



STUDIJŲ KOKYBĖS VERTINIMO CENTRAS

KLAIPĖDOS VALSTYBINĖS KOLEGIJOS VEIKLOS VERTINIMO IŠVADOS

INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW REPORT OF KLAIPEDA STATE COLLEGE

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I. INTRODUCTION

In October 2013, Klaipeda State College, hereafter referred to as ‘KVK’ or ‘the College’, underwent an institutional review organised by Centre for Quality Assessment in Higher Education (SKVC). In September 2013 the group of national and international experts (hereafter ‘the Team’), who had been selected and appointed by the SKVC, were provided with the *Methodology for Conducting an Institutional Review in Higher Education*, alongside a copy of the KVK Self Evaluation Report. The Team attended an Introductory Meeting at the SKVC Offices in Vilnius on 28 October 2013 and undertook a site visit to KVK between 29 and 31 October 2013. During the site visit, the Team collected oral evidence to supplement the written evidence provided in the Self-Evaluation and its appendices. Additional documentary evidence was also provided to the Team on request. Over the three-day visit, the Team held fourteen meetings and met with a wide range of internal and external stakeholders, including staff, students, social partners and alumni. The Team also visited classrooms, libraries and other facilities in order to observe learning and teaching resources.

The Team comprised:

Prof. Nicholas Harris (Chair), Independent Consultant on Quality Assurance in European Higher Education Area. Former Director for Development and Enhancement of Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA).

Dr. Helen Kelly (Secretary), Education Consultant. Former Director of Quality Development and Enhancement, Trinity College Dublin, Ireland.

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The *Methodology for Conducting an Institutional Review in Higher Education* defined the criteria to be followed in an external institutional review of higher education institutions organised by the Agency and authorised by the Minister for Education and Science of the Republic of Lithuania. The

Methodology was produced in line with the Law on Research and Studies of the Republic of Lithuania (*Official Gazette*, 2009, No 54-2140) as part of the implementation process of Government Resolution No 1317 of 22 September 2010 and other legal acts governing the activities and evaluation of higher education institutions and the provisions of the European guidelines for quality assurance in higher education.

The Team was directed to draw upon the self-evaluation report, the MOSTA results, data obtained during the on-site visit, the judgements and recommendations of previous evaluations – of Klaipeda Business and Technology College (2007) and Klaipeda College (2005) - the follow-up data, and other information on the performance of the higher education institution. The experts were also presented with the results of the evaluation of learning resources and associated infrastructure conducted by MOSTA, and with the evaluation decision of 14 June 2013.

The purpose of external review is to ensure prerequisites for the improvement of the performance of higher education institutions and the promotion of their culture of quality, also to offer recommendations for the development of the activities of higher education institutions.

II. BACKGROUND INFORMATION ABOUT THE INSTITUTION

Klaipėda State College was founded in 2009 following the merger of Klaipėda College and Klaipėda Business and Technology College. In 2011, KVK was reorganised into a public institution and a new Statute of the College was approved. The self-evaluation documentation confirms that the College is the largest higher education institution in the Western Lithuanian region and the third largest higher education institution in Lithuania. It currently has 4,063 students: 2,781 in full-time and 1,265 in part-time studies. The College has 531 employees comprising 299 academic staff, 205 economic employees and 27 administrative employees. Full-time academic staff account for 209 of the 258 teaching posts.

The merger of the two Colleges presented complex and challenging strategic and operational issues which necessitated significant changes to the management structure. This entailed the formation of the College Council and election of the Academic Council, and led to the development of the *Integrated Development Strategy of Klaipėda State College for 2011–2021*. It further resulted in the streamlining of Faculties from four to three, as the Faculty of Pedagogy was integrated into the Faculty of Social Sciences due to the decreasing number of students enrolling in pedagogical studies. The College now comprises the Faculty of Health Sciences, the Faculty of Social Sciences, and the Faculty of Technologies.

Study programmes are offered in the fields of biomedical, technological, physical and social sciences under 28 full-time and part-time study programmes. It was clear to the Team during the review visit that these programmes are developed based on the needs of the regional labour market and that social partners are active and supportive participants in this process. It is this relationship with external stakeholders that underpins the mission of the College to become ‘a modern higher education institute leading in Western Lithuania and recognised at EU level’. The College aspires to respond innovatively and rapidly to market demand in the development of its study programmes and in so doing, equip graduates with the necessary skills to compete regionally, nationally and internationally. Allied to this is the College’s ambition to commercialise its applied research output and consultancy opportunities to provide additional and sustainable revenue streams.

In relation to KVK’s engagement with the self-evaluation process, the Team found that all stakeholders were actively aware of and, where appropriate, involved in the development of the documentation. Furthermore, there appeared to be widespread support for and belief in not only the content of the report and accompanying documentation, but also the overall vision and ambition of the institution, with a shared sense of responsibility to actively pursue and deliver the College’s core values and mission.

III. STRATEGIC MANAGEMENT

Fitness for purpose, publicity, guarantees for implementation and management effectiveness of the Strategic Plan

KVK presents its strategic planning through three key documents: Strategic Action Plan for 2010–2013 (hereafter SAP, 2010–2013), Integrated Development Strategy for 2011–2021 (hereafter the Strategy), Strategic Action Plan for 2013–2015 (hereafter SAP, 2013–2015). The Team notes that the self-evaluation document is largely developed in reference to the SAP, 2013–2015, with limited reference to the previous SAP. This is largely a consequence of the merger and the necessity to develop an appropriate, fit-for-purpose strategic action plan to accommodate the new College structure. Whilst this meant that there was a lack of evidence-based documentation from which to assess the effectiveness of the SAP, 2010–2013, the Team were largely satisfied that previous objectives had, where appropriate, been incorporated into current planning mechanisms.

