



***UTENOS KOLEGIJOS
VEIKLOS VERTINIMO IŠVADOS***

***INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW REPORT OF
UTENA COLLEGE***

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



Prof. Neil Cameron Sammells

ABBREVIATIONS

CPD	Continuous Professional Development
EFQM	European Foundation for Quality Management
EHEA	European Higher Education Area
EQF	European Qualifications Framework for Lifelong Learning
ERA	European Research Area
ESG	Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area (2015)
ET 2020	Strategic framework for European cooperation in education and training
EU	European Union
FTE	Full Time Equivalent
HEI	Higher Education Institution
ISO	International Organization for Standardization
KPI	Key Performance Indicator
LQF	Lithuanian Qualifications Framework
LLL	Lifelong Learning
MOSTA	Centre for Monitoring and Analysis of Science and Studies
MOU	Memorandum of Understanding
PhD	Doctor of Philosophy
QA	Quality Assurance
SER	Self-Evaluation Report
SKVC	Centre for Quality Assessment in Higher Education
SQMS	Study Quality Management System
UAS	University of Applied Sciences
UK	Utena College
UN	United Nations
USP	Unique Selling Point
VLE	Virtual Learning Environment

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 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 – Centre, SKVC), and a virtual site visit, conducted on-line, where meetings with a wide range of internal and external stakeholders 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. Neil Sammells

Review secretary: Dr. Norma Ryan

Panel members (category): Lars Lyng Nielsen (academic representative)

Kersti Viitkar (academic representative)

Dr. Nora Pileičikienė (social partner)

Edvinas Levišauskas (student representative)

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

5. Judgment by area:

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

6. **Six** examples of good practices were found; **17** recommendations and suggestions for improvement are made.

II. INTRODUCTION

2.1. Background of the review process

7. The external review of Utena College (hereafter also referred to as UK or the institution) was organised by the Centre for Quality Assessment in Higher Education (SKVC) and carried out in May 2021 by an Expert Panel of international and Lithuanian experts (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 19th December 2019 Order No. V-1529 and the Methodology for Conducting an Institutional Review in Higher Education approved by the Director of SKVC on 9th 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. It should be noted that in this review the site visit and all meetings of the Panel were conducted virtually, facilitated by SKVC, because of the global pandemic.

9. At the preparatory stage of the external review, the Panel received the Utena College Self-Evaluation Report (SER), consisting of 170 pages with 11 annexes. The Panel was also provided with the guidelines for conduct of the review, background information on higher education in Lithuania, European Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in Higher Education, and other relevant supporting documents. The Panel requested and received additional information, including *Internationalization Strategy for 21-27* and *Strategy for Utena UAS activities 2014-2020*.

10. SKVC confirmed to the Panel that the legal name of the College is Utena College and thus the College is referred to as such in this report. In some of the documents presented to the Panel, including the SER, Utena College referred to the institution as Utena UAS or Utena University of Applied Sciences. The Panel refers to these documents, where relevant, using the title provided on the document.

11. The Panel wishes to express its concern about the overlong, overly repetitive, descriptive SER and its lack of evaluative and analytical detail. The Panel found that, while there was a considerable amount of description of strategies and operational targets in the SER, there was little systematic evaluation or analysis of the success or otherwise of the implementation of the strategies. The SER was a missed opportunity to assist the Panel in identifying strengths and priorities, and to assist the institution in focussing its activities and future direction. The SER describes the monitoring procedures and processes in detail, and the lack of discussion of results and implementation of improvements following these procedures is very striking. No substantial information on results and achievements of the implementation of strategies was provided in the

SER. There were references to levels of achievements of criteria and indicators but no details were given.

12. The site visit was undertaken after an on-line training session organized by SKVC staff and preparatory Panel meetings. The Panel members were unable to physically visit the institution for the site visit **because of the world-wide pandemic, and thus all meetings with stakeholders took place virtually using the video-conferencing tool Zoom** and facilitated by SKVC, on 18-20 May 2021. Meetings with the Director, staff and students of the institution were held as well as with representatives of relevant external stakeholders. Subsequently, the Panel met virtually to review and agree conclusions and recommendations. The review report was finalised by correspondence and submitted to the SKVC.

13. In line with the procedures approved by SKVC the final draft of the Report was sent to Utena College for comments on factual errors. The Panel considered the comments made by the College. One factual error was identified by the College and was corrected in the Report. 11 additional comments on the analysis of the Panel were made, essentially arguing with the conclusions of the Panel. None of these were accepted as valid by the Panel but the Panel did make some clarifications to its analysis in six cases, not changing the analysis or conclusions but seeking to ensure that the College would understand the reasoning of the Panel in its analysis.

14. 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 contained in the report of the previous review conducted in 2012.

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

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

17. 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.

2.2. Background information about the institution

18. Utena College is a state higher education institution in the Eastern Aukštaitija region of Lithuania. Utena College has the following strategic aims:

- a. to train highly qualified specialists, motivated to constantly improve and work under the conditions of global digitalization and innovation growth;
- b. to develop applied scientific activities, research and non-formal education services, relevant to the region and the country.

19. Utena College was established in 2000 following the merger of the Utena Medical College of Further Education and the Utena Business College of Further Education. Permanent status was granted to Utena College in 2005. Following the amendment and supplement to the Law on Higher Education and Studies by Law No X-769, dated July 8, 2006, successful Utena College graduates have been awarded with a Professional Bachelor's qualifying degree. On July 18, 2012, by the Resolution of the Government of the Republic of Lithuania No 948, upon the adoption of the Statute of Utena College, the legal status of Utena College was changed, and it became a public institution. In 2020, Utena College Statute was renewed and harmonized with the relevant provisions of the Law on Science and Studies of the Republic of Lithuania, which was approved by the Government of the Republic of Lithuania on April 1, 2020, by resolution No 322.

20. The collegial governing bodies of Utena College are: Utena College Board (consisting of 9 members, including 1 student representative, 4 members of the academic community, belonging to Utena College staff and whose main place of work is Utena College, and 4 members elected from candidates, who are not members of Utena College staff or students); the Academic Board (comprising of 9 members, of whom 6 are teachers (2 of them are researchers, holding not less senior positions than the Associated Professors), 2 student representatives, and 1 member by position – the Director) and a sole governing body – the Director. The interests of students are represented by the Representation of Students, which consists of students, elected by the General Student Meeting (Conference). The Representation of Students operates in accordance with its Regulations, approved by the Meeting (Conference) and agreed with the Academic Board of Utena College, which shall not contradict the Statute of Utena College.

21. The organisational structure within Utena College comprises two main academic units: the Faculty of Medicine and the Faculty of Business & Technologies. Each faculty has 3 departments. The Faculty of Medicine consists of the Departments of Nursing & Dental Care, Health Care & Rehabilitation, and Social Welfare. The Faculty of Business & Technology consists of the Departments of Business & Public Management, Engineering & Technology, and Law. Faculties are responsible for the organisation and delivery of 21 study programmes, for applied scientific research and quality assurance. The activity of each Faculty is overseen and managed by the Dean and the Faculty Board. The Dean's Office is a collegial advisory institution, supervised by the Dean, consisting of the Dean, the Heads of the Departments, the Study Specialist of the Faculty and the Practice Supervisor.

22. Organisational and other functions are also carried out by Utena College general departments, centres and services, supervising different areas of activity: Legal and General

Affairs, Accounting and Finance, Study, Career and Communication, Project Management, International Relations Department, E-learning Centre, Library, Computer System and Housekeeping Services.

23. During the academic year 2020-2021, Utena College delivered 21 study programmes in the fields of: *Informatics, Engineering, Health, Social, Technologies, Law, Business & Public Management, Agricultural Sciences*. Since 2001 to date, an external evaluation of all the study programmes has been carried out.

24. In 2020-2021, 1,433 students studied at Utena College and the institution had 174 employees, including 130 lecturers (74 full-time and 56 part-time lecturers) and 78 other employees and the Management (34 of whom work educational work). 77 international students studied full-time at Utena College (according to the data of 15.03.2021).

