



STUDIJŲ KOKYBĖS VERTINIMO CENTRAS

SOCIALINIŲ MOKSLŲ KOLEGIJOS

VEIKLOS VERTINIMO IŠVADOS

INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW REPORT OF COLLEGE OF SOCIAL SCIENCES

Grupės vadovas:
Team leader: Prof. Dr Malcolm C. Cook

Grupės nariai:
Team members: Dr Neringa Ivanauskienė

Dr Jacques Kaat

Dr Outi Kallioinen

Andrius Šimonėlis

Vertinimo sekretorius:
Review secretary: Barbara Michalk

CONTENTS

I. INTRODUCTION.....	3
II. BACKGROUND INFORMATION ABOUT THE INSTITUTION.....	5
III. STRATEGIC MANAGEMENT	6
IV. ACADEMIC STUDIES AND LIFE-LONG LEARNING	10
V. RESEARCH AND ART.....	14
VI. IMPACT ON REGIONAL AND NATIONAL DEVELOPMENT	18
VII. GOOD PRACTICE AND ENHANCEMENT RECOMMENDATIONS	20
VIII. JUDGEMENT	21
ANNEX. COLLEGE OF SOCIAL SCIENCES RESPONSE TO REVIEW REPORT	21

I. INTRODUCTION

Studijų kokybės vertinimo centras (SKVC - the Centre for Quality Assessment in Higher Education, the quality assurance agency which has been authorised to conduct evaluations of higher education institutions and degree programmes in Lithuania) commissioned the expert team to conduct the institutional evaluation of the SMK University of Applied Social Sciences (hereafter: SMK or the College). This evaluation was conducted in line with the methodology and guidelines provided by SKVC, specifically the Procedure for the External Review in Higher Education (Government Resolution No. 1317, 22 September 2010).

The purpose of the evaluation was “to ensure prerequisites for the improvement of the performance of [SMK] and the promotion of [its] quality, also to offer recommendations for the development of the [institution’s] activities” (Methodology for Conducting an Institutional Review in Higher Education), taking into consideration autonomy and accountability; the mission, strategy and operating conditions; the interaction and compatibility of the areas under review; stakeholder involvement; and the unity of internal and external quality assurance.

The results of the last institutional review, carried out in 2005, were taken into account.

Four weeks before the planned site visit, the review team received the institution’s self evaluation report and 15 annexes with statistics and documentation. Additionally, SKVC provided information on the Lithuanian higher education system and financing. The SER and the annexes were informative and provided the knowledge necessary for the preparation of the site visit. But as the SER was more descriptive than analytic, a number of questions arose to be discussed on site. On the other hand, the SWOT analysis complementing the Integrated Development Strategy was helpful for the preparation and during the interviews.

The expert team also received the latest analysis of learning resources at SMK by Lithuania’s Research and Studies Monitoring and Analysis Centre (MOSTA). According to this report, SMK’s provision met the required learning resources in the four fields that form part of the evaluation, so that “for 2010-2012 the learning resources of the higher education institution were assessed positively in line with Point 11 of the procedure for the external evaluation of higher education institutions, approved by the Decision No. 1317 of 22 September 2010 of the Lithuanian Government (OJ No. 113-5760 of 2010, No. 64-3235 of 2012)”.

The review team’s site visit took place at SMK’s Klaipėda Central Campus on 25 - 27 February 2014.

During the visit, the expert team had meetings with the Director and the other College stakeholder, members of the self-evaluation group, representatives of the Academic Council, heads of academic departments, administrative and support staff, teaching staff (full-time and part-time), students and student representatives, graduates, and social partners. The expert group was given the opportunity to interview the different status groups separately and to observe the facilities and learning resources. At the end of the site visit, an oral feedback of the findings was given to the institution.

The expert team carrying out the review consisted of six members. Professor Dr Malcolm Cook, Senior higher education expert and former Deputy Vice-Chancellor of the University of Exeter

(UK) acted as the team leader. Dr Neringa Ivanauskienė (Associate Professor in Management, Vice Dean for Academic Affairs, ISM University of Management and Economics, Lithuania), Dr Jacques Kaat, Academic Director of Webster University (the Netherlands), Dr Outi Kallioinen (Rector of Lahti University of Applied Sciences, Finland) and Andrius Šimonėlis, student representative (Lithuania) were the team members. Barbara Michalk, head of section, German Rectors' Conference, acted as secretary to the team.

II. BACKGROUND INFORMATION ABOUT THE INSTITUTION

SMK is a non-state higher education institution, founded in 1994 and established by Nijolė Skuciėnė. According to its statute (approved in 2001, renewed in 2013), its “structure and its modifications are determined by the General Meeting of Stakeholders. SMK autonomy is based on the principle of self-government, academic freedom, respect for human rights and freedoms.”

SMK operates in two cities, in the port city Klaipėda and in the capital Vilnius. A third campus at Telsiai has recently been closed down due to decreasing student numbers.

There are 16 first cycle college study programmes in the study areas of Social Sciences, Physical Sciences and Arts, awarding Professional Bachelor’s degrees. Three study programmes are taught in the English language. One programme (English Philology) has been deregistered.

Based on the data of October 2013 the College has 2365 students. Since its establishment SMK has almost 5000 graduates. Since 2009, the number of full-time students has almost doubled while the number of part-time students has dropped by a third.

Based on the data of October 2013 the College had 228 employees, including 170 lecturers, 21 of whom have a doctorate. A rough estimate shows the staff: student ratio to be almost unchanged over these years.

The institution lists applied research activities carried out by the teaching staff, but it does not give the number of teachers engaged in these research activities.