In assessing the effectiveness of the SAP, 2013–2015, it is clear that the document contains not only strategic objectives and measures but also operational; this duality has led to a distracted and at times confused strategic focus. This is most clearly demonstrated through the listed 95 key performance indicators (KPIs). Delivering against so many KPIs is neither desirable nor sustainable and the College is encouraged, as a matter of urgency, to reduce this number significantly. To this aim, the College may wish to consider developing a scorecard system which comprises meta institutional KPIs but also allows for a second tier of Faculty differentiation KPIs, with each faculty developing its own key measurements. The College has undergone a process of considerable change and each of the three Faculties is at a various stage of development and consolidation. It would seem appropriate, therefore, that qualitative and quantitative measures be agreed by each Head of Faculty and their senior management team pursuant to their local goals and objectives. The Team recommends a total of five to eight KPIs per Faculty.

In relation to College-level KPIs, it may be useful here to consider what indicators are critical to the measurable success of the strategic plan. If compiling the data is more resource consuming - time, financial cost, etc. - than the value of the information obtained, it is likely that the indicator itself is not effective. It is important to remember that whilst effective procedures and measurement tools are integral to the strategic planning process, they should not become subsumed by the method rather than the outcome. The College is, therefore, encouraged to streamline the institutional KPIs and reduce them to five to eight high-level, critical indicators. These might also include one or two stakeholder specific indicators focussing on strategic and operational development.

Effectiveness of the internal quality assurance systems

The Self-Evaluation document identified that, in line with the Law of Higher Education and Research in the Republic of Lithuania, KVK strives to ensure the effectiveness of its study programmes. Furthermore, it aims to respond to the changing needs of its social partners and the development of the broader society. To this end, the College operates to three distinct quality frameworks: ESG, EFQM, ISO 9001:2008.

Whilst the Team appreciates the very apparent commitment demonstrated across the College to the development and implementation of robust quality assurance systems, there is concern that the range of methods currently operating could ultimately be counterproductive. Quality assurance and enhancement operates most effectively in environments that can respond to and develop organically as well as systematically. In overburdening the system with stringent and at times opposing procedural frameworks and requirements, it may quickly become too difficult to effectively monitor, assess, discuss and develop quality in any meaningful way. The College should consider, therefore, a simplification – and ultimately a reduction – of these processes in order to reduce the administrative burden on staff, and develop a clear quality framework that is coherent, robust and accessible.

The College's recent appointment of a Quality Manager is to be commended and it is hoped that this role will be pivotal in addressing, over time, the issues of streamlining, developing, implementing and monitoring an effective quality framework. In order for the Quality Manager to do so operationally as well as strategically, it will be critical that she is fully immersed in College policy as it develops. The team recommends, therefore, that the Quality Manager sit *in attendance* at College committees - as deemed appropriate by the senior management team - particularly with regard to the Academic Council and Faculty Committees.

In relation to quality assurance and student evaluation methods, the Team were advised that KVK conduct student questionnaires to periodically evaluate the quality of teaching and the student experience in the more general sense. In meeting student and alumni representatives there appeared to be broad agreement that the College valued and where necessary, took action, following student feedback. In terms of closing the feedback loop, students reported that changes were communicated electronically via the intranet or by email. In cases requiring attention ahead of the scheduled student questionnaire, it was reported that students had direct access to the Dean of Faculty. This is indeed to be commended and the Team recognises the importance KVK places on hearing the student body's voice. The College may also like to consider further ways of engaging with students and closing the feedback loop such as verbal feedback in small groups, or developing a 'you said, we did' annual forum.

Appropriateness of the organisational structure

Following the merger in 2009 and approval of the College Statue in 2011, KVK underwent a reorganisation of its management structures, which was approved by the College Council on 30 January 2013. Under this current structure, the Director is responsible for all activities within College. The Council of College considers matters relating to issues such as financial and asset management and the Academic Council considers all academically related issues. The Director ultimately works to decisions arising from both of these Councils. Additionally, there is a Science Committee although this does not form part of the formal management structure.

The Deputy Director for Academic Affairs reports directly to the Director and is responsible for all academic activity within the College; in this he is assisted by the Deans of the three faculties and their staff. The Deputy Director for Strategic Development works closely with the Deputy Director for Infrastructure, and the Head of Finance and Accounting, all of whom report directly to the Director. At present and into the immediate future the Deputy Director for Strategic Development obviously has an extensive and demanding remit and, whilst the current incumbent is exceptionally competent and willing to take on such extensive responsibilities, the Team have some concerns about the medium – and indeed short - term sustainability of such a demanding workload. Whilst the Team recognise that responsibilities are clearly defined in various ways including job descriptions, it is not clear whether / where / if at all the appropriate and necessary accompanying ‘authorities’ (to ensure that responsibilities can be met) are set out. There is, for example, no formal risk analysis or consideration of how risks will be dealt with in terms of allocation of responsibilities in the event of short to medium term absence of key members of the senior management. Equally, the Team found no evidence to suggest that any formal and co-ordinated method for ensuring that the latest ‘state of play’ is recorded by each of the senior staff in terms of progress against their specific responsibilities. This is particularly significant in terms of knowledge transfer between colleagues to ensure continuity when periods of ‘stand in’ arise; but which cannot necessarily be foreseen.