25. In the period 2015–2020 42 students undertook a period of time studying abroad, whilst 190 students from abroad participated in studies in Utena College. During the same period 135 students undertook traineeships in institutions abroad whilst 147 students from abroad undertook traineeships associated with Utena College. In examining the numbers of students involved in mobility it should be noted that students' participation for study abroad was limited by students' lack of motivation, insufficient level of foreign language proficiency, limited opportunities to choose more diverse countries for studies abroad, limited students' socio-economic conditions, and insufficient progress. The harmonization of study agreements with the host institution was also a significant problem. There are cases when there were differences significant enough in study subjects, which the student had to make up after returning from partial studies abroad. The decrease in financial support also had a significant impact on student mobility.

26. Since the establishment of Utena College, 9,951 students have graduated from the institution (the first cohort graduating in 2003), and 2,657 graduates who were awarded with Professional Bachelor's diplomas in the period 2015-2021. Utena College has developed cooperation networks with the social partners of the region and the country (to date with more than 230 agreements) and is an active participant in the International Higher Education Area, implementing relevant study and research projects. During the period 2015-2020 16 projects, financed by EU funds, were carried out and the institution participated in 13 projects with foreign partner higher education institutions. Utena College has an extensive network of foreign partners in Europe and other regions of the world (over 200 agreements). Every year, about 50 events of various themes and formats are organised for the community, region, and country. The main advantage of Utena College that distinguishes it from other institutions is its unique study programmes (*Dental Technology, Dental Care, Apparel Technologies, Hospitality Management, etc.*). It aims to meet the needs of the region, in particular, and the country in the areas of granting additional competences, professional development, consulting activities; individualization and accessibility of studies, considering the needs of students; wide e-learning opportunities; development of social partnerships with businesses in the region.

27. In 2012 an external institutional evaluation of Utena College took place, following which Utena College activities were accredited for a maximum period of 6 years.

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.*

28. In the report on the previous external review (2012) it was stated that *“the College has a clear view of its strategic aims, but would benefit from a tighter strategic focus on evaluating opportunities and developing plans into actions. It manages its activities effectively, but its evaluation of quality needs to be less episodic, more transparent and more systematic, with more use of defined procedures and less reliance on extended discussion or individual judgement. This will help to manage risk and facilitate enhancement”*. The following paragraphs discuss how far the institution has progressed in implementing this recommendation. It should be noted that UK provided detailed description of activities and processes. However this alone does not guarantee or provide efficiencies and increases in quality enhancement; nor does it identify prioritised actions for the College.

29. The Panel was provided with the key strategic documents prepared by the institution, taking into account the national strategic goals and aims as described in *“Lithuania 2030”*. The SER described the strategic documents, the goals and priorities for the institution and how progress in achieving these goals are monitored. Utena College stated its strategic aims are as follows: to train highly qualified specialists, motivated to constantly improve and work under the conditions of global digitalization and innovation growth; to develop applied scientific activities, research and non-formal education services, relevant to the region and the country. For the period 2019-2021, Utena College identified the following strategic priorities: attracting and retaining students; improvement of studies; internationalization development; improvement of Utena College organisational culture; improvement of applied scientific consulting activities and research; and development of strategic partnerships.

30. The Panel found that, while there was a considerable amount of description of strategies and operational targets in the SER, there was little systematic evaluation or analysis of the success or otherwise of the implementation of the strategies, where it occurred. The SER was a missed opportunity to assist the Panel in identifying strengths and priorities, and to assist the institution in focussing its activities and future direction. The Panel noted the SWOT analysis presented in the SER. However, apart from identifying the problems no plans for addressing the weaknesses and challenges were given. Student recruitment is declining (in 2015/16 there were 904 full-time

and 970 part-time students registered, while in 2020/21 the numbers had decreased to 582 full-time and 864 part-time students registered) and there is an obvious need to address this problem to ensure the financial sustainability of the institution. There is ongoing monitoring by management using a very detailed set of indicators (60 in total), but little analysis of their success or what a change in the level of the indicators means. What is lacking is a set of targets, clearly identified, aimed at delivery of the priorities, and shared with all key stakeholders. Where some targets are identified, for example, increasing the number of international students to be recruited over the next three years, there did not appear to be a specific operational plan as to how this can be achieved.

31. Other documents included by the institution in the development of its Strategic Plan and objectives included “*The National Programme for the Development of Studies, Scientific Research and Experimental Development for 2013 – 2020*”, *The National Programme for the Development of Studies, Scientific Research and Experimental (Social and Cultural) Development for 2013–20*’; ‘*Priorities of Promoting Internationalisation in Higher Education for 2019 – 2020*’; *Future Vision for Science and Studies "Moksloji Lietuva" (Scientific Lithuania) 2030*’; key documents of the European Higher Education Area (EHEA) and the European Research (ERA) area, with particular reference to the *Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area (ESG 2015)*, the Communiqués issued in relation to the Bologna Process, and the *UN 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development*.

32. The Panel was satisfied that the institution had carefully considered the local, national and international situations when drafting the institution’s strategic plan. Those interviewed by the Panel during the site visit supported the plan and confirmed they had been consulted in its drafting. Members of the Board, including external members, confirmed they had been consulted and that they had had an opportunity to discuss the plan prior to its finalisation.

33. In examining the evidence submitted by Utena College it was evident to the Panel that a major issue for the institution over the next 5 years must be the likely drop in ‘home’ student recruitment (see paragraph 30 above) and the accompanying risk this poses to the funding of the activities of the institution. The Panel raised this matter in different meetings with staff and stakeholders, and noted that it did not appear to be an issue of major concern to senior management or to staff nor is there a specific detailed operational plan in place to address this. Senior management expressed the view that increased recruitment of international students could improve the numbers of students. However, the Panel was not informed of any specific plan in place to facilitate the recruitment of additional international students. An issue related to this is that the drop-out rate of students seemed high to the Panel (approximately 11% per year) and, as with the decreasing level of student recruitment, poses a risk to the viability of the institution and its study programmes. There are systems in operation to follow-up on students who drop-out so as to identify the reason(s) and to determine if assistance can be provided to the student concerned to enable her/him to continue their studies. Students who wish to leave their study programmes before completing them must meet with the head of department and discuss the reasons for leaving. Individualized student retention measures were planned and implemented in the activity programs of the faculties: for example, counselling of students studying on an

individual schedule, increasing the number of distance learning courses in the VLE Moodle, improving student information, analysis of reasons for unsatisfactory progress, etc. Some options are available to address issues a student may have, such as requiring to be in full-time or part-time employment. The institution can facilitate students in individualising their courses of study and their assessments to suit their availability.

34. Monitoring of the implementation of the strategic plan is carried out to some degree and the indicators referenced in the plan are measured and reported on regularly. However, while there are very many indicators, there are few specific targets mentioned and the staff interviewed, while clearly aware of the plan and the measurement of indicators, did not appear to be aware of specific targets to be aimed for nor of the means to be used to work towards achieving such targets. References were made to the recruitment of international students, but it was unclear as to what the target is as several different figures were provided ranging from 60 to 90 within a three-year period. A clear strategy for how the number of international students is to be increased was not evident, beyond an expressed desire that the number should be increased to offset the fall in national students. Some activities are in place, for example, the aim to improve the language skills of staff, but these alone will not be sufficient to increase the number of international students. The Panel did not get a sense of urgency in discussions with management and staff on the need to act on the ambitions expressed.

35. In meetings with senior management and staff of the institution the idea of Unique Selling Points (USPs) was questioned by the Panel. There was some clarity around what these might be for Utena College: for example, unique study programmes, offer of distance learning opportunities, individualised programmes of study tailored to an individual's needs were all identified as possibilities. However, what was not clear is how the institution planned to work towards exploiting these opportunities to attract more students and more associated funding. UK expressed their intention to work towards attracting more students but needs to provide evidence that the proposed plans are working. In the opinion of the Panel the measures proposed by UK for attracting additional students are speculative and not based on evidence of likely success.

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.*

36. Following the appointment of the current Director of Utena College, the governance of the institution was reviewed and re-organised. The system of governance is very clear to all and seems to work well.

37. Utena College is headed by a sole governing body (the Director) and collegial governing bodies: the Board and the Academic Council. These governing bodies perform the functions established by law and the Statute, assume responsibilities and make decisions. They oversee all activities of the institution. The Panel was told that the Board meets regularly with the Academic Council and that this practice is very helpful for the sharing of information and views. There are

clear definitions of responsibilities for all staff at all levels and a detailed description of the structures was provided in the SER.

