



## **STUDIJŲ KOKYBĖS VERTINIMO CENTRAS**

### **ŠIAULIŲ VALSTYBINĖS KOLEGIJOS**

### **VEIKLOS VERTINIMO IŠVADOS**

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### **INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW REPORT OF**

### **ŠIAULIAI STATE COLLEGE**

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## I. INTRODUCTION

1. Šiauliai State College (SVK/the College) submitted a self-evaluation report (SER) that addressed the key elements required by the Lithuanian Institutional Review process. The SER was prepared by the Self-Evaluation Review Group within the College that included managers, staff, students and a representative from employer and social partners. The draft report was shared widely with all stakeholders who contributed through a consultation process. Students and external stakeholders confirmed that they had been involved in the consultation process and were able to make comments on the SER. The SER also drew on information annual feedback reports, student feedback, and made reference to key themes and issues that the College felt to be of significance at the current time. The SER also included self-critique and highlighted areas for improvement. The Review Team (The Team) came to the view that the SER was well written and clear with an appropriate tone of self-critical comment about the issues which were presented.
2. The SER covered the information required to prepare the team for its visit to the College. A number of appendices were included to elaborate detail of the following aspects of provision; college management structures, student profile data, a full list of all programmes currently on offer, information on the previous review in 2006 and detailed information on professorial publications.

### **The Process of the Review**

3. Before visiting the College, members of the review team (The Team) reviewed the SER and its annexes, commenting on the points made and the questions that were prompted. Each member submitted initial comments on the SER using the SKVC review criteria. The initial responses were mapped into a document for the team that highlighted recurring issues, potential areas of good practice and areas requiring further information. This facilitated the development of the programme of activities of the review, and enabled identification of potential areas of enquiry for the team. On arrival at SKVC the team used the first day of the review to establish a clear overview of the process and undertake additional training & preparation from the Sub Director and staff of SKVC, including *inter alia*: the higher education system in Lithuania; procedures that must be followed for Institutional Review; and the protocols & courtesies to be observed within the review process. An external assessment of the College's learning resources was

provided for the Institutional Review by Lithuania's Research and Higher Education Monitoring and Analysis Centre (MOSTA). The team was able to learn more about the national policy arrangements including the funding arrangements which were pertinent to SVK.

4. The site visit to SVK took place over the three days (5,6 & 7 November 2013) and included 13 formal meetings with College staff, students and external partners. A tour to review facilities on the main SVK campus site was also included and was supplemented by a presentation on the other campus facilities. The team spent the final day of the review day at SKVC reviewing the evidence collected during the review, discussing and agreeing the findings, and summarising the conclusions of the review. The Review Team came to a collective and full agreement on all of the judgment in the final report. During all meetings the Secretary to the team, Professor Sue Frost, took detailed notes, and after each meeting the team identified key points and areas for further exploration in subsequent meetings.
5. Additional Material was available to the team before and during the site visit. The members of the team were presented with the results of the review of learning resources and associated infrastructure conducted by MOSTA and with the evaluation decision of 2006. The team received a range of information from the College in advance of the visit including the annual report, a breakdown of the student profile and information on the staff profile of the College.
6. While on site, the College provided further information including a range of SVK policy documents, student information and Ministry of Education and Science orders relating to accreditation of prior learning.
7. College staff and students participated actively in meetings and were committed to the process of review. The team was impressed with the willingness of staff, students and external colleagues to engage with the review process and this was exemplified by the number of external stakeholders who travelled to meetings and the large number of staff, students and employers who attended the final feedback meeting. All meetings were conducted with the aid of an interpreter to support the members of the team who do not speak Lithuanian. Many staff were able to speak English but were understandably

reluctant to use their second language in meetings they considered to be of considerable importance to them and their College.

8. At the beginning of each meeting the Chair explained the purpose of the review, assured those attending of the non-attributable nature of any comments and invited colleagues to be open and frank in their responses. The meetings were held in a non-confrontational style and participants were willing to make constructive comments and answer questions openly, supporting one another in the process.