Human Resource Management

The Self-Evaluation document recognises that since the merger of the two institutions, consideration had to be given to developing a coherent human resources strategy. To this end, KVK has developed and implemented a strategic plan in relation to human resources, which contains mechanism to recognise and reward the quality of teaching and administrative staff. This includes the up-skilling of academic staff to doctoral level; harmonisation of qualification requirements; and a staff motivation initiative. The panel are satisfied that sufficient measures have been taken to implement the strategy and, in various discussions throughout the visit, staff appeared to be knowledgeable of, and satisfied with, the approach to human resources within the College. The panel were interested to learn, for example, of the on-going assessment of lecturers every five years, against both generic teaching

criteria and also discipline specific requirements. Since tenure is not available for teaching staff, this form of assessment was linked directly to the continuation of the employment contract.

Within the context of the overall human resources strategy, however, the Team would recommend that KVK revisit all job descriptors to ensure both consistency and relevance of requirements. Furthermore, the College should seek to link 'responsibilities' to the necessary identification of 'authority' available to ensure that responsibilities can be addressed and (hopefully) met.

During the site visit the Team were informed that the College operates a work allocation model in which teaching, research, administration and contribution to cultural activities are included. Significantly, the Team notes that they did not receive any specific comments critical of the outcomes of the work allocation model other than the general view of academics everywhere that there are too many competing responsibilities for the resources available, and for the developmental ambitions of staff. The Team is concerned that the expectations of an apparently overly complex quality assurance matrix may prove counterproductive to the reasonable ambitions of staff to develop their primary interests in teaching, research and other activities.

Change Management

During the course of the visit the panel were struck by the level of involvement of the social partners and the deep collaborative relationships that have been developed and nurtured overtime. It was also clear, however, that these relationships had developed largely in isolation from one another, often through links either with individual Faculties and members of staff, or through the LLL centre. This topic will be developed further in the section below (Academic Studies and Life Long Learning) but in relation to Change Management, the panel found that some opportunities to develop new programmes in consultation with social partners may be being missed because a clear strategic approach has not been fully developed, integrated or implemented.

It is vital that the College responds dynamically and effectively to market demands and thus build confidence in its social partners that KVK is the preferred partner both regionally and indeed nationally. During the visit, the Team were informed of the external requirements and processes involved in developing new programmes, and the inherent restrictions therein. Certainly, *in terms of international standards/expectations*, it was apparent that the timeline from inception to delivery of a new programme was not 'competitive' and this may be something the College should be lobbying on, and the sector addressing, not just at regional but also national and legislative levels.

Notwithstanding these limitations, the Team believe it is critical that KVK identify their core strengths academically and operationally, and from this actively develop a network of partners with whom they can develop programmes, conduct research, and deliver consultancy services. Such an

ambitious approach to the College's future growth and development will require coordinated strategic planning and the Team recommend that KVK begin this process as soon as possible.

The Team has recommended elsewhere that it is necessary that the College develops a risk register that systematically assesses risk across the College and monitors all activity that is critical to the future success of KVK's core mission. Included within this should be an evaluation of the risks associated with change management and, where these are critical to the implementation of the Strategic Plan, necessary (preventative) actions should be identified.

Learning resources management and allocation

The KVK Self-Evaluation report states that since 2011 the funds management of the College has been regulated by Statute. In this, the College Council acts as the forum for financial decision-making on the appropriation of College funds. Revenue is generated through state budget allocation, income generated by the College for provision of services, and other projects. The report further outlines EU funding sources for development of infrastructure and teaching resources and during the site visit, the Team found evidence of a number of examples of successful applications for such funding.

On visiting facilities on campus, the Team found that resources and facilities are indeed sufficient for the student learning experience and that developments such as 'Moodle' is to be commended. Similarly, the Team was impressed by the collaborative approaches to the sharing of resources with other institutions, linked not only to technical and/or advanced equipment/instrumentation but also to advanced technical expertise as well. The Team would like, generally, to encourage yet further cooperation in this regard to contribute both to the students' learning experience, and to the role of the College in supporting regional development.

It was clear, however, both from the Self-Evaluation report and through subsequent discussions, that the level of income generated by the College is reducing and that the College is beginning to face severe financial challenges. An overreliance on EU generated funding for the continued maintenance of, and investment in, facilities is unlikely to be sustainable in the medium/long term. This may be particularly acute where funds are obtained to establish new initiatives and equipment, but where funds for continued operation and maintenance are less readily available-/secured. The College should include such considerations within its Risk analysis to ensure that its short term success for initiating high profile projects does not place an undue burden on other and subsequent developments within the College as a whole.

In advance of the site visit, the Team received from SKVC an evaluation of KVK's learning resources, commissioned by the Ministry for Education and Science. The indicators were produced by the Centre for Monitoring and Analysis in Research and HE (MOSTA) for evaluating an institution's

learning resources, associated infrastructure and human resources. The Team noted during discussions with the senior management that the method of evaluation presented by MOSTA to KVK was not immediately apparent, and that the criteria and presentation of data required were also somewhat unclear. Nevertheless, the College has tried admirably to respond to the MOSTA evaluation process, and conducted extensive analysis of internal and external issues following the merger. This entailed a comprehensive analysis of resources and data from both Colleges, and a restructuring of staff in order to meet the requirements of the evaluation.