38. Responsibilities of Utena College staff are allocated following the Study Quality Management System (SQMS) manual; by the Director's order, each SQMS process is assigned a host who is responsible for monitoring the process. The hosts of the processes are the employees of the management, the heads of the departments and other employees. SQMS has 44 processes identified and 44 hosts assigned to them. The responsibilities of the process owners are described in the Quality Manual, the main document of the SQMS, which is approved by the Academic Council and overseen by the Study Quality Committee.

39. The hosts of all SQMS processes (usually the heads of departments), following the dates established by the Director's order, are required to provide data for the management with evaluative analysis on the fulfilment of process performance indicators (based on the Strategic Action Plan indicators for the reporting year), as well as recommendations for the improvement of processes.

40. Systematic risk identification and analysis is performed during the preparation of the annual activity report of Utena College. The report names risks *as adverse developments and to be improved areas of Utena College activity*. The SER provided a number of examples where this process is evidenced. For example, Utena College activity report for 2018-2019 highlighted the following risks (adverse developments): *"Decrease in the number of students to all study programs (2.5 per cent in 2018 and 2019), and especially to Environment Protection Engineering, Transport Business, Law, Physiotherapy, Beauty Therapy, Dental Hygiene, Odontological Care"*; *The number of students granted with state-funded study places is decreasing: compared to 2018 and 2019 admissions – about 6 per cent, the share of students granted with state-funded places is about 40 per cent from all students; The number of full-time students is decreasing: in 2018-2019 by 10 per cent, in 2019-2020 by 23 per cent. This tendency is especially relevant for the programmes of technological and engineering study fields"*. To manage these risks, in its Operational Programme 2020-2021, the Faculty of Business and Technology planned 33 measures offering such activities as the Interesting Sciences Club, consultations for those preparing to take maturity exams, science and professional seminars, lectures in schools at Utena College, organization of practical classes and other activities for students; development of Facebook and other social platforms to promote individual study programmes; organization of competitions, events, exhibitions for students and schoolchildren, involvement of graduates in the publicity of studies, participation in national and international exhibitions. In its Operational Programme 2020-2021, the Faculty of Medicine plans 7 measures to attract students to Physiotherapy, Beauty Therapy, Dental Hygiene, Odontological Care study programmes, and virtual lectures, excursions, and open days, demonstrations of cosmetology, physiotherapy and other procedures for students and the public. The measures mentioned above concerning both faculties are aimed not only at managing these risks but also at the achievement of the priority of the first strategic goal of Utena College *"Attracting and retaining students"*.

41. The annual report on the activities of Utena College is discussed at the extended meeting of the Directorate, where decisions are made on the improvement of the activities of Utena College

and the improvement of individual processes. The Director submits the annual activity report of Utena College, previously discussed in the Directorate, to the Board of Utena College for approval by a specific date. The approved report is published on the website of Utena College in Lithuanian.

42. Evidence was provided of the efforts of the institution to involve external stakeholders in the management of the institution and also in the management and content of study programmes. Representatives of local industry, and of the local community are involved as members of the Board, which is chaired by an external stakeholder, and of the Study Programme Committees which oversee the design and implementation of the individual study programmes. This is commendable and ensures the voice of the local and, potentially, the national communities have input into both the strategic management of the institution and the study programmes.

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.*

43. The Panel was provided with evidence that the collection and some analysis of performance data is carried out and made available to all staff and students, on an annual basis. The principal document that gathers essential information about the performance of the College during the academic year is the annual activity report, which, after approval by the Board, is published on the College website. The report, as provided for in Article 8 (5) of the Law on Higher Education and Research of the Republic of Lithuania, is required to discuss and analyse all areas of the institution's activity: the number of students, teaching staff, researchers and administrative staff, including those coming from abroad; composition and qualifications of teaching staff, researchers and administrative staff; number of graduates; the number of graduates employed under awarded degree; number of study programmes; funds per student; state budget funds granted to the College, including EU support funds, and their use; the total area of the premises of the College per one student; coverage of scientific, applied research (scientific activities); student drop-out rates, statistics on final accounts, findings of student and graduate surveys, study infrastructure, indicators of project, non-formal adult education activity, the results of the Strategic Action Plan implementation.

44. The results of the performance of Utena College and measures for improvement are presented to the community at the meetings of the academic community, directorate, deans, departments, and by publishing the results on the website. It should be noted that these reports are published in Lithuanian only. There is a version of the web site in English but containing very basic information only. Many of the links when clicked on state: "*Information will be soon*". Evaluation reports on study programmes and activity reports are not published in English or Russian.

45. The data is discussed at management and faculty levels and used to support decisions for improvement within Utena College. Relevant data, including financial data, is also provided to the Ministry of Education, Science and Sports in Lithuania annually or more frequently, as required.

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.*

46. Personnel management, assessment and development are clearly defined in the descriptions of Utena College SQMS in the Personnel Management processes. With the introduction of revised governance procedures there was a reduction in the number of staff – determined by clear processes with all changes discussed by the Board. As a consequence of the changes in governance and management structures introduced by the Director, following his appointment, there were significant savings made, a reduction in staff numbers and thus the College has sufficient financial resources for the coming year. However this cannot be repeated every year.

47. In 2020-2021 Utena College employed 174 employees, of which 130 are teaching staff (74 full-time (in-house) and 56 part-time teaching staff members) and 78 other employees and administration (34 of them do some pedagogical work). In total, the number of staff decreased by 49 during the period under review: 36 teaching staff members and 13 other non-teaching staff, including the administration. In terms of staff positions, there was a decrease of 24.67 in teaching positions and 18.75 in other staff positions. The Panel would be concerned about the ability of the institution to support an increase in student numbers (from whatever source) in the absence of a reversal of this trend. In discussions with senior management and staff this was not deemed to be an issue of concern and the staff felt confident they are able to support the students in a positive and individual way, even in the situation of an increase in numbers.

48. Utena College has plans defined in the Strategic Action Plan to support junior staff in further studies (masters, doctoral studies) in their disciplinary fields, by, for example, covering part of the study fee (up to 50%), providing opportunities to combine studies and pedagogical or administrative work, and teaching staff members-practitioners are provided with opportunities to engage in practical activities in relevant departments of Utena College, e.g. in the Dental Room. However the level of uptake by staff is unclear.

49. Utena College provided evidence in the SER of the high percentage of teaching staff who have improved their qualifications by undertaking training and also participating in professional developmental events over the past 5 years. Academic staff are encouraged to participate in international mobility availing of European programmes such as Erasmus to fund such activities.

In 2015/16 23% of academic staff engaged in some form of mobility, ranging from short study visits, participation in conferences, seminars and workshops, to longer periods of research leave. In 2019/20 this decreased to approximately 12% of staff engaging in such activities. Staff are also supported in the improvement of foreign language skills as part of the strategy to support a potential increase in international student numbers.

50. The professional development of non-academic staff is governed by the provisions of the Statute of Utena College, the Rules of Procedure, and the SQMS Manual. The improvement of these employees' competence emphasises the direction of professional qualification improvement to comply with relevant legal acts and other requirements related to the implementation of the activity specified in the position regulations. The SQMS Manual stipulates that staff must seek to improve their qualifications at least once every 3 years. Support is provided by the institution in areas such as improvement in foreign language skills, in how to support students with special needs, and in attending workshops and seminars in their areas of responsibility to improve their knowledge and skills. However the Panel were unable to discover the level of uptake of these opportunities by staff.

51. The improvement of qualifications of employees of other Utena College structural units – departments, services, centres, and library - is provided for in the operational programmes of these divisions, which is prepared each academic year. The head of the unit is responsible for the improvement of the staff's qualifications, and the staff are responsible for ensuring that their qualifications are relevant to the requirements of their post. An employee must account for in-service training to the immediate superior, such as the head of a division. The Panel noted that the number of non-academic staff decreased from 70 in 2015-2016 to 47 in 2019-2020. 18 staff undertook some form of upskilling in 2019-2020. Some activities could not take place because of the pandemic. Specifics were not provided and staff were vague in discussions, referring mainly to academic staff and references to experience providing the knowledge and competence required, and being as valuable as training. The Panel was not convinced that there is a specific developmental plan in place for each staff member, nor was there evidence of detailed planning for continuous professional development of staff.

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.*

52. Each year, departments, units and faculties prepare plans for expenditure for the following academic year, based on anticipated needs and informed, *inter alia*, by comment from the Programme Study Committees, students and other stakeholders. Deans have responsibility for deciding on the merits of applications for additional funding, based on these applications and for supporting the case to the Board which makes the final decision.