In 2009 SMK was awarded a Diploma Supplement label, recognising the implementation of the Diploma Supplement at the College.

According to the “Integrated Development Strategy 2011-2020” the College’s mission is “to open and provide lifelong learning opportunities to people, to foster their intellectual and creative powers, to promote self-education, to prepare for a successful professional career and responsible, honest and social way of life”.

III. STRATEGIC MANAGEMENT

SMK is an unusual College that is relatively small and yet which has many strengths. It can truly be described as a family business as the present President and her brother are the stakeholders of the institution which they inherited from their mother. It has a very strong regional presence and excellent levels of employability of its graduates, suggesting an effective process of teaching, learning and transition into the workplace. Relations with alumni are excellent, as are those with significant players in the region. It is unusual in that it has a strong leadership but there is little devolved power and little evidence of devolved budgetary processes.

There is a genuine European perspective in the institution and an awareness of the priorities of the region, the nation and Europe. At the present time the College has notable impact on the region, rather less on the nation and Europe, but the ambition is certainly there.

It has a clearly defined strategic plan that has been shared across the College community including stakeholders outside the institution and which is also available to the public on the College's website (*Integrated Development Strategy 2011-2020*). This plan is detailed and ambitious and looks forward for a period of ten years with periodic reviews to assess the effectiveness of the strategy. The plan, briefly, proposes the following:

- Study Reform
- Development of Lifelong Learning
- Increase of Internationality
- Science-Business synergy issues
- Development of Applied Research Activities
- Creation of Social Partnerships
- Striving for Recognised Quality

Within this period of ten years there are activity plans that are prepared for five years. The plan is a challenging one, especially given the amount of progress required in a number of areas where there will need to be a step change if the ambitions are to be reached. Nevertheless, it is clear that the strategic plan is fit for purpose and is closely aligned with the College's mission. It is furthermore in accordance with the European Higher Education Area and the European Research Area.

The College has a set of targets and indicators in the plan and there are systems in place to monitor progress. The expert team recognised the significant effort that has gone into creating an ambitious strategic plan and also the overall perspective and genuine desire to make progress on a number of fronts as it clearly sees itself as a part of the European Higher Education Area as well as the European Research Area. The Team felt nevertheless (although the strategic plan includes some qualitative and quantitative indicators) that the College would benefit from more detailed quantitative measures of improvement, clearly defined timelines with targets to be achieved year on year as progress is being made towards the overall vision. This would also provide added value to the monitoring of the implementation that is already in place. The strategy of SMK is a public document available to all on the College's website.

On study reform the expert team recognised the desire to move forward but felt that the arrangements in some of the current teaching areas, where there are fixed benches and seats in some rooms, would be more in keeping with a traditional teacher-led environment; it was

recognised that the new building planned in Vilnius would offer a quite different environment. Still there will be changes required in Klaipėda, perhaps with the assistance of the local region which is offering land for a new building. But new buildings are costly to create and equip and at a time of diminishing student numbers in Lithuania there will need to be an increase in student numbers from elsewhere. This would be in keeping with another of the ambitions, but this too will present challenges, as we shall see later. The expert team recognised the sincerity of the ambition of the College but wondered whether there was sufficient awareness of the competition that existed in the same areas of activity.

The Science-Business synergy, development of applied research, creation of social partnership will be considered in detail below. The College's activities in applied research, development and innovation are very much diversified and cover a wide range of areas. Suffice it to say that it would seem that these areas offer less of a challenge given the institution's current activity and strengths.

In a small College with a large number of part-time staff, limited income from student fees but nevertheless with a number of evident strengths, any change of gear is going to present a challenge. The College is, effectively, a family business with an energetic President who is at the centre of the operation and who manages the vision, the operation, the financial decisions and the relations with the region. Significant power is in the hands of a single person and this, in any organisation, represents a risk for obvious reasons. With the desire to expand, the opening of a new building in Vilnius, possibly a new building in Klaipėda, and the everyday running of an organisation, human resources and endeavour would seem to be stretched. The expert team saw evidence of skilled leadership at a number of levels but, eventually, control is in the hands of the President.

The College's Integrated Development Strategy 2011-2020 is publicly available on the College's website, along with the Annual Report on the College's activities. Thus not only the College community receives information via the internal boards and reports, but also the stakeholders, partners in teaching and learning or in RDI activities are enabled to keep up with the HEI's implementation of its strategic plans.

In short, the College does have a valid quality assurance system and software that supports it. At the time of the visit this was not fully operational but there is no reason to suspect that in time this process will not be effective. The College collates feedback from its students and acts upon such feedback. SMK's Quality Management System consists of a quality policy and quality objectives, a Quality Manual. The Quality Management System covers all the areas listed in the Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area (ESG), Part 1, and internal audits are conducted according to Part 2 of this document. Procedures are clearly defined and processes enacted.

The expert team found a number of examples where the data that was provided was either unclear or apparently incorrect. The College has a sophisticated quality assurance process with new software that, at the time of the visit, was still bedding in, with the adaption of the software to the College's needs. The process at the moment is more active in the area of data and procedures, rather less so in the area of analysis, maybe due to the adaption of an ISO-model. The President is responsible for the key action chains, among them the quality assurance of study

programmes and student performance, as well as the overall monitoring of the College. There is an advisory board at the College but the expert team did not receive a clear idea of its role.

It is evident that there are regular surveys of students and programme committees with external representatives (although the role of these committees and their relationship with the major committee, the Academic Board, is not clear). Academic Board is the fulcrum of the institution, it deals with all the major issues and has student representation and external membership. It meets twice a year, but more often in case meetings are needed. It is not clear if any decisions on academic affairs are taken outside the Academic Board between the meetings.