The Team learnt that, in relation to the Finance Department, this process of self-analysis has led to the introduction of an accounting and book keeping software which is in the process of being operational. This system is part of a European initiative and is being introduced across all higher education institutes within Lithuania. It is also part of a broader software system, which will include Human Resources management and study programme management. It is understood that this will provide more detailed data analysis – including the cost per student – as well as greater financial autonomy and accountability at Faculty level. It is anticipated that each Faculty will, over time, (have the potential to) become an individual cost centre. This process will require considerable oversight if it is to progress smoothly, potentially through a period when resources may be likely to diminish yet ‘expectations’ increase, both regionally and nationally. It will be important to ensure that the planned development of such a comprehensive ‘management’ system also includes ‘teaching and learning’. In addition, the Team were concerned that insufficient training will be provided to implement these extensive management systems and that the timeline for full implementation is too ambitious. The College is encouraged to give significant thought to this aspect of any implementation process.

The Team identified the following areas of STRENGTH:

- The management of institutional merger and the care and attention shown in limiting the impact on the student body.
- The proactive approach to enhancing the KVK student experience through the assessment of student feedback questionnaires.
- The successful implementation of various restructuring projects.
- The quality, commitment and enthusiasm of KVK’s staff.

The Team identified the following areas of WEAKNESS:

- The duality of the Strategic Action Plan in addressing strategic and operational objectives and measures, resulting in a confused overall focus.
- The number and ‘value-added’ status of the 95 Key Performance Indicators listed in the Strategic Action Plan.
- The range of frameworks and methods employed to assess quality assurance and enhancement.

- The absence of a risk register to systematically assess risk across the College and monitor critical activity against the institutional strategic plan.

Judgement on the area: Strategic Management is given a POSITIVE evaluation

IV. ACADEMIC STUDIES AND LIFE-LONG LEARNING

The Team were careful to explain during the site visit that their enquiries and viewing of College facilities were linked to the 'institutional' nature of the evaluation, noting that the strengths relating to specific requirements for particular programmes were considered in detail during programme evaluations. That said, the facilities that the Team saw and visited demonstrated the planned and targeted investments that the College continues to make are directly related to the development of their vision and Strategic plan.

One of the many impressive aspects of the site visit was the extent of strong supportive views about the College provided through the various meetings with present and former students. It was clear from the students that the panel met, both in formal sessions and less formally during a short tour of teaching activities, that students are generally very positive in their views about the College including: why they chose the College (against others) and its specific programmes, the extent of detail provided prior to enrolment and during their studies, the appropriate balance of 'theory and practice' contained within the programmes, the 'access' to teaching staff, and their employment prospects on graduation. Noted elsewhere but important to be reiterated here, the students reported, and could provide specific examples, that their views were both heard and where appropriate acted upon by the College management.

Links between study programmes, KVK's strategic plan and national priorities

KVK's vision and strategic goal is to equip its students with the skills and experience to become professionals in their field and contribute to the regional and national culture and economy. The Self Evaluation report provides detail on the numerous study programmes delivered by the College and the diversity of fields available. This diversity reflects not only KVK's links with its social partners but also an awareness of national and European HE policies and including the principles for lifelong learning.

The Team commend the College for their committed approach to these areas that are soundly based, reflected in the vision and mission, directed through the Strategic Plan, and implemented through work in the faculties and programmes.

Variety of forms of HE including LLL

The Team was impressed by the close links between study programmes / faculties and the directly related skills linked to the needs and the relevant business areas and employment within it. From an academic perspective it was notable that, for example, final year student projects were often linked to specific local business needs and that the engagement with the business community was undertaken in an exemplary manner. Business partners were not only involved in collaborative supervision of, for

example, Final Thesis projects but also in their assessment. This is for many institutions a ‘difficult’ area, but it is clear and commendable that KVK have ensured the relevant quality assurance of assessment, by providing suitable induction (in the principles and practices of the assessment of student achievements) to those social partners involved in assessing thesis defence.

Systematic monitoring of graduate employment and subsequent career profiles

The College does not yet have an effective system for the collection and collation of data relating to the employment of its graduates, or any system for ‘longitudinal’ monitoring of career paths. The College does, however, have plans in hand to establish such a system; this is being undertaken as part of a European collaborative programme and will involve the establishment of an IT based system to cover these aspects.

Cooperation with partners

During the site visit, the Team met with a number of social partners and was most impressed by the level of engagement and collaboration that exists both with Faculty and the Lifelong Learning Centre (LLC). It is clear that there is an open dialogue between all stakeholders and that from this programmes are developed in response to market demands. What was less clear, however, was the extent to which the LLC has developed a clear and dynamic approach to strategically planning such engagements.

The College has stated that the LLC is central to future revenue generation and the financial targets for the LLC are extremely ambitious. In realising this vision, KVK will need to identify clear areas of responsibility between the leadership of the LLC and the individual Faculties. Success in this will require a clear, strategic plan that is owned, driven and implemented by one area. Whilst the natural home for such planning and management is within the LLC itself, the development of the strategy will also require full integration with individual Faculty plans and a level of ‘buy-in’ at the highest level within each Faculty. Internal communication will be key in this regard in order to enrich the development and successful delivery of the strategy.