9. The review team consisted of the following members:

- Prof. dr Erich Hoedl – Chair of the Review – Emeritus in Wuppertal and Vice-President of European Academy of Sciences and Arts (EASA), member of the Austrian Accreditation Council/Vienna (2005-2012), Austria;
- Dr Jacques Kaat – Academic director of Webster University, external consultant for European accreditation panels (broad experience with American, British, and Dutch higher education and accreditation systems), AIESEC Advisory Board – member of the Leiden Advisory Board for this international student association, the Netherlands;
- Greta Kasperavičiūtė – Student representative – student of Economics and Management faculty at Kaunas University of Technology;
- Mindaugas Paunksnis – Employer representative – Senior administrator of College of Dental Medicine of Columbia university, USA;
- Dr Tiit Roosmaa – Rector on the Estonian Information Technology College, member of the Council of the Estonian Higher Education Quality Agency (2006-2011), Estonia;
- Prof. Susan Frost – Secretary to Panel – Emeritus Professor and former Pro-Vice Chancellor, University of Huddersfield. Institutional Reviewer with Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education UK and Reviewer with Qualifications & Quality Assurance Ireland (QQI), UK.

The team was supported by Mrs Rugile Paravinskaite. SKVC Evaluation Coordinator, who acted as the point of liaison with the College team during the review.

## II. BACKGROUND INFORMATION ABOUT THE INSTITUTION

10. Šiauliai State College is the only state higher education college in Šiauliai region. The College was formed in 2002 after reorganization of two former Medical and Technical high schools. The College is located centrally in the town and has three main campus buildings. The other main higher education provision in the town is located in Šiauliai University, with whom the College works in partnership on some educational projects.
11. The College has undergone considerable development since its formation and provides a wide range of vocational programmes leading to degree awards. The College is an accredited institution of higher education (the Order of the Ministry of Education and Science of the Republic of Lithuania “On Permission to Grant the Professional Bachelor Degree”, dated 16 April 2007, Order No. ISAK-666”) and was the first of the country’s colleges reorganized into a public institution..
12. 28 undergraduate programmes of study operate at SVK with a focus on biomedical and physical sciences, technology, management and business studies, economics, health and social care, social work, information systems and tourism. 22 new study programmes were registered from 2002 to 2012 and a portfolio of new study courses is planned.
13. The College plays a very active role in its local community and works with employers and social partners across the Šiauliai region. The College has in the region of 346 partnerships with other institutions, in Lithuania and internationally, which support student and staff exchange and broader collaborative project work. The collaboration with local companies is extensive both in supporting the student practical experience and in the skill development of the existing workforce. More than 83 external events and in-company programmes have been offered locally involving 45 teachers. The contribution of the College to the regional workforce through continued skill development is significant and is exemplified in the recent establishment of a unique programme of preparation for Foremen in partnership with local companies.
14. In 2012/13 SVK has a total of 319 staff of whom 202 are teachers comprising; 5 professors, 19 associate professors, 112 lecturers, 66 junior lecturers. In-service training, adult education, staff requalification and scientific applied research activities are continuously carried out at the College. There has been some reduction in the staffing

complement, largely in campus support whereby some services have been contracted out. There has been no reduction in the substantive workforce of teaching staff.

15. The SER reports a total of 2767 students in 2012 (headcount), 75,6 percent of undergraduates being enrolled on full time programmes in 2012. Four programmes are delivered in English and four in Russian. This has started to attract students from outside of Lithuania. The first students to access these programmes have come from Belarus and India.
  
16. The College is organised into two Faculties; The Faculty of Business and Technology and the Faculty of Healthcare. The Faculties are subdivided into functional Units which are Departments that operate as subject clusters delivering academic programmes and undertaking applied research. Additionally the Faculties have academic units that focus in specific areas such as the Hospitality Services Centre and The Adult Education Centre. The College has a Directorate which considers organizational, study, research, economic and other issues, activities of College subdivisions helps the Director to implement decisions made by the College Council and Academic Council. These include *inter alia*; The Science Unit, Academic Mobility and Project Management Department, Student Records and the Quality Management Team. Additionally the Library services and IT services are managed centrally in the College as discrete services.

### **Institutional Review 2006**

17. In 2006, the first external quality assessment of College performance was undertaken. The evaluation of the College was positive in all of the key areas. A number of recommendations was made including requirements to;
  - analyse student satisfaction;
  - formulate a well-balanced development action plan of applied research;
  - adapt a quality manual for the requirements of college activity;
  - provide financial resources for Constructing study programme facilities development to improve College strategic action plan [sic];
  - revise practical criteria of final thesis arrangement and assessment;
  - create a monitoring system of graduates placement and career;
  - decrease student dropout in technical science areas;
  - provide teaching staff with academic degrees;

- enhance the productivity of applied research and international publication;
  - improve language skills to enhance foreign language teaching.
18. SVK has addressed many of the issues raised in 2006 and is able to show the impact on the development of the college. Some areas could have been addressed more robustly and these are discussed in the relevant sections of this report.
19. The findings of the Review are presented according to the four major themes required by the "Methodology for Conducting an Institutional Review in Higher Education". These four themes are; Strategic Management, Academic Studies and Life-long Learning, Research and/or Art Activities and Regional Impact.