53. During the accreditation period, Utena College implemented 34 projects initiated by it and 22 projects as a partner, financed by the EU, Lithuania and other funds and programmes. The projects focused on the study content, study infrastructure, pedagogical, subject (professional), research, and other competencies, enhancing student entrepreneurship and other relevant areas of Utena College' activities. The projects are detailed in the SER and are linked to key areas of activity of Utena College and in particular to activities specifically relevant to the region. Such projects include the following examples: "Preparation and Implementation of Utena College International Joint Hospitality Management Study Programme" (2012-2015), "Improvement of Skills of Information Communication Technology Use and Management" (2015), "Business Tasting", "New skills – New Opportunities" (2018-2019), "Education of Students' Entrepreneurship and Creativity in Utena, Vilnius and Panevėžys Regions (IN CORPORE)" (2018-2019), "Generation Y for the City" (2020- 2021), "Creation of a Modern Technological and Engineering Study and E-learning Facility that Responds to the Needs of Utena Region" (2019-2020); Erasmus+ projects "Projects of Mobility of Higher Education Students and Staff in the Program Countries", "Projects of Mobility of Higher Education Students and Staff between Program Countries and Partner Countries", "Erasmus+ and other International Higher Education Programs" (2015-2021), "Support for Foreign Teachers, Coming to Teach at Lithuanian Higher Education Institutions" (2015), "Business Education for Sustainability: Corporate Social Responsibility and Social Entrepreneurship Education for Sustainable Local and Regional Development (BEST)" (2016-2018), "Enhancement of the Experiential Learning Live Project System (ELPE)" (2017-2019), "Development and Presentation of a Communication Competence Model for the Development and Maintenance of a Network of Business Mentors, DICCMEM" (2019-2021); Nord Plus programme projects "Rural Water Protection Network" (2016, 2017, 2019, 2020), "Drinking Water Quality and Food Safety" (2020), and others. The funding for participation in these projects came from the State, from EU funds, from charitable donations and companies, also assisting with the financing of student scholarships and modernisation of premises.

54. The allocation of the budget of Utena College to departments and units for each year takes into account implementation of key priorities identified in the Strategic Plan. The working group identifies the most urgent areas of improvement identified for the performance of Utena College and provides measures and funds to address them. A particular focus is the strengthening of the College' teaching and learning resources and facilities, the development of methodological materials, the update and supplement of the library fund and the introduction of the latest teaching and learning technologies in the study process.

55. The institution considers the most appropriate use of funds available for the support of studies and research on an annual basis. Extensive details were provided in the SER on the numbers and types of resources and supports available: emphasising the focus on access to all by staff and students. The Panel noted the descriptions but found that there is a lack of analysis as to the relative benefits of individual aspects. Because the Panel could not visit the institution in person it was difficult for the Panel to critically judge the value and quality of the resources. Staff stated that each year they are asked for their views and informed that these are taken into account in planning budget allocations for the following year.

56. The infrastructure development component is integrated into the strategy and strategic plan of a higher education institution. The Operational Strategy 2014-2020 of Utena College to achieve the first strategic objective includes the third strategic priority trend "Modernising the infrastructure of study, learning and working environment", with three key measures for its implementation: 1) to strengthen and modernise the learning resources of technological and engineering studies, general practice nurses; 2) to create modern learning resources and study facilities, e-learning and in-service training; 3) to renew the infrastructure and technological provision of working places for teaching staff and study environments. The College's Strategic Action Plan 2019-2021 provides for a set of measures "Renovation of the study infrastructure" to achieve the first strategic objective, with nine measures planned. These measures include the development of library funds and the transfer of the library to the town centre, the renovation of learning resources and facilities for the training of nurses, beauty therapy, technological and engineering specialists, the renovation of classrooms, one of the buildings, and specialist training in companies of the region.

57. The annual budgetary allocation process of Utena College takes into account what is planned for that year in the Strategic Plan. The working group responsible for making the final proposals to the Board and Director for fund allocations identifies the most urgent areas of improvement of Utena College performance and proposes measures and funds to address them. In order to create appropriate conditions for studies, a great deal of attention is paid to the strengthening of the College's teaching and learning resources and facilities, the development of methodological materials, the update and supplement of the library fund and the introduction of the latest teaching and learning technologies in the study process. As the studies at Utena College are focused on practical training, the renewal of classrooms and laboratories for practical training is a major target of the planning of the renewal of the study infrastructure. For example, in 2019/20 measures for the renewal of practical training facilities for the training of specialists in Nursing, Beauty Therapy and other fields were put in place.

58. Funds for the renovation of buildings and premises are allocated annually based on available resources. Annual funding for the renewal of library collections is also allocated. Funds are allocated annually for the renewal of information technology resources, technological equipment and teaching aids for all fields of study. The funds allocated for the renewal of information technology resources, technological equipment and teaching aids for all fields of study are fixed assets. These funds are allocated according to the priorities of the strategic goals of Utena College, the need of the faculties, departments and services to upgrade the study infrastructure, upgrade the equipment necessary for the study process, the infrastructure of computers, laboratories and Students' Homes.

59. Each year, Utena College carries out renovation and refurbishment of its teaching and learning facilities and premises, by using funds from the state budget, its own resources and project funds. This is discussed in detail in the Self-Evaluation Report and confirmed in discussions with management and staff during the site visit. The major upgrading of the study infrastructure is being carried out from 2019 - 2021 within the framework of the project funded by the European Regional Development Fund "Creation of a Modern Technological and Engineering Study and E-learning Facility that Responds to the Needs of Utena Region" (No

09.1.1-CPVA-V-720-08-0001). The 800,000 euro funding enabled the upgrading of the infrastructure necessary for quality studies in engineering, technology, informatics engineering and other fields of study: 1) the laboratories of Automatic Control Systems and Robotics, Electrical Energetics, Multimedia, Computer Networks and Computer Architecture have been renovated; 2) Utena College E-learning Centre is being modernised – the Conference Room, Distance Learning Classroom, and the centre's management rooms will be renovated, two mini video recording studios will be installed, and modern distance learning equipment and furniture will be purchased. The Panel understood that this work is still ongoing.

60. **In summary**, Utena College has progressed somewhat in the development of an appropriate strategic plan, given the institution's location and its developmental history. The aims and aspirations in the Plan are appropriate for the institution and the region. The Panel acknowledges that the institution has considered both its strengths and weaknesses and has identified key areas for improvement. Several critically important areas for improvement and action are identified by the institution in its Plan, but Utena College has yet to prioritise these areas in practice, create an operational plan to implement the changes and assign responsibility for the actions to specific bodies/individuals. Key performance indicators with specific targets need to be developed for these areas and a timeline developed for the delivery, which is monitored by the Academic Council and the Board. There is a great deal of detail described in the SER on all the areas of activity, including indicators, resources, and supports for development of academic and administrative staff. However, there is a lack of systematic analysis of the implications of the findings which leads to a lack of prioritisation of key activities for the survival of the institution. This lack of analysis is also evidenced in the lack of specific operational plans, with responsibilities assigned to individuals, for the implementation of key prioritised activities and which need to be agreed and acted upon. The Panel was agreed that while there are plans, strategic and operational, in place there is a lack of actions on these plans and a lack of measures to determine the success or otherwise of actions taken.

61. **Judgment:** the area is being developed with good attention being paid to the description of the elements of the strategic plan and the drive for improvement, thus meeting the minimum requirements but with significant drawbacks, particularly in the analysis and operational planning using key performance indicators remaining to be addressed, and is given two points.

62. **Recommendations for the area:**

- a. Utena College needs to increase its focus on halting the decline in student numbers. Specific measures need to be planned and acted upon with targets set for measurement of success.
- b. Utena College should develop and increase its focus on the use of appropriate indicators for assisting in the implementation of its strategic priorities. The number of key performance indicators should be reduced in order to aid prioritisation and effective action. These KPIs should be identified, measured, and reported on to the Academic Council and the Board at regular intervals.
- c. Specific operational plans must be developed with responsibilities assigned to named individuals for the delivery of the actions agreed based on the key priorities identified for

the future development of Utena College. These plans must be regularly assessed, and the results made public.