The desire of KVK to provide consultancy services to social partners as a future revenue stream was discussed at some length during the visit. When meeting with a selection of the social partners it was apparent that not all were aware of the potential services but, more significantly, the Team were also informed that those who had been involved with the College would be reluctant to pay for a service which was currently offered free of charge. It was clear that if the College is to move into arrangements that are more directly commercially oriented there will need to be a period of ‘explanation’-/-‘re-education’ and ‘re-alignment’. To some extent there is currently a ‘quid pro quo’ within some of the arrangements with local stakeholders; these will need to be evaluated more explicitly. It will be important for (new) expectations to be made clear from the outset in terms of the

valued placed on provision of resources to social partners. It is vital that KVK is proactive in this engagement and does not merely respond to, and rely on, the instigation of activities by (other) stakeholders. The College may wish to consider how it might effectively establish some form of segmentation of target groups and develop specific but nuanced strategies to engage with and develop each sector.

Integral with such developments is the need for a clear and agreed differentiation between what the College does under its Research and its Consultancy activities. Whilst there can be overlap between the two the College is encouraged to discriminate in planning (and strategic) terms between Research (that leads to national and international kudos and may - secondarily - lead to consultancy earnings) and Consultancy (that must in the first instance provide identifiable benefits to the College in financial or equivalent terms, and may also lead to research outcomes). This topic is considered in more detail in the Section V.

Staff and Student Mobility

KVK defines its international cooperation activities in reference to EU and national strategies and operates ECTS in order to assist student mobility. During the site visit, the Team were satisfied that both current students and recent alumni were aware of and had, to some extent, taken advantage of the Erasmus programme, which is managed via the International Office. The Self-Evaluation report demonstrated a reasonable balance of incoming and outgoing students under the Erasmus programme and the huge academic and personal benefits gained through student mobility were clearly articulated by those students the Team met who had taken the opportunity to study elsewhere. The benefits identified by the students relate both to the quality of the learning experiences available and the enhanced employability skills and opportunities thereafter. Whilst recognising that for many reasons, including personal, mobility placements cannot be undertaken by all students, the Team would encourage KVK to do as much as possible to identify and publicise the advantages of studying abroad within its programmes, so that the overall percentage of students experiencing some studies overseas will increase. In this, the International Office should take a proactive lead to work closely with academic colleagues and students (including recent graduates) to develop and promote an integrated strategy for study abroad opportunities.

The development of an international dimension is one of KVK's strategic goals. The Team were informed, however, both through the Self-Evaluation report and during the site visit that (international) mobility of staff, both *from* the College and visiting staff *to* it, is an area of concern. Language barriers are thought to limit movement of academics in both 'directions' but the Team was however disappointed to learn, considering some of the international research links, that no academics from abroad had yet been able to undertake a sabbatical period with KVK.

It is clear that some Faculties are more internationalised than others, particularly where they are part of broader EU funded research programmes. Such initiatives are crucial to maintaining and further raising the College's profile, and that of its academics, overseas. The Team is keen to commend the successes to date and, within its strategic research overview, would encourage KVK to look at such examples as a basis for seeking to extend such activities across other Faculties.

Internationalisation is of course closely bound with research and consultancy. Research per se is considered in more detail in Section V but with a focus on 'internationalisation' the Team note that further internationalisation -/- research developments might be initiated through greater dialogue and sharing of ideas/activities between Faculties. It would be important for there to be some coordinated overview of such developments, and the (strategic) identification of areas where internal, cross-Faculty collaborations could strengthen the acquisition of funds externally should be encouraged. Such discussions to identify and exploit potential new opportunities should also be considered on a regional and national basis.

Internationalisation can be achieved through many avenues and KVK should give consideration to: inviting international colleagues to join supervisory boards; recruit international researchers; and develop an international network of colleagues across all Faculties, as well as institutionally.

In summary, KVK has clearly aligned its study programmes, qualifications, and its increasing commitment to a variety of life long learning opportunities, with the requirements not only of Lithuanian HE, and in particular the regional priorities of Western Lithuania, but also with the principles of the EHEA. The institution has close links with (mostly local) social and business partners particularly in seeking to develop employable graduates. The College also provides support and encouragement for those students who are able to take the additional and valuable opportunities linked to international mobility within study programmes. It is, by contrast, somewhat disappointing that the inward and outward exchange of staff on international exchanges does not match that of the students.

The Team identified the following areas of STRENGTH:

- Students are generally very positive in their views about the College including: why they chose the College (against others) and its specific programmes, the extent of detail provided prior to enrolment and during their studies, the appropriate balance of 'theory and practice' contained within the programmes, the 'access' to teaching staff, and their employment prospects on graduation.
- The College systems through with student views and concerns are both heard and where appropriate acted upon by the College management.
- The ways in which the College has ensured the relevant quality assurance of assessment by stakeholders involved in teaching and learning, and in particular the induction in the

principles and practices of the assessment of student achievements, for those social partners involved in assessing Final thesis defence.

- The level of engagement and collaboration that exists both with Faculty and the Lifelong Learning Centre (LLC). It is clear that there is an open dialogue between all stakeholders and that from this programmes are developed in response to market demands.

The Team identified the following areas of WEAKNESS:

- The expectation that in future some consultancy services may be charged for when the Team were informed that social/business partners would be reluctant to pay for such a service which is currently offered free of charge
- The lack of a clear and agreed differentiation between what the College does under its Research and its Consultancy activities.
- The lack of (international) mobility of staff, both *from* the College and visiting staff *to* it, is an area of concern for those areas seeking to establish an international profile.
- The Team was concerned that the current operational plan did not clearly articulate a strategic and proactive engagement model with social partners in order to fully develop and maximise the potential of the LLC.