### **III. STRATEGIC MANAGEMENT**

#### **Strategic planning**

20. SVK has a College Integrated Development Strategy 2011-2020 (IDS) that has been developed by the Executive management Team and approved by the College Council. The plan underpinning the strategy is updated annually and the outcomes are included in the annual report presented to the College Board. The strategic plan is derived from its core mission and emphasizes that SVK is a higher education institution that meets the needs of the workforce in the region. Moreover the strategic aims of the College have been developed to define higher level goals with regard to regionalisation and internationalisation. The College aspires to be a leading edge college that will become the leading provider of vocational higher education in Lithuania. The mission of the College informs the strategic plan and prioritizes the following; the development of the college as a centre of specialist education for the region, the need to promote the college as a centre of vocational excellence nationally and internationally and to increase the numbers of international students coming to study in SVK. One of the key strategic aims of the college is to enhance its national standing through the further development of applied research. In particular priority is given to applied scholarship and research, efficient and effective support for lifelong learning and the creation of opportunities for study that reflect contemporary practice. The strategic plan is coherent with the mission of SVK and the plan complies with regional and national policy and recognizes the principles of the European Higher Education Area and the European Research Area.

21. The strategic plan reflects the priorities that are highlighted in the Lithuanian Strategy for Education, currently in draft form, and indicates that SVK intends to make a powerful regional impact in supporting lifelong learning, applied research and support of the regional workforce. These contributions to the region are crucial in the light of current demographic patterns and economic factors.
22. The current plan has been shared widely with all stakeholders. The Team learned of extensive consultation with external stakeholders who confirmed their understanding of and commitment to the strategic direction of SVK. Resources have been arranged to support the strategic plan and ensure the continued stability and longer term viability of the college.
23. The strategic plan has a number of qualitative and quantitative indicators that are coherent with the mission of the college. The challenge for the college, however, is that many of these indicators are largely measures that monitor the inputs from the college rather than being external focussed on the impact of the strategic plan. The output measures that are in the strategic plan are, in the view of the Team, overly general and are insufficiently quantifiable to ensure that the College Council has an effective flow of data that gives information on the real achievement of the plan. This means that it is difficult for the College Council and the Executive Team to assess the impact of the operational plans that support the delivery of the strategic plan of the college. The lack of impact measures means that the ability of the college to demonstrate the significance of its contributions may be undermined. *The college in effect cannot do justice to its achievements without clear impact measures that demonstrate the weight and significance of its strategic outputs.*
24. Many of the targets that underpin the strategic plan are found in the supporting action plans. These are robust plans to ensure actions are carried out. The targets and measurement criteria are largely operational and in the view of the Team could be strengthened considerably to reflect the strategic nature of the action planning process. **The Team came to the view that the college would be supported in its more ambitious goals by a clearer specification of what is to be achieved and the measures by which the impact of these new actions are assessed.** In particular the goals relating to applied research are overly generalised and it is difficult to tell from the anecdote and reporting whether or not the strategic plan is meeting its targets or exceeding its

expectations in relation to the development of applied research. The College profile rests partly on its ability to give an account of these important strategic developments and would be greatly enhanced with greater rigour in the evaluation and monitoring measures.

25. The strategic plan is monitored annually by the College Council through upward reporting mechanisms. The annual report is shared widely with partners and other external stakeholders. The College recognises the need to strengthen its regional and national profile and the Review Team would affirm the view that a more robust account of activity that has demonstrable outcomes for partners and employers would reflect a better representation of the College's contribution regionally and nationally.
26. The College has an internal quality assurance system that is contiguous with its external accreditation, the national benchmarks and Ministry requirements. The organisational structure is highly devolved and responsibility for quality management is located within the Faculties. This ensures that staff in the Faculties and Departments take responsibility for assuring the quality of their programmes and is strength of the College.
27. The management of quality processes within faculties is overseen by Faculty Council that ensures appropriate processes have been followed. There are good quality controls in place. The decision making in central committees of the College is dependent, however, on an upward flow of information from Departments. Reporting activity is largely organized in Departments and an annual report is prepared for the faculty. Faculty reports are reported to the Director who forms the overall annual report for the College. The team came to the view that this decision making approach is insufficient for internal processes to assure external success.
28. As the College moves to become more entrepreneurial, demonstrate more applied research activity and to become increasingly strategic in its approach, the organisational management of quality assurance and quality enhancement needs to be addressed. Central academic governance could be strengthened to ensure that good practice is highlighted, outcomes from programmes are measured and increased externality supports the internal review system. This would complement the existing system to raise the account of achievements that would give greater weight to the regional and national profile of the college. Greater externality in the Colleges cycle of reviews would also