63. Good practice examples:

- a. Joint meetings of the Board and Academic Council, scheduled at regular intervals, with agendas on topics of interest to the institution.
- b. Involvement of external stakeholders in management of the institution and also in the management and content of study programmes.

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.*

64. In 2013 Utena College implemented the Study Quality Management System (SQMS) based on the ISO 9001 Quality Management Standard, the EFQM Excellence Model and the European Higher Education Quality Assurance Regulations and Guidelines (ESG). The purpose of SQMS is to ensure high-quality and sustainable work of Utena College, to guarantee the transparency of ongoing processes, to divide responsibilities among employees and to promote continuous improvement of the Utena College activities, individual processes, study quality, more efficient and rational use of people, time, materials, etc. resources. SQMS consists of 12 process groups and 44 processes covering management positions, marketing and advertising, curriculum development and improvement, study management, applied research management, non-formal adult education, project management, international and national cooperation, resource management, SQMS evaluation and improvement processes. A Study Quality Committee was formed in 2019 to oversee the implementation and improvement of Utena College governance processes. The Study Quality Committee is responsible for the implementation of the College's Study Quality Management System and for the systematic coordination of the procedures for assessing, monitoring and improving the quality of studies.

65. The SQMS is published and available on the Utena College web site in Lithuanian.

66. The institution provided evidence of the alignment of the Utena SQMS processes with the ESG 2015, including a table specifically indicating which processes are aligned with the individual ESG standards.

67. The quality assurance system covers all activities of the institution, and the criteria and indicators of the QA system are in line with the mission and strategic goals of Utena College. All are integrated into the SQMS.

68. In discussions with internal stakeholders, including representatives of students, the Panel was satisfied those full consultations take place on all aspects of quality assurance. Examples were provided of actions taken because of evidence put forward, including by students. For example, the location of the Library was moved to a central location in the institution from an area located in the outskirts of the city, following representations made by the student body. The committee system in place whereby each programme has a Study Programme Committee which meets regularly, seeks views of staff and students and external stakeholders, decides on actions to be taken and oversees the implementation of recommendations for improvement, is commendable, as is the inclusion of representatives of the local community/industries. It would be a more effective process should a platform be established (for example, a website) where the outcomes could be published.

69. The SER described in detail the processes in place for planning and implementation. Some examples are provided of improvement activities. For example, in the group of study quality assurance measures of the Faculty of Business and Technology in 2020-2021 the activities include updating the study program progress reports, updating the Study Programme Committee compositions, organizing round table discussions with the Study Programme Committees and social partners, analysing the student employment situation, updating work tasks, etc. In the Faculty of Medicine in 2020-2021 activities include performance of self-analyses of study programs, renewal of study programs according to specific recommendations of external evaluation of study programs (for example, to ensure interdisciplinarity of the program), etc.

70. The implementation of improvement measures is monitored by the Quality Committee and published in the Annual Report available on the institution's web site. During the site visit the Panel explored the extent to which internal and external stakeholders are involved. It was evident that internal stakeholders are involved and listened to within the committee structures in the institution. It was not so evident that external stakeholders, although representatives are involved in the various committee structures, feel empowered to bring forward suggestions for improvement. The Panel was satisfied that staff and students are aware of the processes and that the institution is working to ensure that the processes are implemented and that actions take place on issues that may arise. The Panel noted that there are many processes described and in place and that this may lead to confusion on the part of stakeholders as to relative importance, if any, of the individual processes.

71. In the SWOT analysis, one of the stated opportunities for improvement is the quality assurance of studies/distance learning. Distance learning is one of the areas where the institution could focus and possibly improve its student recruitment. However, the Panel found that there is an absence of a specific plan on how to do this and how any results could be evaluated.

Responsibility for development of a plan and oversight of actions needs to be assigned to an individual who can lead on this for the College.

72. Academic support provided to students includes counselling on the studied subjects, credit transfer, preparation of final theses, internships, participation in the Erasmus exchange program, career opportunities, etc. This support is provided by teachers, heads of departments, deans of faculties, chairmen of SPC, heads of faculty practitioners, Departments of Careers and Communications, Studies, International Relations, Project Management, library staff, etc.

73. An example of good practice is that students with special needs seem to be well supported. For example, for students with a disability or temporary health disorder, some aspects of the study process (study environment, study material, etc.) are adapted to individual needs arising from the disability or temporary health disorder. Study programs can be adapted to the needs of a person with a disability both by organizing the study process and by applying various forms of study and assessment, e.g. the Dental Technology Program was studied by a hearing-impaired student, to whom the material was presented individually, louder and clearer during the sessions; a visually impaired student studied in the Physiotherapy Study Program – a written text was presented to him in a larger font, conditions were created for working on a computer adapted for the visually impaired, etc.

74. Support for international students is not so well organised nor is it very apparent to the Panel as to precisely what is in place. The English version of the web site has little information beyond the admission and supervision procedures. Most of the links say: “*Information will be soon*”. There is not a version of the web site in Russian, which had been indicated to the Panel as one of the key foreign languages used in the institution and in which some study programmes are delivered. The Panel was given different timelines for delivery of an improved version of the website, especially the English version, varying from September 2021 to sometime in 2024. The Panel recommends that this is addressed as a matter of immediate importance, as an essential support to the attraction of international students. The Lithuanian version of the website contains all documents relevant to student (study regulations, procedure of crediting study results, regulations of the Utena College administration, student disputes commission, etc). The Panel queried the availability of these documents to international students and was assured that the information is made available on the institution’s VLE. However this is available only to registered students and not to those who may be considering pursuing a course of studies in Utena College.

75. During discussions with staff and students as to the quality of teaching and how this is assured the Panel was informed that there is no formal system in place for the support of teachers, except where a complaint is made against a teacher. In that situation actions are taken to observe, monitor and recommend improvements for that individual. However, this is the exception rather than the rule. The recognition of the scholarship of teaching is a very positive development in recent years in many institutions across Europe and elsewhere. Peer observation of teaching has been found to be of real assistance and support to individuals, helping with the improvement of the quality of teaching by the sharing of experiences and mentoring. The Panel recommends that Utena College considers the introduction of such a scheme with the aim of supporting teachers in a positive manner.

76. Students are surveyed regularly, and their opinions are also sought via presence on committees, etc. However, as is common in many institutions, the level of engagement of students in responding to surveys is decreasing. Following discussions with both staff and students the Panel observed that there is no clear agreement on how to improve the situation and on how to improve the methods for obtaining the opinions of students.

77. The ethical values of the academic community, academic integrity, tolerance and non-discrimination, ethical provisions, and procedures are regulated by the Utena College Statute, Code of Academic Ethics, Academic Ethics Committee Regulations, the Utena College Rules of Procedure, Student Internal Rules, Study Regulations, and other documents. The Code of Academic Ethics clearly defines the ethical values that guide the academic community, describes the relationships between members of the academic community and the ethical norms of performing their duties. It is the document that sets out key provisions on academic integrity, tolerance and non-discrimination, appeals, ethics and procedures to help the academic community assess and address specific situations in academic life that may raise ethical issues, discipline members of the Utena College academic community, delimit responsibilities, and more.

78. At the beginning of each study programme and subject, the importance of polite communication and academically ethical behaviour is emphasised to the students, time is given to explain the importance of academic integrity, to talk about the means of detecting misconduct and the consequences of exposing violations. All students and teachers are made aware of the policies and procedures and are required to sign that they understand and will abide by the regulations. All of the policies and procedures are emphasised even more to both students and staff in the pandemic times, managed through very regular contact with students and staff and ensuring all are familiar with the requirements.

79. Utena College underwent an external review and the report received in 2012 detailed many conclusions and recommendations for improvement. 3 main recommendations focussed on the quality assurance system and the development of a self-assessment culture, the improvement of the strategic planning process, and the strengthening of students and teachers foreign language competencies. An overview of the implementation of these recommendations was presented in the SER. The Panel was convinced that the institution had implemented an extensive QA system, that every effort is being made to include all staff and students in the processes, as well as representatives of external stakeholders. While a number of initiatives have been put in place to assist in the improvement of foreign language skills in teachers, it is evident that more needs to be done. In all the interviews with staff and students an interpreter was required (the meetings were conducted in English) and, while it was evident that some staff were reasonably competent in English, it was clear that not all those attending the meetings were. The institution is continuing to plan for improvement in foreign language skills, recognising the importance of this in facilitating the increase of the numbers of international students – one of the strategic priorities of the institution.