The institution is able to make appropriate changes in its internal structures according to the needs of the various programmes. Such changes are agreed by the Academic Board, when circumstances require some modification of the existing programme, be it implementation needs of studies or other required modifications.

The expert group found evidence that the programme committees and the Academic Board work together effectively and efficiently, although obviously along informal lines of cooperation. The group would like to recommend that the institution considers the creation of a more formal framework without giving up the evident usefulness of the flexibility of the present arrangements.

If the College is to attain its aims it will need to build on its evident strengths and be active in a number of areas:

- Develop a formal mechanism for working with external partners, since this does not appear to exist at present.
- Increase the competence of the full range of teaching staff, perhaps by the creation of a specialised learning and teaching centre staffed by pedagogical specialists, as it is clear that not all staff have the highest qualifications.
- Develop the work of the Study Office, perhaps also appoint a dedicated special needs officer with expertise in physical disability and other special needs, as there is no evidence that support for students with special needs is as effective as it should be.
- Develop the role of the Student Council so that it becomes a formal organisation with a role in quality assurance that guarantees the expression of the student voice. It would be more of a partner in terms of policy than its present role of developing student clubs and social activities. Students can have an important role and voice in the management of an institution and, at the time of the visit, the expert team saw little evidence that the student voice was being effectively used.

The expert team found ample evidence of a harmonious and active organisation, where communication is good, the gender balance of staff is appropriate, and, as far as the expert team could observe from the meetings and from the environment, staff are willing to be supportive and active in the advancement of the College's aims.

There is always a risk in a small institution where power and decision-making is in the hands of a particular individual or individuals – are there good contingency plans in place, is there a register of risks that the College has prepared in the case of emergency? A more pronounced subsidiarity within the institution might be a way to reduce this risk.

Another risk is the security of academic standards in a small private College – is there sufficient oversight of the assessed work? There is excellent practice in the marking procedures of the final thesis with double marking and the assessment of an external partner. But elsewhere the setting of papers and the marking of them is done by one individual (cf. IV).

The buildings the expert team all seem to be in excellent condition with immaculate decoration and first-class equipment although, as the experts have seen, the furnishing of some of the rooms is not best suited for innovative student learning.

The expert team did not have access to detailed accounts but looking at the College with a critical eye one would naturally ask how safe it is to expand at a time of demographic change, at a time when there is intense competition for the best students both internally and externally. More and more institutions are offering degree courses in English, more and more universities are developing first-class online courses, so the competition with SMK is intense. All the more reason, therefore, to check progress regularly with detailed quantitative targets established for survey.

The College has a clear policy on academic ethics, laid out in the Statute. A *Code of Academic Ethics* has been approved and renewed in 2012. It is being disseminated and discussed regularly with first-year students and during their progression through their coursework.

In short, the expert team had full confidence in the management and processes of the institution as well as in the commitment to the College at all levels of the management. As in any institution, some of the practices could be improved and the expert team has a number of suggestions and recommendations for the College – but the expert team also identifies a number of areas of good practice. There is little doubt that relatively minor changes could bring about substantial improvements: the quality assurance process while planned conscientiously, need some further implementation; academic staff could be appointed with higher qualifications or staff in post should be encouraged to undertake further study; students should be encouraged to play a larger part in terms of quality assurance and general strategic management. They should have a larger voice in the institution.

The expert team would like to commend the “good practice” of the commitment of the leadership and all staff as evidenced by the active collaboration of all levels and the encouragement of and participation in peer-learning activities.

For the enhancement of its performance, the expert team would like to recommend to the College the further operationalisation of the College’s strategies through the creation of detailed quantitative measures for improvement, with defined annual targets to make progress more visible; and the improvement of data management.

Judgement on the area: Strategic Management is given positive evaluation.

IV. ACADEMIC STUDIES AND LIFE-LONG LEARNING

The College offers a variety of professional Bachelor programmes mainly focused on business and law, which are in accordance with its mission and strategic direction, as well as most conventional study programmes: social sciences, physical sciences and art studies. The expert team saw evidence of well-documented academic policies and procedures, competent teaching staff, good staff development programmes (e.g. staff peer-learning, encouragement of international staff exchange), and satisfied students with good career prospects resulting from the compliance of the programmes with the needs of the regional, national and overall economic strategy. There are pedagogical training programmes in place, and there are regular staff appraisals. The degrees awarded, with additional European Diploma Supplements (the College was granted the DS label), appear to be compliant with both national and European Qualifications Frameworks, credits according to ECTS are being used consistently and throughout the provision.

Not all programmes however were as “unique” in the opinion of the expert team as the College claims, especially when seen in the context of not just regional but also national and certainly international development. This is perhaps where the reality and the College’s ambition levels are slightly at odds with each other.

That was also the case with the holistic education model that is being implemented. Instructors are encouraged to use a variety of teaching methods, and to experiment with delivery models and techniques, e.g. moot courts in Law, IT-based interactive creativity in Public Relations. Internships form a regular part of the students’ introduction into the labour market, providing them with additional practical skills and often leading to topics for their final theses. The modern teaching approach, however, also requires additional teacher training, and it would be advisable to establish a Teaching and Learning Centre with high level pedagogical expertise to ensure that the needs of the (mainly part-time) staff are being met.

