs used are useful and the data collected can inform relevant changes that could drive strategic development;
- to develop the strategy so as to formulate clear directions about research, which relevantly differentiate between scientific and applied research;
- to develop an overarching strategic approach for internationalisation and clearly establish priorities and allocate resources against these;
- to evaluate the new structure, including the Deputy Director post, to ensure that workload is manageable and there are not too many functions concentrated within one position;
- to develop research capability at strategic organizational level and ensure research activities are distributed across the institution equally;

- to ensure staff development activities are systematically guided by strategic objectives rather than individual staff priorities, and that qualification/competence differences can thus be levelled out across the different departments;
- to better manage drop-outs by exploring all points at which students become vulnerable and offering counselling for alternative pathways still within the maritime sector;
- to develop more varied mechanisms by which external stakeholders become even more involved in management activities;
- to maintain its public information in relation to QMS up-to-date and accurate, at all times;
- to institute a cyclical system to make changes to QMS so that stakeholders can contribute effectively and consistently to areas which impact their activities;
- to streamline risk management across the various QMS documentation to ensure relevant risk factors are identified and mitigated equally across the areas of provision;
- to ensure its system of monitoring QA actions is applied consistently, is itself tested for fitness-for-purpose and renders relevant results which can, indeed, drive improvement;
- to consider introducing formal training on plagiarism, acquiring a plagiarism detection software to ensure lecturers are consistent in their treatment of plagiarism, and systematically collecting and analysing cases of plagiarism as part of QMS;
- to consider instituting a system to allow for students in all bodies to be nominated or elected by students and not selected/appointed by LMA staff without student endorsement;
- to consider adding, as part of the admission process, interviews (face-to-face) to better manage student expectations about academic and professional requirements;
- to strategically consider expanding their degree offer to more mature students;
- to ensure that clear information on medical requirements is given to candidates for seafaring programs, e.g. through the study program description in the LMA website, in order to reduce or prevent drop-out due to medical reasons;
- to consider varying graduation requirements to give students more options and support higher graduation rates;
- to more systematically include students in their research activities in order to increase the level of student participation in research activities;
- to address the issues students are experiencing on return from study exchanges in respect credit recognition so as to minimise student academic debt, and to expand possibilities for exchange beyond Erasmus arrangements;
- to enhance the intercultural learning experience of students by increasing the volume of intercultural training as part of the programs, and facilitating better integration between Lithuanian and international students;
- to expand internationalisation-at-home activities, such as, but not limited to, including shorter project-based collaborations with partners, applied research activities involving students and staff;

- to continue to invest in support for English language skills development, especially in light of strategic internationalisation aims also regarding English-medium programs;
- to consider involving social partners more strongly in marketing initiatives to allow for admission expectations to be better calibrated by prospective students.

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A. Goštauto g. 12, 01108 Vilnius, Lithuania  
tel.: (8 5) 205 3323  
[skvc@skvc.lt](mailto:skvc@skvc.lt)  
<http://www.skvc.lt>