80. **In summary**, the Panel is satisfied that Utena College has a detailed quality assurance system in place, known to all stakeholders, and clearly defining all the processes and procedures for all activities of the institution. Representatives of all stakeholders, internal and external, and

including students, are involved at all levels. However, in reflecting on the monitoring process the Panel was concerned at the number and types of the indicators used to assess progress and quality improvement. It seemed to the Panel that the number of indicators is excessive, and this distracts from key messages that would arise if fewer performance indicators were used specifically focussed at monitoring key priorities and activities. Key performance indicators at the level of the institution should be identified, along with targets based on annual and five-year plans. This would assist the institution in focussing its awareness and consequently its actions on very specific targets and a clear idea of the desired outcomes.

81. **Judgment:** the area is being developed, with many processes and procedures in place, but there are drawbacks that need to be addressed including the development of active monitoring systems leading to change, and is given two points.

82. **Recommendations for the area:**

- a. That the revised and updated English version of the website be published as soon as possible, and that consideration should be given to the provision of information in Russian, for potential international students.
- b. That the institution focusses on systematic evaluation of outcomes of quality assurance processes and identify and prioritise actions in line with the stated strategic priorities of Utena College.
- c. That Utena College should put in place a formal peer observation of teaching scheme to support academic staff.
- d. That Utena College should review the nature and number of indicators that the institution uses to measure progress.
- e. That the institution agrees and implements a plan for the development of its distance learning offerings.
- f. That Utena College makes explicit and publicly available the ways it supports its international students.

83. **Good practice examples:**

- a. The procedure whereby students who drop out are followed up and the reasons for their dropping out determined. The student meets with the head of department and every effort is made to support the student remaining in education, if possible.
- b. The committee system in place whereby each programme has a Study Programme Committee which meets regularly, seeks views of staff and students and external stakeholders, decides on actions to be taken and oversees the implementation of recommendations for improvement, is commendable, as is the inclusion of representatives of the local community/industries.

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.*

84. Currently 21 study programmes are offered in a number of fields of study at Utena College. These study fields are aligned to the mission of the institution and defined in the Strategic Plan. The following 14 fields of study have a single study programme available: Law, Foodstuff Technologies, Beauty Therapy (Cosmetology), Rehabilitation, Nursing and Obstetrics, Social Work, Informatics Engineering, Electronics Engineering, Environment Engineering, Agriculture, Management, Business, Accounting and Education Sciences (Pedagogy). 2 remaining fields of study offer two programmes – Polymer and Textile Technologies and Tourism and Leisure. The Dental Care field offers 3 study programmes.

85. The scope of study programmes at the College is designed to prepare necessary specialists in various fields aligned to the needs of the Utena region and of the country. These fields include aspects of engineering, business, informatics, and medically related disciplines such as dental hygiene, dental assistants, nursing, etc. The study fields from which the study programmes are developed correspond with specializations approved by Utena District Development Council in 2017: 1) Metal processing, machines and woodwork production; 2) Light industry, food and drink industries; 3) Communication infrastructure modernisation, tourism and recreation. Specialists trained in Polymer and Textile technologies, Informatics Engineering, Electronics and Electrical Engineering, are essential in developing the first and second specialisations. For the third specialisation, graduates from the following programmes – Business, Management, Accounting, Tourism and Leisure, Law, etc., are relevant. Foreign investments are the most pertinent in the Utena region's development, especially in the areas where industry specialises in manufacturing, IT, and other sectors. It is a priority for the region that industries and businesses in these fields are attracted to the region and thus there is a need to be able to supply enough qualified workers or educational programmes for training those workers.

86. In examining the data it was apparent to the Panel that there are very small number of students in a few of the study fields, in particular one student in Electrical Energetics, four in Clothing Design and Technologies, four in Hospitality Management, 18 in Odontological Care, and ranging to 244 students in General Practice Nursing. The decreasing numbers are clearly an issue for concern and the maintenance of sufficient resources to maintain those programmes where the student numbers are low could be a major issue for the institution. The student numbers overall have decreased by 23.5% from 2015 to 2020. The point was made that often the

programmes with very small numbers are final year where students are completing final year projects.

87. In addition, in some of the programmes there is a high drop-out rate where students leave the programme without completing their diploma. The staff assured the Panel that there are several reasons for this, for example, in programmes such as social work and nursing there are very specific requirements for practical work which cannot be undertaken in the student's own time. Where a student, for reasons of needing to maintain him/her-self in employment, finds themselves in this position then it is not possible to continue in such programmes. Many of the students fund themselves in the study programmes and the need to be able to attract an income and perhaps support a family may mean the student drops out of the programme. There is a formal procedure for when a student terminates his/her studies before qualifying for the diploma, including a meeting with the head of department to ascertain the reason(s) for leaving. Sometimes it is possible to offer students support which will enable the student to remain in the programme. Analysis of the data is undertaken by the institution to determine the causes and to attempt to reduce the drop-out rate with mitigation measures.

88. The institution also allows students to undertake studies by distance learning and/or by developing an individualised programme for them. This is very time-consuming but does allow students to complete their studies and acquire a qualification in their own time. It is evident that the institution makes every effort to support students and to encourage them to complete their studies. The Panel observed that staff are very committed to the support of the students in all situations and this personalised approach takes a lot of time and effort on the part of staff.

89. All teaching staff are encouraged to undertake research in their disciplinary field. However, the teaching load is very high, although the Panel was assured that they work to national norms, and this means there is less time for research. The institution does offer the possibility for teaching staff to be exempted from teaching to carry out research for a year while still receiving their salary. However, only one staff member in the five-year period 2015-2020 availed of this opportunity to develop a research portfolio. A reduction in the workload of teaching staff would enable additional time to be spent on development of a research agenda by staff and this would enhance the research profile of the institution.

90. The re-accreditation process for teachers that occurs every five years encourages engagement with research, in-service training, and production of publications. Areas of research are discussed and approved by Academic Council but the time available to teachers to engage in research to any significant degree is very limited.

91. Staff are encouraged to integrate research themes into the study programmes and to include students in research activities as a part of their learning process. This is considered at study programme committees. It was clear from discussions with staff that the primary focus of the teachers is the support of the teaching and training within the study programmes leading to acquisition by students of skills necessary for successful employment within the region.

92. The recognition of foreign qualifications is conducted by SKVC for Utena College as the institution does not have the authority to do so itself. The institution has a number of documented procedures (see paragraph 93), which are used to regulate the recognition of prior

learning, both non-formal and informal. Depending on individual situations students may be offered the facility to make up missing credits or gaps in their portfolio. This individualisation of a student's study programme is valued by the institution and by students and employers in the region. The Panel noted that this practice could be very time consuming for staff.

93. Utena College has approved orders to recognise foreign qualifications, partial studies, and prior non-formal and informal learning. One of these documents is "The Admission Procedure of the European Union Member States, European Economic Area States, Other Foreign Citizens and Stateless Persons to Utena University of Applied Sciences in 2020". This order is applied to procedures for admission to study at own funded study places. Holders of foreign qualifications who intend to study at Utena College at state-funded study places apply through the LAMA BPO system. Utena College still has not the right to recognise foreign qualifications but, together with other HEIs, participates in the project KAPRIS-2: *Strengthening the System of Academic Recognition*, coordinated by SKVC. By participating in this project it will prepare the application to acquire the right of such recognition of foreign qualifications. Utena College approves the admission to higher than the first year of studies. Upon entering a higher course, the institution evaluates the education acquired in other foreign higher education institutions. The evaluation and recognition of competences, gained by non-formal and informal learning, is carried out following ESG 2015 guidelines, the European Recognition Manual for Higher Education Institutions (EAR-HEI Manual), the methodologies/recommendations prepared by SKVC, "The Admission Procedure to Study in the Higher Course of the Study Programmes of Utena College in 2020", "The Procedure for Academic Recognition of Partial Studies, Teaching and Learning Outcomes."