Judgement on the area: Academic Studies and Life-Long Learning is given a POSITIVE evaluation

V. RESEARCH AND (OR) ART

Research Activities and the institutional mission and strategic documents

The close and strong links between that the College's predecessor organisations had built up with regional (social/business) partners have clearly been not only retained but built upon in a very substantive manner. This is in part due to work and commitment of individuals but also to the way in which the merger of the Colleges was overseen through two Strategic Plans.

As mentioned above, the Team recognises the need for the substantially different forms of Strategic plan between 2010-2013 and the current one 2013-2016, but is very concerned at the excessive number of performance indicators and in particular relating to the research ambitions of the institution.

The College develops and teaches programmes up to the level of Bologna first cycle and these are each subject to separate external programme evaluation. The Team noted the ways in which, in line with the Strategic Plan, a significant number of programmes have been aligned with regional business and employment needs and often provided close links through the final year project/-thesis. Whilst such links/-activities were generally referred to as 'research' within the College and considered as such within the planning and monitoring the Team considered the use of this term to be, in part, potentially misleading. The Final thesis is part of the Academic Study Programmes and as such can offer an additional instrument to gain a first glance of a research topic, which may in some cases be developed into something more substantial. However, Final theses are written by students as the final step to the first cycle graduate level. Research as an international expectation comprises much more and relies on much higher competencies and capabilities than generally expected at first cycle student/graduate level.

It is important that the College clarifies and distinguishes the extent to which consultancy or applied research work is to be promoted (with a framework established at College and/or faculty level). It will be important that this is done only after the College has clarified its use of terminology to distinguish between 'research', 'applied research' and 'consultancy'. Further the College is urged identify some form of 'scale' against which it can set its research and consultancy contributions. This should clarify that, for example, bachelor theses, whilst having the potential to contribute to local needs and developments, would seldom be likely to considered as 'research' at a national and certainly not international level. The very best student theses might reasonably be expected to contribute to 'applied research' or 'consultancy' at a regional, and occasionally at a national level.

The College is also encouraged, when reconsidering its Strategy in terms of clarification of terminology and alignment to activities, to consider how a more coordinated approach to the identification and development of consultancy/research opportunities might be established.

There is a clear need for more explicit leadership, at College level, of what was referred to during the site visit as ‘research’; this is actually applied research (a term used widely in the Self Assessment document) and ‘consultancy’ (a term not used in the Self Assessment). Various approaches might be considered including, for example, the appointment of a responsible individual (a ‘cross faculty’ Dean, perhaps) and/or through a realignment of the Science Committee or development of a Science Council. Such developments would need to consider a different and more specific set of roles and responsibilities, designed to bring greater strategic and practical integration and covering the planning/coordination of (research), applied research and consultancy, and their targeted promotion. It would be important to ensure that the different faculties maintain and continue to further develop their portfolios of activities in ways that reflect their strengths and stakeholder needs; not all faculties should be expected to cover both areas – ‘applied research’ and ‘consultancy’ – in similar ways or to similar extents and levels.

Building on the ‘pockets’ of success already within the College, all faculties should, however, be encouraged to have at least some of each type of activity (research, applied research and consultancy) within their portfolio. Further, each faculty should be encouraged, and in time expected, to have established demonstrably strong, international links in its key area(s) of activity.

In summary, the College has not identified a clear, internationally-referenced, view of what it considers as ‘research’ and/or related activities. The term ‘research’ is used to cover ‘pockets’ of international activity (aligned with the European Research Area) and other work that is more locally focussed, but still advanced; these might more accurately be described as ‘applied research’. There are also a variety of ‘consultancy’ activities, mostly developed in reaction to local business sector needs. Predominantly short term in nature, all of these applied research and consultancy activities appear to be identified largely in a responsive mode, with decisions made at the level of individuals or small groups, and with little or no College oversight. There does not appear to be any clear integration of policy/-strategy on how such activities are differentiated and/or prioritised to be medium term development of the College and its further strengthening.

With increasing demands on increasingly scarce resources, particularly financial, it will be important for the College to build on its current ‘pockets’ of strength, in research, applied research and consultancy. This should be done in ways that identify/clarify each type of activity and their real contributions more clearly, and in ways that promote a more pro-active approach leading to greater sustainability. The challenge for the College will be to do this in such a way that the ‘management’ of research, applied research and consultancy recognises them equally and values the essential

contributions of all, and does not place unrealistic expectations that might reduce enthusiasm and innovation.

The Team identified the following areas of STRENGTH:

- The ‘pockets’ of international research collaborations, and success in gaining European funding through various consortia.
- The close links between (what the Team would refer to as) the ‘applied research’ and ‘consultancy’ being undertaken in collaborations with local-/regional stakeholders.
- The links between the teaching programmes and final thesis projects-/placements in local and regional enterprises.

The Team identified the following areas of WEAKNESS:

- The lack of a clear distinction between the different types of ‘research’ activities carried out by the College and its staff and students.
- The lack of a clear and realistic strategy to develop the different types of applied research in coherent and sustainable ways.
- The lack of clear and systematic lines for responsibility, management and communication, concerning the identification of opportunities for applied research and consultancy; and the lack of clear prioritisation the College places on these to ensure a coordinated development that makes best use of resources and generation of financial income and/or other benefits.