The HEI’s policy for recognition of prior learning (RPL) is based on the national regulations, accepting a maximum of 75% of credits from RPL. There are procedures in place for the evaluation of prior learning. The final thesis cannot be replaced by prior written documents. Whilst there were clearly students who had been given credits for work-based activity and for credits obtained at other colleges, there seems, to the expert team, that there might be a need to have a centralised unit for student counselling which could also deal with the requests for accreditation of prior learning and prior experience. However, the College has taken a different view and made a decision not to form a separate structural division. The practices in place should be based on clear policies about what constitutes transferable credits and experiential learning, how the latter can be tested, and what the maximum number of these types of credits should be that can be applied to any degree, in order to secure the integrity of the SMK awards.

With around 30% of students registered in part-time programmes, with excellent linkages with the regional community either through personal contacts of the College leadership or through the Careers Office, and with a clear recognition that accessibility of learners can be improved through the development of online and blended learning, there is evidence of good life-long learning practices at the College. However, the expert team was concerned that the quality assessment systems currently in place were not fully equipped to deal with the intended

developments in distance learning, and particularly the adaptation of examination procedures for this deserves some extra attention.

Life-long learning would suit regional and national needs for the creation of a skilled workforce but this is a competitive area and there are many players developing online teaching that will compete with a more traditional form of teaching. SMK believes that a form of blended education with a mixture of traditional and new teaching technology will provide solutions. SMK claims that it is 'unique'. Other institutions, however, are offering similar packages, but perhaps without the family atmosphere that is seen, locally, to be one of the institution's strengths. The College would do well to think carefully about what it means by 'unique' and to develop its personal identity which might indeed be a strength in the future.

The current assessment system includes regular student and faculty evaluation processes, programme reviews, and input from social partners. There is evidence that employers and other organisations in the region give regular feedback of the achievements of alumni in their employment and discuss the curriculum development according to the needs of the labour market. There are regular meetings for programme updates in which ideas for new study programmes are also suggested.

The input from alumni in the programme reviews and curriculum development could be improved, but nevertheless it is there. Its more informal features might be put on a more formalised basis. Also, alumni from the College's Ba-Programmes often return for the College's provisions for life-long learning and give feedback from their work-experience.

There is good study counselling and adequate programme documentation with a focus on learning outcomes (although where a thesis requirement is part of the degree programme, it should also be linked to the learning outcomes which, from the evidence seen by the expert team, appeared not to be the case in the BA Transport and Logistics Business). The intended shift in assessment procedures to incorporate transferable competences, although commendable, begs the question how this can be measured and how this can be implemented with faculty who are to a large extent hired on part-time contracts. The expert team recognises that part-time faculty provide the College with more flexibility and very useful practical expertise, but this may also give rise to continuity problems at programme level and diminished loyalty to the institution. The plans of the College to increase applied research output are also difficult to achieve without staff who can commit full time. As the College seeks to expand and diversify, it may want to try and achieve a better ratio between full-time and part-time positions.

It is important that the College continues to work on security of standards. There was some evidence that the final thesis, especially when written in English, was double graded with input from external assessors, but many theses written in Lithuanian that were shown to the expert team did not appear to have any grading rubrics or final grade, or any visible evidence of external marking. The expert team would strongly advise the College to include more externality in the assessment processes, not just for the final thesis but also for other coursework. External assessors should also be sought from other Colleges and universities, not just from local companies, in order to provide benchmarking of the assessment and avoid the large disparity of grades that was sometimes noticeable between external and internal supervisors.

Accessibility for students with special needs also deserves more attention. The College is responsive to students with disabilities on an individual and ad hoc basis, but it may want to consider having a centralised service with staff who have the appropriate specialised training. Accessibility for students cannot be improved by online education only – accessibility plans for physical access and resources for students with physical and learning challenges (e.g. dyslexia) need to be addressed.

There are excellent facilities in Klaipėda and a good virtual learning environment (Moodle) that supports classroom teaching, although some inconsistency was noted between staff about how much of the teaching materials was to be uploaded. The library is small but adequate, with access to electronic books, articles, and databases as an ample compensation.

There is evidence of student self-governance at the College, but most of the student activity is in the area of social clubs. The participation of students in the College's bodies and committees is evident, but there does not seem to be a culture of constructive criticism and offering different opinions among the students, which may be an impediment to improvement. This is also evident from the curriculum which could benefit from added foundation courses in Critical Thinking, which would also provide a better basis for methodology courses and quality enhancement in applied research.

There is evidence that the College is very much aware of its being part of the European Higher Education Area. The "Bologna instruments", such as Diploma Supplement, ECTS, Qualifications Framework, are part and parcel of its academic activities. The College is active in ERASMUS and GRUNDTVIG projects and aims at being a reliable partner for other HEI in the European Higher Education Area for the exchange of students and teaching staff. Its Joint Degree Programmes are further evidence for its ability to cooperate with other institutions across borders.

The aim for internationalisation is the one that perhaps presents the greatest challenge. An operationalisation of the efforts, including a connection to the distance learning strategy, might enable the HEI to better check the achievements against the strategic goals and the targeted time frame. Furthermore, there will need to be rapid development of second-language proficiency, probably English or Russian, if students from other countries are to be attracted to SMK. The building will need to be open to visitors from a range of countries with signage in a language or languages other than Lithuanian. Teaching material and research productions will need to be produced in other languages. There will need to be a significant change of culture, with more students taking up mobility schemes as well as teaching staff and support staff. Competition in this area is, again, fierce, so the institution will need to consider what makes it different, what it can offer that other institutions do not. It may be that Vilnius is a more attractive environment than Klaipėda so there will be internal competition for the same students and staff. There is little linguistic confidence in the organisation, with, of course, some notable exceptions.