support its more ambitious goals in giving critical and supportive feedback as the strategic plan unfolds.

29. **The panel came to the view that strategic planning could be more dynamic to support the appropriate and ambitious plans of the College. The current stability and high quality financial management places the college in a good position to develop plans to achieve its current goals. More effective impact measures, greater externality and increased internal criticality would strengthen academic governance and drive the college strategy forward.**

### **Human resources**

30. The strategic plan is aligned to the management of human resources in the college. The structure of the staff workforce is based upon the range of programmes provided and the specialist skills that are required. The appointment of staff meets national guidelines and there is a selection process to ensure that new staff meet the requirements of the post.
31. The College has invested heavily to increase the academic level of staff and staff have the opportunity to complete their degree studies and many are currently registered on doctoral programmes. Staff who met the Team were committed, enthusiastic and articulate. They confirmed the range of mechanisms to support their continued studies and shared with the team the wide range of opportunities for professional development including conference attendance, encouragement for publication and practice based sabbaticals.
32. The qualification base of the staff complement is developed through strategic investment that is planned within the Departments. There is no formal peer observation of teaching scheme in place but new teachers are offered additional support and feedbacks with a mentor appointed who will observe the new teacher at work. **The college may wish to consider the advantages of a wider scheme of peer appraisal that could support regular feedback for all teachers.**
33. Staff in the College appear to be highly professional and cohesive. They are highly valued by managers and by students. The faculties provide leadership to ensure focus on the business priorities of the College, and to direct staff activity towards the key

priorities, to recruit and retain students. The College, at central level, does not collect and utilize systematic data on staff performance other than descriptive reports on activity plans.

34. Students who met the Team reported high level of satisfaction with their teachers. A number of examples were given of teaching staff who had given high levels of support and made adaptations to support students with particular needs. The Team gained the impression of a highly supportive academic community that takes particular care to ensure that students achieve. Student dropout rates were very high in 2006 and a number of activities were put in place to reduce attrition. The rate of student withdrawal has dropped and, while still somewhat high, is approaching the norms in similar institutions elsewhere in Europe. The college does not have sufficiently refined monitoring mechanisms to determine which actions have been particularly useful in reducing attrition. This is an example of monitoring that could be strengthened to improve the outcome measures of actions that have been taken.
35. The college is anticipating a further reduction in student numbers in the region of 20%, partly due to regional demographic change. The senior management team confirmed that the teaching staff:students ratio will not be reduced, and increased flexible and distance learning will ensure that students continue to have good academic support. Some staff reductions have been achieved through outsourcing campus support in order that the complement of teaching staff does not affect the student:staff ratio.
36. The Team came to the view that the improvement in qualifications is impressive and staff support is strategic and planned. It is not possible for the team to assess the impact of changing numbers at this time but the College is clear and confident that it is meeting its resource requirements to meet its obligations.

### **Management of change**

37. SVK has sustained its portfolio and the character of the institution through a period of turbulence and change nationally and across Europe. The college's approach to risk seems to be cautious and prioritizes viability and stability. This has served the college well through its first stages of development. As the new ambitions, outlined in the

strategic plan, become the focus of new activity then the college needs to consider whether its current approach to risk assessment requires review.