Judgement on the area: Research (and (or) Art) is given a NEGATIVE evaluation

VI. IMPACT ON REGIONAL AND NATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

The Self-Evaluation report of KVK seeks to position the College as the leading educational institution in Western Lithuania through partnership with industry, enterprise and business networks. It demonstrates an acute awareness of the priorities of national and regional development particularly in regard to transport, health, commerce and communication. The report further articulates the following means of engagement with, and assessment of, the College's impact on Western Lithuania: 1) development of innovation; 2) implementation of applied research and communication/transfer of the outcomes; 3) supply of high quality specialists with necessary skills, capabilities and knowledge to the Region; 4) creation of social and cultural climate characteristics.

The Team found there to be a broad and solid connection to regional partners and to the broader development of Western Lithuania, and the College can be proud of its achievements in this regard. It was strongly evidenced, both in the report and orally, that the College provides a diverse range of economic, cultural, social and environmental activities that are valued by their social partners. Furthermore, it was apparent that graduates of KVK are respected and valued amongst employers, particularly within a regional context. This close relationship the College enjoys with its social partners is to be recognised and commended and the Team would suggest could be used nationally to benchmark engagement models for other institutions within Lithuania.

That said, it appeared to the Team that, with some notable exceptions, the impact of KVK is stronger regionally than nationally. The College may, to some extent, be the victim of its own success in this regard, as its close ties with regional industry creates a powerful momentum and profile locally. But in order to realise its broader ambitions, KVK must address this issue and may wish to do so by consideration of wider collaborative partnerships in (applied) research, which may be developed nationally and indeed internationally.

The College may wish to consider how, and to what extent, it addresses the apparent imbalance between a particularly strong regional impact, and less-strongly developed national impact. The regional interconnections are strong and linked to specifically-identified needs and opportunities. By comparison the potential for such an approach to national impact may be less easy to develop, and it may be that the College would wish to consider developing its 'national' contributions in targeted ways rather than on a 'broad front'. Obvious approaches for tackling the national perspective could be through expansions from initiatives and projects that have proved successful at either regional and/or international level(s). In this way the College would be able to build on its existing and proven strength and expertise(s) without having to seek to enter into new areas merely in seeking to address an evaluation criterion linked to a (non-specific) national agenda.

Measuring implementation and impact

The Self-Evaluation report clearly outlines the number and range of activities engaged with by KVK, particularly in regard to its social partners. These are numerous, and cover a wide range of areas, predominantly linked to specific faculties as opposed to cross-faculty initiatives. Links and services used by local business and social partners are predominantly provided on a 'free of charge' basis, although often with some form of link to teaching and learning, often through a final year student Final thesis project or similar exercise.

The Team noted that measures of impact are numerous but not all are particularly clear, and, importantly, because of the time frame in which they are set (from the latest Strategic plan) there is to date insufficient time to establish a reliable evidence base. The measures also vary in the extents to which they are more or less ambitious, and more or less based on a clear rationale linked to the Strategic Plan. The College is encouraged to consider how the measures of impact may be clarified and reduced in number.

Linked particularly, in the near future, to the 'regional agenda' the College may consider how it could 'bundle' its activities towards mission and vision by faculty, and especially towards the needs and the relevance to the stakeholders of the college, keeping in mind to expand, to strengthen and generally to enhance the network with their main stakeholders.

The Team note the clear links between the College's formal documents, referred to in the Self-Evaluation report, and the identification of aspects of regional development, and the ways in which the College is seeking to comply with and support the priorities of regional development.

Additionally, the Team notes the effort being made by the College through its lifelong learning initiatives to further link to and support regional development at organisational and individual levels. The Team encourages the College to continue and, where appropriate, seek to expand on these efforts, for example through 'specialist' seminars, projects, in-house-training, etc. that might be based on the existing and well-regarded main study programmes. These could further reinforce and provide new links between College staff and local stakeholders.

The Alumni Club

The Team makes particular note of the potential of the Alumni Club to contribute to the College's further integration with regional and national developments. Inevitably, because it has been running for a limited period, the Alumni club is still at an early stage of development. Currently it is aimed primarily at social and cultural contributions, but it is clear to the Team that the Club has the potential

to become an important link not only between past students and the College and its present students but also, and importantly, in helping its graduates develop their own careers and businesses through the initiation of a 'business club' aspect.

Such a well-founded development could provide technical and professional support for graduates and the companies they work for (thus expanding influence beyond the region). It could further develop, through links with the LLL centre, courses and programmes that are focused on continuing professional development, and could and should be income generating.

Currently, only a very small percentage of all graduates are members of the Alumni Club and the College is strongly encouraged to engage more strategically with this important stakeholder base. Effective international alumni clubs develop their graduate base into business networks and harness the experience and expertise of alumni to raise the profile and impact of the institution nationally and internationally.

On meeting with a diverse alumni group, the team found them to be extremely supportive of the College and immensely proud to be its graduates. This sentiment should not be lost once the period of study has been completed. KVK alumni should be encouraged to re-engage with the College both in relation to programme development as well as student recruitment. The best advocates of any institution providing tertiary education are its graduates, and KVK may wish to consider a number of ways of coordinated engagement such as: an alumni mentoring schemes; alumni talks to students; alumni reception evenings for networking opportunities; alumni electronic magazine with College initiatives, research projects, student activity etc. In addition, the Team recommends the development of an alumni database in order for the College to systematically and strategically engage with its alumni in a more co-ordinated and effective way.