Staff training and development is certainly also needed to achieve the high levels of ambition with regard to internationalisation. English proficiency amongst teaching staff, support staff, and current students alike is poor at the moment, and if the stretch goals for internationalisation are to be met the College needs to work on bringing the internal organisation and operations. Based on the current internationalisation levels, it will almost certainly not be possible to achieve the target of 7 out of 16 programmes taught in foreign languages by 2015.

Simple measures like signage in English or Russian are needed both in Vilnius and Klaipėda, but there should also be high(er) IELTS/TOEFL proficiency standards for teaching staff and language training for support staff. There does not appear to be an internationalisation target in HR management. The buddy system the expert team learned about is an excellent way of involving current students in the internationalisation activities, but international mobility and internships abroad should be stimulated more, in particular for teaching staff. In its strategic plan, the College aims at 4 lecturers per year to go abroad. English-language documentation such as grading policies and other practical information, which is now provided to exchange students in hard copy only, should be available on the website.

For the College to gain an international reputation in teaching and applied research, which will also benefit knowledge transfer within the region, there will need to be further professionalisation within the institution.

The expert team would like to commend the following areas of good practice in Academic Studies and Life-Long Learning: the number of student internships, many of them leading to practical projects as the final thesis, the level of employment in the graduates, the willingness to invest into internationalisation, as evidenced by the “buddy system” for international students, and the encouragement for staff to take up international internships.

For the enhancement of its performance, the expert team would like to recommend to the College a study office for student counselling, a stronger role for student representatives, the professionalisation of staff in Teaching and Learning, establishment of a Teaching and Learning Centre e.g. for new methods of teaching, including more critical approaches and foreign language proficiency.

Judgement on the area: Academic Studies and Life-Long Learning is given positive evaluation.

V. RESEARCH AND ART

Within the framework of Horizon 2020 European cities are currently developing strategies towards becoming “smarter cities”. These strategies are also based on a new understanding of innovation, grounded in the concept of open innovation ecosystems, global innovation chains, and on citizens’ empowerment for shaping innovation and urban development. Smart City creates an innovation ecosystem in which the RDI function of a University of Applied Sciences can truly make a difference. To support these objectives in Lithuania there is a national smart specialisation strategy to which SMK’s activities are closely and strategically linked, as evidenced not only in the strategic plans but also in their annual reports.

By describing itself as a University of Applied Sciences, SMK sets itself in the league of higher education institutions with a clear objective of applied research as one of the cornerstones of its operations.

In European Higher Education Area (EHEA) universities of applied sciences are working in the fields of professional higher education producing graduates for various professions and performing research, development and innovation activities. They work closely with the region, organisations and municipalities and their main purpose is to serve the region by producing graduates in a variety of educational fields. UASs also have a strong role in reforming the knowledge base (regional, national, international) with applied research as well as development and innovation activities. Through research results it is possible to reform education, update curricula and have stronger impact on the region.

As an applied research institution the concept of research in SMK is primarily focused on practice-based, applied research aiming to solve problems, produce solutions and innovations and at its best, enabling the creation of new companies. However, in the SER of SMK different terms are being used to describe the form of research being undertaken (research, scientific research, applied research). It might be more appropriate and fit for purpose to use a single term, i.e. ‘applied research’, leaving the objectives of basic research and scientific research mainly for the academic universities.

SMK describes its vision as a “Unique, Modern and Creative higher school inspiring for new ideas, meaningful discoveries and constant improvement.” and its mission as “to open and provide lifelong learning opportunities to people, to foster their intellectual and creative powers, to promote self-education, to prepare for a successful professional career and responsible, honest and social way of life.” (*Integrated Development Strategy 2011 - 2020*).

The vision stays at a very general level but can be interpreted also to promote research, development and innovation activities. In its mission SMK places importance on its education task in providing lifelong learning opportunities.

In SMK’s *Integrated Development Strategy* the main objectives are to seek new ideas, to promote economic growth and to create a sustainable society. The strategy states that for SMK it is essential to develop the institutional capacity to create new knowledge and transform it into innovations. The College emphasises the synergy of science and business. SMK sees itself as an entrepreneurial academic institution where new ideas and knowledge are generated and transformed into the innovations and products that are readily applicable in the market, creating

value for the institution, region, country and Europe. In SMK's RDI function it can be seen that several steps have been taken towards these ambitious goals but SMK has not yet achieved a substantial amount of real output of this kind. The implementation of the development strategy underway and some early results can be seen, but there is still some way to go before the goals are achieved. Nevertheless, the annually held students' "Science Week" is an example of the College's good practices on the way.

One of the key priorities in SMK's research activities is the integration of studies, science and business through the development of the relevant research trends and transforming scientific knowledge into innovations. The development targets in the RDI area are clearly defined in Strategic Priority 3:

- Development of applied research in scientific fields relevant to SMK
- Strengthening of SMK research potential and increasing the internationality
- Commercialisation of knowledge and its application for public needs
- Intellectual entrepreneurship
- Transfer of research results to the study content and study process.

These development steps need to be implemented effectively into the daily activities of the entire staff, and managed as well as resourced so that it is possible to attain these ambitious goals. It is important to define specific targets per year for each field in order to follow up the development path to 2020.

From the strategic perspective SMK has taken the RDI function very seriously in order to compete with other higher education institutions and to be recognised also for its RDI impact and results. In order to achieve these goals a much larger proportion of PhDs (31 out of 194, incl. part-time teachers from industry and business, plus 18 working towards a doctorate) and international researchers among the staff are needed, so that there would be critical mass in the selected fields.