38. The college has a Risk Coping Programme 2007 which identifies latent risks largely relating to finance and economy and the demographic change in the region. There is no overarching risk strategy which could support the development of a more enterprising activity that is needed to support the external profile of the college and international development that is envisaged. It is not clear to the Team whether the College is risk-averse or risk-taking but the current approach to academic risk is largely operational. The lack of strategic evidence in relation to risk taking means that investment and performance management is more difficult to manage in the context of new plans. Currently risk management is in summary form and does not include a clear risk analysis in establishing alternative directions in research, internationalization and academic expansion. **In effect the strategic management of risk presents no contingencies and would be strengthened by a more comprehensive risk analysis to underpin its plans.**

### **Learning Resources**

39. MOSTA evaluated the learning resources of the College in June 2013 and reported that the college was assessed positively in line with the national procedures for external evaluation. The College met all of the indicators used in the MOSTA methodology and the efficient use of funds allocated from the State Budget was assessed positively.
40. Students who met the Team confirmed their positive learning experience and spoke highly of the resources available. They confirmed that in the library the College had developed the electronic repository of learning materials and on line access to journals and archival material.
41. The Team had the opportunity to visit some of the facilities in the main building of the College. This confirmed that the resources were congruent with the level of studies being undertaken. There are a range of science laboratories that support undergraduate study. The library resource and laboratory infrastructure will need considerable development if the higher level intentions for applied research and consultancy are achieved. The College is aware of this and plans to develop specialist facilities in partnership with the funding partners of applied research and consultancy.

42. Ethical scrutiny for applied research and student projects is in place and students confirmed the processes that they are required to follow, especially where there are human participants in research studies.

### **Strategic Management Summary**

43. The Team came to the view that the College has developed its planning processes considerably since the 2006 review. The Team recognized the significant achievement of the College and its focus on the student learning experience. Programmes appear to be robust and designed to meet both the academic and professional needs of the student. The College is highly committed to its mission and is moving towards a more externally focused phase of development that will support a stronger regional and national profile. There are appropriate strategic plans in place that could be strengthened by deeper analysis of the risk factors and a greater focus on impact measurement. Additionally the Team recognizes that opportunities presented by the strong support from partners that will support the College becoming more entrepreneurial and developing its scientific outputs.

44. **The Team recommends that as a matter of some urgency, to support its more ambitious goals, the college should:**

- **Strengthen its decision making and governance structures to ensure that the achievements and potential of the college are benchmarked and reflected in ways that give a stronger external focus on the impact of its high quality applied research and skills oriented teaching activity;**
- **introduce a phased plan of internationalization that is underpinned by key performance indicators and an impact analysis programme;**
- **develop a risk strategy that is founded on risk analysis with impact and priority measures embedded to support the new goals in the strategic plan;**

**The Team commends SVK on;**

- **a strong focus on the learning needs of students;**
- **achievements that have resulted in a stable financial infrastructure through a time of economic and demographic challenge;**

- **a strategic plan that is ambitious and raises the aspirations of the College that will play to its strengths.**

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

#### **IV. ACADEMIC STUDIES AND LIFE-LONG LEARNING**

45. The Review team explored academic studies and life-long learning approaches at SVK with reference to the criteria set out in the Institutional Review Methodology and considered the College compliance with the requirements for Lithuanian higher education and harmonization with the principles of the European Higher Education Area.
46. The programmes at SVK offer qualifications that are awarded and delivered in accord with requirements of programme specification. The team noted that the programmes and life-long learning provision offered were compliant with the College's mission and also contributed to meeting the needs of the regional economy and social and cultural development. Programmes offered are subject to external accreditation by SKVC and are fully compliant with national standards and the European Framework for Higher Education Qualifications.
47. There is a significant number of programmes that reflect a diverse range of professional practice skills. Students and employers value the strong skills focus in college programmes and this was a significant factor for many students in their choice of College. All students undertake a practicum that for most is work related. Students are required to undertake final projects that are supervised through a tripartite arrangement between the College, the employer and the student. Many students gain employment in a company as a result of being placed there as a student for their final year. There are low student numbers on some programmes and the Team explored this with the College management. Some programmes offer a range of pathways leading to different awards with a common core programme to ensure academic viability. This ensures that the degree award reflects appropriately the skill base that is acquired. Some courses are offering highly specialist skills and are crucial to the local workforce. Where numbers on these courses is small, the programme may run on alternate years for academic and financial reasons. The college continues to develop a range of courses to meet local needs. The College Council may wish to consider whether the current portfolio may

become less sustainable in the light of the demographic changes and other factors in delivering the new strategic plan. The Team suggests that this should be considered carefully as part of the academic risk analysis, in order not to adversely affect the character of the College.