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.*

94. In the strategic documents of the institution for the accreditation period (the Operational Strategy 2014-2020 and the Strategic Action Plan 2019-2021) for the implementation of the strategic goals, among the other priorities, the priority of international development has been established. A separate strategy for the development of the internationality of the institution was prepared for 2021-2027. These documents contain a number of measures with specific criteria and indicators to facilitate judging the success of the institution in this area. Such measures include:

- a. To modernize study programs, their implementation process by introducing innovations and digital technologies
- b. To increase two-sided mobility of students and staff, with a special focus on people with fewer opportunities, employment of graduates

- c. To strengthen multilingualism and intercultural competence
- d. To develop international partnerships, increasing University's recognition and reputation in the international setting, diversifying the forms and activities of international cooperation;
- e. To develop lifelong learning by providing opportunities for professional development in foreign higher education institutions or companies
- f. To develop applied science activities and research
- g. To motivate active citizenship and shared values by strengthening the sense of European identity and culture.

95. As part of the evidence submitted in the SER on the level of engagement by teaching staff in international activities data was provided that during 2015-2020, Utena College teaching staff members participated in 16 projects financed by EU funds and 13 projects of foreign partner HEIs. These activities have contributed to developing various teachers' intercultural competencies, as projects include discussions, sharing of academic and scientific experience, preparation of methodological material, scientific production, participation in project results dissemination events, etc. During 2015-2020, teaching staff published 34 scientific articles in the materials of international conferences organized in foreign countries and 35 papers in international or other international meetings.

96. In the SER details were provided of all the international activities, including research, seminars, presentations at conference, mobility undertaken by staff and students over the past five years. Much of these activities were funded under European projects, including Erasmus.

97. It is the stated policy of Utena College that, insofar as is possible, all programmes should incorporate elements of research and internationalisation into the studies. This is overseen by the Study Programme Committees. In the SER the institution describes how the development of intercultural communication and other internationality elements is integrated into the institution's study subject programmes and provides many examples of how this is done in the study programmes.

98. **In summary**, Utena College is committed to the ideals of excellence in teaching supported by research in relevant areas. However, a primary focus of the teaching staff is clearly the support of students in their studies. The percentage of the time of the teaching staff that is spent on teaching and preparation, assessment and the support of students amounts to a majority of their available time. This conclusion was based on both the evidence submitted in the SER and the comments of staff during meetings with the Panel. This does not allow sufficient time for development of research and/or engagement in international activities, especially for teachers in the more junior grades. The Panel noted that the amount of time available does depend on the grade of the academic staff member.

99. **Judgment:** the area is being developed, meets the minimum requirements, and there are drawbacks that need to be addressed and is given 2 points.

100. **Recommendations for the area:**

- a. That Utena College consider additional ways in which development and participation in active research programmes can be encouraged and undertaken by all teaching full-time staff.
- b. That Utena College consider ways to increase engagement with and participation of students in research activities.
- c. That Utena College seeks to find ways to increase the number of students going abroad for studies (not only practice placements).
- d. That Utena College seeks to intensify the efforts to realize the measures mentioned in paragraph 94.

101. **Good practice examples:**

- a. Facilitation of individualised study programmes for students.
- b. The integration of international elements in the various study programmes of Utena College.

3.4. Impact on regional and national development

Effectiveness of the impact on regional and national development:

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

102. Utena College analyses the regional and national demands, allocates HEI performance according to relevant national and regional (e.g. the Utena Region Development Plan 2014-2020, the Utena District Municipality Strategic Development Plan 2018-2024, the Strategy of the Local Action Group of Utena for the period 2016-2022 and other documents) documents. Utena College develops strategic and social partnerships, applied scientific activities, research and non-formal education services. Utena College Operational Strategy 2014-2020 aims to impact the national and regional development and achieve its objectives through 3 priorities with 8 key actions. In Utena College Strategic Action Plan 2019-2021, the impact on the national and regional development is also pursued through three priorities with 26 actions.

- a. Priority: *Modernisation of the infrastructure for studies, learning and working environment*, which includes the key work of creating a modern facility for studies, e-learning and qualification development, ensuring open and quality knowledge transfer via distance learning in the Utena region.
- b. Priority: *Strengthening of the cooperation with employers in the region to improve the quality of training of specialists*, which includes such activities as reorganising the system of working with employers, systematically analysing the needs of employers, expanding cooperation with employers in need of technology specialists and specialists in the field of

social sciences of the Faculty of Business and Technology, organising profession days in companies.

- c. Priority: *Enhancing the integration of studies, applied research and business*, which includes key activities such as joint research and tailored research projects between science and business on topics of interest to the region's enterprises, participation in EU-funded initiatives, and joint publications between Utena College and Utena College' partners in business field.

103. The mission of Utena College is to prepare specialists meeting the needs of the regional demands. The main advantages of Utena College that distinguish it from others are unique study programmes for the region (Dental Technology, Dental Care, Apparel Technologies, Hospitality Management, etc.), these programmes having a strong social partnership with businesses in the region. The Panel considered that these unique programmes have the potential to support regional industry and business significantly more than is the situation currently. The numbers of the entrants and graduates of some strategic Utena regional business areas (e.g. food industry, textile, tourism) is low (according to SER and Activity report of Utena College for the academic year 2019-2020). Therefore, SER statement No. 469. "Utena College has contributed to the development of the region by training for the region demanded highly-qualified specialists in a variety of fields" is open to question.

104. The impact for regional development is made through Utena College study and research activities of students and teachers, on institutional basis and granted by EU, national funds. It is difficult to gauge the impact. During the visit, Utena College staff underlined the institution's impact on regional and national development indicating the unique programmes mentioned above (Dental Technology, Dental Care, Apparel Technologies, Hospitality Management, etc.). However, in discussions with the Panel and in the SER the staff focussed on the impact on regional and national development in other fields: specifically environmental programmes, distance learning, etc. Some of the external stakeholders that met with the Panel were very positive, others recognised the potential of the institution in impacting on the regional activities and industries. The employers understood the need for change in the modern world and especially, following the global pandemic, recognised that the world of work is changing and that Utena College can support both the employers and the employees in coping with this. The Panel had a wide-ranging discussion with representatives of local industries and businesses. The Panel felt that the institution should engage in a more proactive way with the local communities in discussions on relevant study programmes and the needs of the communities, especially in a post-pandemic world. The Panel recommends that Utena College should be more proactive in reaching out to local community representatives with offers of short courses, seminars, workshops, etc directed at identified needs.

105. Cooperation agreements with regional and national employers (for workshops, lectures, internships, etc.), secondary education schools and vocational training centres are being signed, some activities are performed. The forms of cooperation include:

- a. Promotion of science and communication of the results of applied scientific research;
- b. Participation in cultural life at local and national level;

- c. Development of youth entrepreneurship and creativity;
- d. Public accessibility of Utena College spaces to the local community;
- e. Activities orientated to socially sensitive groups outside Utena College;
- f. Volunteering by students and teachers;
- g. Environmental protection and conservation of natural resources;
- h. Involvement of Utena College in regional strategic documents.

The Panel was not able to evaluate the level of the impact of these agreements since the Utena College staff put the importance on the number of agreements (as is indicated in Strategic Action Plan for 2019-2021) but without discussion of their impact.

106. Activities for Utena region community are implemented: artistic-cultural events, youth entrepreneurship and creativity events, events for socially vulnerable groups outside the institution, volunteering initiatives, etc. These activities are appreciated by the local community and help to promote the institution and its activities within the wider community.

107. The institution provided evidence of its cooperation with academic, social and business partners via for example:

- a. participation of academic, social and business partners in the strategic management,
- b. involvement in the process of attestation of teaching staff and the work of the commission for the public competition for academic positions,
- c. development of new study programmes and the improvement of existing ones, working in study programme committees, participating in the processes of preparing and defending students' final theses,
- d. final theses prepared at Utena College address true-to-life problems of companies/institutions in the region and country (82.6 %),
- e. Utena College' staff are professionals – expert activities that directly impact the progress of the region and the country.

All of these activities are welcomed both within and external to the institution.

108. There was some information provided on the impact of Utena College activities on national development. The Panel considered, based on the evidence provided and the discussions with Utena staff and management, that the institution is weak in the national development area. During the visit the Panel learned that some staff (as individual academics) perform some nationally important research, and take part in some expert work, but this is done more on an individual than institutional basis. Some examples of such research include “*Research of student entrepreneurship education in Lithuanian colleges*”(partly funded by the Ministry of Education, Science and Sports of the Republic of Lithuania, 2016); “*Situation of E-learning and learning in higher education institutions: needs of students and opportunities provided by higher education institutions*”(partly funded by the Ministry of Education, Science and Sports of the Republic of Lithuania, 2018); “*Research of communication skills, barriers and problems in communication of business consultants and start-up entrepreneurs or intending to start a business*” (under the

ongoing project "Development and Implementation of a Communication Competence Model for the Development and Maintenance of a Network of Business Mentors" (2019-1-LV01-KA203-060414). 2020).