SMK Integrated Development strategy for 2011-2020 is well in line with the Klaipėda Regional Development Plan to promote the development of knowledge society in the region, which in turn is also related to the Smart City Initiative in the EU. One of the goals of this development is to "Promote the development of innovations, research and technologies (DIRT) in the region". SMK has created a valuable network with Klaipėda regional actors and the city. SMK also responds to the Vilnius Strategic Development Plan and describes in its own strategy the priorities in Vilnius.

In the 2005 conclusions of SMK's evaluation it was stated that "Social Sciences College of Higher Education develops applied research needed for regions, consults local authority and other subjects". Since then SMK has continued developing its RDI activities more strategically and in active cooperation with the region and especially with Klaipėda city. During the past 20 years SMK has created strong networks and cooperation with the region and they seem to work effectively.

"Research, education and innovation are three central and strongly interdependent drivers of the knowledge-based society. Together they are referred to as the "knowledge triangle". To realise ERA, research needs to develop strong links with education and innovation." (European

Research Area¹) In its strategy SMK links its internationalisation efforts to the aims of the European Research Area and has already shown some progress in these steps, e.g. building strategic partnerships, founding the Science and Business Cluster and participating in various networks. Integration of education and RDI is at an early stage and has not yet reached the full potential of integrating students' studies in RDI activities during the study units.

Universities of Applied Sciences are generally strong in activities of the regions for the birth of innovations, new services and new growth enterprises leading to increase in economic and sustainable growth. The Europe 2020 Innovation Union Flagship Initiative states that in a global environment, Europe must also develop its own distinctive approach to innovation which builds on its strengths and capitalises on its values by focusing on innovations that address the major societal challenges, pursuing a broad concept of innovation, both research-driven innovation and innovation in business models, involving all actors and all regions in the innovation cycle. The College has strong links to the business in its region, cooperating with organisations and companies in projects of applied research and innovation conducted by the teaching staff.

According to the EU2020 Innovation Union Flagship Initiative, partnerships between higher education institutes, research centres and businesses, at regional, national and international level, are actively promoted. On the whole SMK's strategy in the field of RDI activities supports well the aims of Innovation Union as long as the implementation of the various measures is successful and effective. The College cooperates with a number of Lithuanian universities and other HEI in RDI projects.

In the EU2020 Innovation Union Flagship Initiative it is stated that excellence is a key criterion for research and education policy. Research and project funding are increasingly allocated on a competitive basis and the balance between institutional and project-based funding of research has a clear rationale. Higher education and research institutes should enjoy the necessary autonomy to organise their activities in the areas of education, research, and innovation, apply open recruitment methods and to draw on alternative sources of funding.

The research activity of this institution has been increasing in recent years and SMK has to some extent built up the competence level of the staff in PhDs (compared to the 2005 evaluation) and methodological competences as well as research infrastructure with labs and software. However, the number of externally-funded projects has increased very little and the project portfolio is fairly thin so far.

The expert group has identified SMK's good practice of obliging its staff to publish annually, but in order to increase its RDI impact the character of the publications should move into a more scientific direction because the number of scientific monographs, compiled scientific papers and similar publications as well as the number of international peer-reviewed articles or scientific publications need to be increased. At the moment the publications seem to be mainly textbooks produced in Lithuanian but not research-based publications. The concept of scientific publication needs clarification in SMK in order for it to be comparable with other HEIs.

Presentations in regional conferences should be developed into articles in international research journals in order to disseminate the results to wider academic forums and gain recognition. This

¹ http://ec.europa.eu/research/era/understanding/what/era_in_the_knowledge_triangle_en.htm

in turn means an increase in scientific writing competence as well as improvement in English language skills for staff in general. SMK should also try to attract international research staff. The dissemination of practical solutions and results seems to be effectively organised through various forums and activities.

Based on the results presented the research activity should clearly be strengthened both in quality and in quantity as well as integrated to students' learning processes at the early stages of studies. A decision on the most important areas of applied research could support a more focused approach not only to research as such, but also to its connection to learning and teaching. Projects are excellent learning environments to deliver curricula and they offer students good possibilities to learn transferable skills. At the moment student participation is mainly in small company projects and during the thesis process, but the students' Science Week is a good practice that supports the strengthening of scientific approaches in learning and teaching.

In the ambitious objectives of internationalisation of SMK, externally funded international research projects within its focus areas are a very suitable aim for the College. To achieve this objective the general ambition level in RDI should be taken higher in order to be able to receive more externally funded international projects. In this objective the proportion of internationally esteemed full-time PhDs in staff will need to be increased.

To boost its strategy SMK has organised internships abroad for its researchers, invited foreign scientists to work in the College and strengthened its participation in international networks which is clearly a strength in strategic internationalisation efforts.

The expert team would like to commend the following areas of good practice in Research and Art: the involvement in the regional development through applied research activities, the obligation of teachers to publish annually and the students' Science Week.

For the enhancement of its performance, the expert team would like to recommend to the College in RDI to engage more staff with scientific (i.e. doctorate) qualification to boost the output not only nationally, but also by publications in international journals.

Judgement on the area: Research and Art is given positive evaluation.

VI. IMPACT ON REGIONAL AND NATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

In the Self-Evaluation Report (SER) the College clearly articulates the creation of the value for society as one of College's priorities (Integrated Development Strategy for 2011-2020). In the light of that in 2011 the College prepared a strategic document that concentrates on Analysis of Environment, Resources and Needs of Stakeholders. Also, in the mission statement, the College highlighted the aim to take part in regional and national development by providing educational opportunities to the inhabitants.