48. The Team welcomed the opportunity to meet former graduates and alumni who reported positively on their experience as a student at SVK. Graduate employment was enhanced by the practical experience gained at SVK and 80% of graduates remain in the region. This is an important contribution by the college to the national agenda in supporting the regional workforce and reducing the burden on the State. A local Alumni Association exists but this is not part of the National Association. Graduates and Alumni are welcomed back to the college and invited to participate in a range of events. The Team came to the view that graduates and Alumni are excellent ambassadors for the college and make an important contribution in supporting its continued mission. The Team would therefore suggest to the College that Alumni activities were not handled by the departments alone, but that this becomes centralized in an Alumni Association, allowing alumni development to become an institutional focus area of strategic importance. Graduates and Alumni are extremely proud of their association with the College.
49. The College does not appear to benchmark its performance against similar institutions as part of the annual review process. This means that its achievements may remain unrecognised, as SVK appears to be making an outstanding contribution to enabling students to progress into work within the region. **The College is advised that external benchmarking might be extremely useful for its profile in vocational education.**
50. The 2006 review recommended the development of mapping tools to monitor graduate employment and career modelling. The College has yet to establish a rigorous mapping tool to monitor first destination statistics and subsequent moves to demonstrate the career progression of its students. There is no evidence of systematic review and survey of graduates or career modelling for different subject streams. Its current data base is limited to employment reporting and while this provides some information on graduate destinations, **this could be strengthened to provide more detailed management information of some value on the career progression of graduates**

51. Student education at SVK is embedded in the local community. All students have a final year project placement and as assessment located in their final research project. The programmes develop skills that are focussed on the needs of employers and new programmes are developed with input from local partners. Academic partnerships with Šiauliai University are also supported and a number of academic staff teach in both institutions.
52. The College is compliant with the requirements of the EU and the European Higher Education Area requirements for lifelong learning. Lifelong Learning is part of the College mission and it has a clear strategy to develop its Lifelong Learning activity and has had considerable success. At Šiauliai, Lifelong learning means the continued development of professional skills in the workplace and a commitment to continue formal learning and progress to other learning opportunities. The College embeds this with its approach to staff development whereby each member of staff has a learning plan that supports continued academic activity and development. Lifelong learning and adult learning in partnership with regional employers is impressive and has resulted in the establishment of the prestigious programme for Foremen that is modelled on the German national programme to enhance skills in middle management in companies regionally and nationally.
53. The opportunity for international exchange is highly valued in broadening the horizons of staff and students. Several examples of international mobility of staff and students were shared with the team. Staff reported support and encouragement for working abroad from the College and noted that the Erasmus programme helped staff to travel and bring new understanding and skills back to the College. SVK has sought to increase the numbers of staff and students who benefit from learning outside of Lithuania. ERASMUS funding has been secured and in 2012 50 students and 27 staff members were able to benefit from European mobility funding. There is small cohort of international students but these students are offered considerable support. The international student who met the Team commented positively on her experience. The public information for international students is somewhat limited and the website needs considerable development to meet the information needs of non-Lithuanian students. The Team came to the view that in the light of the College intention for increased internationalisation **there is a need to improve public information available electronically and in the college signage.**

54. The international activity of the College is largely opportunistic and may benefit from a more strategic approach. The College recognises this and was self-critical in the SER on its internationalisation achievement. The impact of current activity is not measured and would benefit from more systematic measurement in order to demonstrate the real benefits on the region for student and staff mobility.
55. The College accredits prior learning and credit obtained on some exchange schemes. There is evidence that students are welcomed from other institutions and many students from Šiauliai leave to enter other higher education programmes. The accreditation of prior learning includes both accredited and experiential learning. The Team was surprised that in the light of the strong vocational focus the College had not adapted the Ministry guidelines on accreditation levels to meet its own needs, within the range permitted. **Currently the college simply uses the maximum permitted credit (in Lithuania) as 75% for exemption or advanced standing. The College may wish to review this, in the light of its international strategy to reflect levels more commonly offered in other European institutions of a similar nature.**
56. Students are represented on all major decision making committees in the College, including the College Board and the Academic Council. Students were involved in the consultation about the self-assessment report and the strategic plan. There is a strong commitment in the college to involve students and annual surveys are used to enhance the student experience. Students gave examples of changes that had occurred as a result of the use of the student voice at college level.
57. Programmes are drawn up according to a standard format which involves completion of a course description. They included learning outcomes linked to programme content and assessment with a particular focus on practice. Staff understand the learning specification for programmes and use the programme specification as the basis for their teaching activity. Staff also understand the role of the national and European academic infrastructure. There is also a significant reliance on professional benchmarks as well as academic reference points.
58. The use of practice based learning in the College is impressive. SVK has considerable expertise and strength in using employers on final project assessment teams. The team

learned of a number of student projects that made significant impacts, transforming aspects of the workplace. The tri-partite agreement between student, teacher and workplace mentor is innovative and an example of best practice. **The team commends highly the involvement of employers and social partners in the learning process and the way in which external partners participate in the assessment of student projects.**