109. The Panel noted that Utena College does not have a systematic way of supporting this activity, nor a strategy for enhancing it or improving the institution's impact at that level.

110. The monitoring, analysis and evaluation of the effectiveness of the measures on national and/or regional development are performed according to the Utena College indicated performance indicators (e.g. Strategic Action Plan 2019-2021, Annual Reports) and measures are taken in line with the internal quality assurance system (documented in Quality Manual). Nevertheless, the key indicators of regional and national development are lost in the excessive pool of indicators listed in the Strategic Action Plan for 2019-2021.

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.*

111. Internal documents (e.g. "The Description of the Procedure for Organizing and Providing Non-Formal Adult Education Services of Utena College", "Quality Manual", etc.) are in place to analyse, develop and assure quality for actions of lifelong learning (LLL). Lifelong Learning Package is developed according to the human and material resources available at Utena College; it is oriented towards the needs of employers in the region and the country, the learning needs of individuals, and the learning needs of Utena College employees. Utena College cooperates with various societies and associations to increase the range of Lifelong Learning resources and provide training on relevant topics. The need for training is determined and monitored by interviewing employers, graduates of Utena College, providing training proposals to employers, recording and analysing enquiries and requests from employers and individuals, and analysing information. Utena College carries out a systematic monitoring and analysis of the need for lifelong learning, develops a package of lifelong learning measures each year, and identifies and monitors the need for training (e.g. SER: 580. In the analysis of the feedback from general education teachers after the training on inter-generational education (2018, 2019), a strong demand for education on these topics among the participants was observed. Therefore, considering this demand, Utena College is planning similar thematic training and the necessary financial resources for the following year). Nevertheless, during the visit, the Panel found out that the institution has no specific commitment or plan to deal with the competition of employees' professional development of regional businesses. The staff indicated that there are a number of education providers in the region, competing with Utena College, and problems are experienced in getting commissions.

112. Utena College's experience in organising LLL activities and its technical capabilities allow face-to-face and distance learning. The conditions created ensure accessibility, social justice and equal opportunities for participants in developing non-formal education services.

113. Utena College has developed quantitative indicators of non-formal training organized in 2015-2020. Number of participants in qualification improvement trainings in the year 2019-2020 was 600 persons. The quantitative indicators used include:

- a. Overall number of participants;
- b. Overall number of trainings;
- c. Professional qualification improvement trainings;
- d. Overall number of participants in qualification improvement trainings.

114. To ensure the quality of non-formal training, the descriptions of the training programmes include the aim of the programme, the competencies to be provided to the participants, and the trainer's requirements. To ensure the quality of non-formal training, participants are asked to fill in an anonymous questionnaire after each training session. If a company or institution commissions training for its employees, the managers of that company or institution are asked to evaluate the quality of the services provided in a free form written report and to draw conclusions on whether any changes are needed in the organisation and delivery of non-formal trainings in future.

115. In analysing the results of the surveys of participants in the LLL activities, it was noted that the majority of the feedback was positive, and there were no suggestions for change. One interpretation of this outcome is that it shows that Utena College provides the right conditions for lifelong learning and organises the measures according to the learners' needs. However, another possibility is that the right questions are not being asked. The Panel believed more work needs to be done, perhaps in focus groups, to ascertain in-depth views and possibilities for development.

116. **In summary**, Utena College is the only higher education institution in the eastern region of Lithuania. This places it in a situation where the provision of education, additional qualifications, access to further and higher education for the communities in the region is a key role for the institution. Utena College has developed good contacts and levels of cooperation with the local communities and industries, and has the potential to develop more programmes, both formal and non-formal, of benefit to the local population. A majority of the graduates are employed in the local industries – i.e. in the textile and manufacturing industry, in the hospitality industry, in the medical and related fields, including social work. For many it is the only possibility for access to education, especially for those employed in the region. Utena College takes this responsibility very seriously and, in discussions with senior management and staff, it is evident that there is a general awareness of the importance of this role. This awareness needs to be translated into specific actions and strategies. Lifelong learning is something that more and more are aware of and the possibilities are endless. There are real opportunities for Utena College not only to contribute to this field but to be a leader and provide models for others to follow. The flexibility students are given in completing their studies and in individualised study programmes is very impressive and the success of this approach in helping students to finish their studies and qualifications is a credit to the institution.

117. **Judgment:** the area is being developed, a lot of work is being done and has the potential to develop much further, but there are significant drawbacks and is given 2 points.

118. **Recommendations for the area:**

- a. That Utena College should be more proactive in reaching out to local community representatives with offers of short courses, seminars, workshops, etc. directed at identified needs.
- b. That Utena College should strengthen the monitoring of professional development of employees of regional industries and other businesses and to provide supply of educational opportunities based on the findings.
- c. Utena College supports many LLL activities, but the impact of these activities is not clear. Therefore the Panel recommends that the institution identifies key areas for regional and national development which would have a strong link to the institution's research and study as a whole.
- d. That Utena College should seek to build on this work and develop a strategy which emphasises its potential centrality to the post-pandemic recovery of the region.

IV. EXAMPLES OF GOOD PRACTICE

The Panel identifies the following examples of good practice in:

1. The holding of joint meetings of the Board and Academic Council, scheduled at regular intervals, with agendas on topics of interest to the institution.
2. Involvement of external stakeholders in management of the institution and also in the management and content of study programmes.
3. The procedure whereby students who drop out are followed up and the reasons for their dropping out determined. The student meets with the head of department and every effort is made to support the student remaining in education, if possible.
4. The committee system in place whereby each programme has a Study Programme Committee which meets regularly, seeks views of staff and students and external stakeholders, decides on actions to be taken and oversees the implementation of recommendations for improvement, is commendable, as is the inclusion of representatives of the local community/industries.
5. Facilitation of individualised study programmes for students.
6. The integration of international elements in the various study programmes of Utena College.

V. RECOMMENDATIONS FOR ENHANCEMENT

The Panel's recommendations for further enhancement to Utena College are:

1. Utena College needs to increase its focus on halting the decline in student numbers
2. Utena College should develop and increase its focus on the use of appropriate indicators for assisting in the implementation of its strategic priorities. The number of key performance indicators should be reduced in order to aid prioritisation and effective

action. These KPIs should be identified, measured, and reported on to the Academic Council and the Board at regular intervals.

3. Specific operational plans must be developed with responsibilities assigned to named individuals for the delivery of the actions agreed based on the key priorities identified for the future development of Utena College. These plans must be regularly assessed, and the results made public.
4. That the revised and updated English version of the website be published as soon as possible, and that consideration should be given to the provision of information in Russian for potential international students.
5. That the institution focusses on systematic evaluation of outcomes of quality assurance processes and identify and prioritise actions in line with the stated strategic priorities of Utena College.
6. That Utena College should put in place a formal peer observation of teaching scheme to support academic staff.
7. That Utena College should review the nature and number of indicators that the institution uses to measure progress.
8. That the institution agrees and implements a plan for the development of its distance learning offer.
9. That Utena College makes explicit and publicly available the ways it supports its international students.
10. That Utena College consider additional ways in which development and participation in active research programmes can be encouraged and undertaken by all teaching full-time staff.
11. That Utena College consider ways to increase engagement with and participation of students in research activities.
12. That Utena College seeks to find ways to increase the number of students going abroad for studies (not only practice placements).
13. That Utena College seeks to intensify the efforts to realize the measures mentioned in paragraph 94.
14. That Utena College should be more proactive in reaching out to local community representatives with offers of short courses, seminars, workshops, etc. directed at identified needs.
15. That Utena College should strengthen the monitoring of professional development of employees of regional industries and other businesses and to provide supply of educational opportunities based on the findings.
16. Utena College supports many LLL activities, but the impact of these activities is not clear. Therefore the Panel recommends that the institution identifies key areas for regional and national development which would have a strong link to the institution's research and study as a whole.
17. That Utena College should seek to build on this work and develop a strategy which emphasises its potential centrality to the post-pandemic recovery of the region.

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