The College evaluates the performance of its impact on regional and national development using four measures – (1) implementation of study programmes; (2) provision of opportunities and conditions for lifelong learning; (3) research and consultancy activities, promotion of science; and (4) realisation of ideas, stated in the public/social mission. The expert team recommends that the College employ more detailed quantitative measures when it evaluates the effectiveness of impact.

The expert team was provided with the information that the College strives to strengthen relationship with social partners, to promote knowledge created in the applied research activities to social partners through social and educational projects as well as to contribute to the economic growth and development of the society.

The College is a member of several associations and the participation in these provides good background for the students' internship projects and practical research projects. Social partners are involved in suggesting the practical topics for the final thesis. Students are encouraged in the practical projects and final theses to explore relevant business problems. The College organises competitions for the best final thesis and encourages students to present the practical projects and theses in students' conferences where social partners are also invited.

The College has had various cooperation activities with social partners while defining study programmes' quality, study results, the students' competences as well as business society needs for new programmes. Close partnership with the social partners helps the College to conduct various practical projects, provides places for students' internships, and finds the topics with practical value for the final theses. The expert team found a number of examples of how the students of SMK are involved in the practical projects.

The meetings with the social partners of the College convinced the expert team that the College took an active part in the Klaipėda region development. The College participates fully in the city life, organises various events and conferences, offers various study programmes and training for the citizens and civil servants. The College actively participates in the preparation of Klaipėda city's strategic development plan. The social partners have no doubts about the competences of SMK graduates and agree that they are well prepared for jobs. There is ample evidence of the graduates' employment rates; graduates have established prominent business ventures in the region. The College has agreements with the social partners for internships and is on the list of training service providers for regional civil servants.

Despite the fact that there are more students in Vilnius than in Klaipėda, the expert team saw clear evidence that most practical projects are done in the Klaipėda region, but it is recognised that the site visit for the evaluation did not include a visit to the Vilnius campus so that we may

have only a partial view of operations. This statement referring to projects is based on information gathered by communicating with the Colleges' social partners and analysing the information provided in SER. It also supports the expert team's concerns regarding the College's ability to create the same level of impact on the development of the Vilnius region as in the Klaipėda region.

The expert team was less sure about the College's ability to create the same level of institutional impact on the development of the Vilnius region and on development at the national level. The College will need to think carefully about how to spread its activities when the expansion planned to Vilnius is accomplished. This could be dealt with hand in hand with the definition of the most important areas of applied research.

In the site meetings the expert team gained the impression that the cooperation with social partners in Klaipėda and its region heavily relies on individual contact (the president and deputy director of the SMK), i.e. not on the organisational level. The expert team saw plenty of evidence of the College's impact on the regional development of the Klaipėda region, but considered that there might be a danger that the expansion of activity in Vilnius could have a negative impact on the work done in Klaipėda - will there be internal competition?

The impact the College creates on regional development is in compliance with the regional priorities. The SMK reports organising and implementing many events and social initiatives (the SER states that more than 700 events were held during the evaluation period) on student, community and society levels, participation in various conferences and projects. Although the ambitious plans of the College to make progress on a number of fronts is praiseworthy, this also raises questions about the lack of clear focus and the development of its personal identity.

The expert team considered that as most of the College teachers work part time they might not see themselves as regional developers, although they are experienced practitioners and bring their valuable knowledge into the classroom. This can be seen from the information gained during site visits as well as from the documents provided by the College.

In conclusion, the expert team considers that the analysed area of the impact on regional and national development is positive but notes that there are areas which will need to be improved.

The expert team would like commend the following areas of good practice in Impact on Regional and National Development: the close cooperation with regional and national organisations and companies, especially in the Klaipėda region, in practical projects related to study and teaching or to research and innovation, thus ensuring the employability of its graduates and its RDI impact.

For the enhancement of its performance, the expert team would like to recommend to the College the use of more detailed quantitative measures in its evaluations and a more focused approach to regional/national projects.

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

VII. GOOD PRACTICE AND ENHANCEMENT RECOMMENDATIONS

The expert team would like commend the following areas of good practice:

- the commitment of the leadership and all staff as evidenced by
 - the active collaboration of all levels,
 - the encouragement of and participation in peer-learning activities

- the strong regional presence of the College as evidenced by
 - the number of student internships, many of them leading to practical projects as the final thesis,
 - the level of employment in the graduates,
 - the involvement in the regional development through applied research activities

- the engagement in RDI activities as evidenced by
 - the obligation of teachers to publish annually,
 - the students' Science Week

- the willingness to invest into internationalisation, as evidenced by
 - the "buddy system" for international students,
 - the encouragement for staff to take up international internships.

For the enhancement of its performance, the expert team would like to recommend to the College the following areas:

- operationalisation of the College's strategies:
 - the creation of detailed quantitative measures for improvement, with defined annual targets to make progress more visible,
 - the definition of its most important areas of applied research,
 - the improvement of data management.

- the development of more formal mechanisms of cooperation
 - within the institution (more subsidiarity to reduce the number of responsibilities of one person [better risk management], a study office for student counselling, student representation, role of the Academic Council and programme committees),
 - with external partners

- the professionalisation of staff
 - in Teaching and Learning: establishment of a Teaching and Learning Centre e.g. for new methods of teaching, including more critical approaches, language proficiency,
 - in RDI: more staff with scientific (i.e. doctorate) qualifications to boost the output not only nationally, but also by publications in international journals.

VIII. JUDGEMENT

College of Social Sciences is given positive evaluation.