In summary, the College has demonstrated strong interactions and impacts with its regional partners and, in a few areas, at a national level too. The Team is of the view that the current Strategic Planning includes too many indicators for assessing impact, and further that there is no clear scale for how the extent of impact is determined. Nevertheless there is a clear correlation of priorities for impact with regional (and to a lesser extent national) economic and social development. The Team were also interested to note various links with regional cultural activities although was unclear to what extent these were the result of individuals enthusiasms (though absolutely not to be underestimated) or contributions planned and integrated to ensure most effective gains in terms of 'impact for effort'.

The Team identified the following areas of STRENGTH:

- The clear focus on four goals underlined by specific indicators (pic. 2 in SE).
- The demonstrated acute awareness of the priorities of national and regional development particularly with regard to transport, health, commerce and communication. The Team found

there to be a broad and solid connection to regional partners and to the broader development of Western Lithuania, and the College can be proud of its achievements in this regard.

- It was apparent that graduates of KVK are respected and valued amongst employers, particularly within a regional context. This close relationship the College enjoys with its social partners is to be recognised and commended.

The Team identified the following areas of WEAKNESS:

- The national impact of KVK is not as universally apparent as that at regional level and requires a targeted and strategic engagement model to redress the imbalance.
- The current structure and function of the alumni club is limiting its potential as a dynamic business and professional networking body.
- The measures employed by KVK to assess regional and national impact are at times unclear and are excessive in number and scope.

Judgement on the area: Impact on Regional and National Development is given POSITIVE evaluation

VII. GOOD PRACTICE AND ENHANCEMENT RECOMMENDATIONS

GOOD PRACTICE EXAMPLES:

- The cooperative engagement by staff and students with the institutional review process and the sense of collegiality across the whole College.
- The successful management of the merger with Klaipėda Business and Technology College ensuring minimum impact on the overall experience of students studying during and subsequent to the merger.
- The valuable contribution the College makes to the region of Western Lithuania through developing collaborative partnerships with a range of social partners.
- The awareness the College demonstrates concerning the employability of its graduates, and its continued efforts to ensure the development of study programmes, which meet the requirements and demands of industry.
- The committed approach of the College to the principles of lifelong learning and the awareness of national and European policy development in this regard.
- The depth and range of study programmes delivered by the College within the context of lifelong learning opportunities.
- The College's continuing commitment to review, modify and enhance its study programmes through engagement with, and feedback to, the student body.
- The accessibility of senior faculty members to the student body in relation to dealing with student feedback issues.
- The collaborative approach the College has developed with other institutions in relation to the sharing of technical instrumentation and expertise.
- Those activities evidenced in parts of the College in integrating into European research programmes. It is hoped that these will prove to be the model for broader engagement.
- The College's aspirations toward, and continued commitment to, developing internationally mobile staff and students; and engaging with a programme of internationalisation at institutional level.
- The appointment of a Quality Manager to oversee the development and implementation of an appropriate and fit-for-purpose Quality framework.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

The Team recommends that:

- The Strategic Action Plan is re-formulated to separate out the strategic priorities from the operational ones. KVK should identify a maximum of eight high-level strategic Key Performance Indicators (KPIs), which critically underpin the development and performance of the College. Additionally, each field may wish to develop a subset of KPIs relating specifically to goals and deliverables within the relevant area.
- The College should conduct a Risk Analysis linked directly to the (revised) Strategic Action Plan and the newly developed high level KPIs, and further develop a Risk Register which systematically assesses the key risks across the College and identifies how they would be addressed.
- The Lifelong Learning Centre (LLC) should, in close consultation with the faculties and their staff, develop a more strategic plan to identify priority areas for the further development of the range of programmes offered. The LLC could be more proactive in identifying, targeting, and engaging with relevant social partners to promote the LLC and expand its revenue generating capability.
- The LLC identify and develop means of better disseminating information to social partners, and which focus on relevant opportunities for starting innovative and progressive programmes of study.
- The Science Committee, or an alternative new-formed committee/council, be made responsible for the approval, coordination and promotion of (all) College activities involving applied research and consultancy; and with an appropriate formal position and reporting line(s) within the management structure of the College.
- The Quality Manager should sit *in attendance* on appropriate academic, senior management and Faculty committees in order to fully participate in the development and implementation of policy in relation to quality developments and enhancement.
- KVK should simplify and, over time, reduce the current operational quality processes in order to lessen the administrative burden on staff and develop an accessible and more efficient/appropriate quality framework.
- The College encourage and support the development of a Business Group within the Alumni Club (see main text for details).

KVK continues to make excellent progress since its establishment. The evaluation Team recommends Positive evaluations in the fields of ‘Strategic Management’, ‘Academic Studies and Lifelong Learning’, and ‘Impact on Regional and National Development’, but a Negative evaluation in the area of ‘Research and/or Art’.

VIII. JUDGEMENT

Klaipėda State College is given a Negative evaluation.

Grupės vadovas: Team leader:	Prof. Nicholas Harris
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ANNEX. KLAIPĖDA STATE COLLEGE RESPONSE TO REVIEW REPORT

We inform that no essential factual mistakes were observed in the expert team's report in the English language. We have one remark, pg.6 (III.STRATEGIC MANAGEMENT. Fitness for purpose, publicity, guarantees for implementation and management effectiveness of the Strategic Plan), the beginning of the second paragraph, instead of "In assessing the effectiveness of the SAP, 2010-2013..." there should be "In assessing the effectiveness of the SAP, 2013-2015...".