Grupės vadovas:
Team leader: Prof. Dr Malcolm C. Cook

Grupės nariai:
Team members: Dr Neringa Ivanauskienė

Dr Jacques Kaat

Dr Outi Kallioinen

Andrius Šimonėlis

Vertinimo sekretorius:
Review secretary: Barbara Michalk

ANNEX. COLLEGE OF SOCIAL SCIENCES RESPONSE TO REVIEW REPORT



Public Institution. Nemuno str. 2, LT-91199 Klaipėda. Phone. / Fax. +370 46 397 077, e.mail. info@smk.lt; www.smk.lt
Code 291823650, VAT code LT100007267913.
Acc. No. LT05 4010 0423 0071 6035 AB DnB bank, bank code 40100

Centre for Quality Assessment in Higher Education

03-06-2014 Nr. 02-321

RESPONSE TO THE SMK UNIVERSITY OF APPLIED SOCIAL SCIENCES REVIEW REPORT

The SMK University of Applied Social Sciences (subsequently SMK) is grateful to the expert group for their submitted insights and recommendations, as well as for professional work during the visit. The commendations of the experts will help the SMK to improve and seek for higher goals further on, and make its activity more effective.

Realizing the huge amount of information and documents, that the experts had to be introduced to, we submit our notices regarding some misstatements in the Report.

1. Paragraph 11.4 of the Report states that the SMK Vilnius branch has 3 times more students, which is not correct, because there are 997 students in Klaipėda city and 1369 students in Vilnius branch.

2. Paragraph 5 of the Report "The background information about the institution" specifies that "Since 2009 the number of lecturers has increased from 145 to current 228".

To be corrected: The Self-assessment report indicates that according to the data of October 2013, there were 170 lecturers working in the SMK, 21 of whom has a doctoral degree. The total number of staff in the SMK is 228.

3. Paragraph 6 in page 6 of the Report of experts says that "the expert group failed finding out a clear role of the Academic Board", and Paragraph 7 expresses a doubt "whether any decisions related to academic affairs are made beyond the boundaries of the Academic Board".

SMK comments: All functions of the Academic Board, described in the SMK Statute and Work Regulations of the Academic Board, are implemented and no other decisions, related to academic affairs are made beyond the boundaries of the Academic Board.

4. Paragraph 2 in page 7 of the Report of activity assessment suggests: „to develop the activity of Study Department and to appoint a special employee, responsible for work with students of special needs“.

We would like to specify that both Klaipėda and Vilnius has appointed employees of study department responsible for this activity. Since 2012, when the SMK joined the national project "Assuring study availability for students with special needs", the University trained lecturers to work with students having physical disability and other needs. The lecturers not only consult other lecturers in the SMK, but also give support to students having special need.

5. Paragraph 1 of Part IV of the Report "Academic studies and life-long learning" mentions that the "University offers various professional bachelor study programmes, mostly in the areas of business and law."

We would like you to specify this information, mentioning the study areas that the University implements most study programmes – social, physical sciences and art studies. Talking about study fields – they would be business, finance, communication and marketing.

6. Paragraph 4 of part IV of the Report “Academic studies and life-long learning” offers to “establish a centralized student counseling division, which could deal with the requests for acknowledging results of prior learning and prior experience”.

We would like to supplement that having assessed the volumes of the activities of study result accreditation and acknowledgement of competences gained in an informal way, in March 2013 the University made a decision not to form a separate structural division, but to appoint people in charge, who would perform counseling and other functions of giving support. This activity is implemented in a centralized way, following the order of the SMK University of Applied Social Sciences of assessing and acknowledging competences gained in an informal way, approved by 01-03-2013 Order No. V-53 of the Director. The University has prepared methods for separate study programmes of assessing competences gained in an informal way and independently. All this defines requirements in order to avoid violating qualification degrees granted by the SMK and provides the persons with opportunities to join the study process in the University as fluently as possible.

7. Paragraph 4 in page 10 of the Report of experts states: “The University has appropriately drafted documents on study counseling and programmes, where a special attention is paid to learning outcomes (though final thesis is one of the requirements of a degree granting programme, it should also be related to learning outcomes, which was not the case in the BA Transport and Logistics Business”).

This conclusion does not correspond to the real situation, because learning outcomes of all implemented programmes are demonstrated in a final thesis and qualification degree is granted only after defence of a final thesis. Transport and Logistics Business Study Programme was assessed by an international expert group in 2013 and it was accredited for 6 years.

8. Paragraph 5 in page 10 of the Report says that: “Final theses, especially those written in the English language were assessed in 2 marks, including external assessors. However most final theses written in Lithuanian were not assessed in any mark, also there were no signs that they were assessed by external assessors.”

We would like to supplement that Final theses in the University are defended publicly in the commission of final theses assessment approved by the order of the Director. Results of final thesis assessment are not written in a Final thesis itself. Aiming at objective assessment, representatives of social partners (3 persons): practitioners, heads of companies and institutions, experts of activity areas are invited to head the commissions of theses defence. The commission of Final theses assessment assesses presentation and defence of a Final thesis in a mark. When making a decision on the final assessment of the defended thesis, assessments of thesis supervisor, a reviewer and all the members of the commission are taken into account. Results of Final thesis defence are marked in the minutes of meetings and all Final theses are assessed in marks. Results of Final thesis assessment are not written in a final thesis itself.

SMK University of Applied Social Sciences once again would like to thank the team of experts for the comprehensive assessment of institutional activity, emphasising strengths and providing rational and skillful suggestions for the improvement and risk reduction. Let us ensure you that all presented suggestions and recommendations will be implemented in order to assure the continuous growth and development.

Director

Gabija Skucaite

Neringa Cekanaviciene, 846397077, neringa.cekanaviciene@smk.lt