59. The commitment to the development of learning in practice is underpinned by teaching staff that is immersed in the practice field. The team learned of the close links that supported continuing professional education to ensure that staff are up-to-date and skilled in their subject areas. This includes the facility for practice sabbaticals whereby academic staff return to a period of practice to update skills and maintain expertise in practical disciplines. Additionally the opportunities to secure practice experience abroad through mobility programmes which enhance skill and knowledge are commended.

60. In summary, the **Review team found great strength at SVK in relation to academic studies and lifelong learning.** The College makes a significant contribution to the regional economy including the major contribution that it makes to maintain close and long-standing contact with social partners, and the unique tripartite agreements with practice, which ensure the professional relevance of the programmes. **The achievements of the College in relation to vocational higher education are impressive and an improved impact analysis would assist the College in its ambition to be recognised as leading edge in this field.**

#### **Academic Studies: Summary**

**The Team recommends that SVK should:**

- **Increase the use of externality in the internal review processes to strengthen upward reporting;**
- **Develop the use of external benchmarks to position itself in the HE Academy more effectively;**
- **Undertake an impact analysis of international programmes and student mobility to support its strategic goals in relation to internationalisation;**
- **Review the College position on the accreditation of experiential learning to support the quality of the international study programmes;**

- **Review the public information available to potential international students including signage and information on campus;**
- **Develop tools to provide more extensive career mapping of graduates to support the SVK national profile in relation to employment and regional impact.**

**The Team commends SVK for**

- **The outstanding contribution to regional workforce development through the provision of highly specialist skill programmes;**
- **The integration between theory and practice that is represented in the final student applied research projects;**
- **The focus on the student learning experience in the development of vocational programmes.**

*Judgement on the area: Academic Studies and Lifelong Learning is given positive evaluation.*

## **V. RESEARCH AND (OR) ART**

61. The College research strategy exists as a general commitment in the overarching strategic plan supported by the Scientific Potential Increase Programme 2012-2015. This identifies the intention to increase the research activity and scientific output of the College. State Colleges are presented with the challenge of being required to undertake scientific research without a discrete funding stream to support this activity. Šiauliai College has sought to meet this challenge in a number of ways and has not set specific targets for income or publication/citation expectations for researchers. Research activity is almost entirely applied research which is appropriate to the College mission and strategic plan, although some important theoretical research is undertaken particularly in the field of mathematics.
62. There is no overarching well-balanced research strategy and action plan that would support the College in positioning its research activities in ways that make clear the expectations of teaching staff as distinct from research intensive staff. Research is determined at Faculty level and supported by Departments. The Team was impressed with the range and level of funding secured, research activity and scientific outputs from a vocational college, but saw the need for a more strategic approach to the management of research.

63. There is no leadership at institutional level for research, and research projects are located across the Departments. The Scientific Unit and Publication Team offer important support and coordination at an administrative level but there is insufficient leadership to focus and direct activity that acts as a multiplier in gaining wider research recognition. The Team was interested to learn that the College Academic Council intends to discuss research priorities and identify key themes in December 2013. Given the recommendations in the 2006 Review the Team would urge the College to develop a well-balanced research strategy with some urgency to support its goals in the current strategic plan. Such a strategy would establish systematic approaches to the identification of research functions and thematic priorities.
64. The action plan for increasing scientific potential is useful but limited by few targets that result in focussed activity that is output oriented. There is a need to establish measurable goals that can inform the College Council of the progress relating to research activity that reflects the strategic priority. It is not clear to the Team how the College Council can make judgements about the effectiveness of research investment other than at a general level.
65. There is evidence from employers and external partners that the applied research undertaken by students in their final year projects makes an important contribution to the knowledge base in the workplace. The College does not have a knowledge exchange programme or a formal strategy for technology transfer. There is anecdotal evidence, however that these activities are occurring albeit through more informal mechanisms and the formal use of student projects.

### **Research and Scholarship – Section Summary**

66. In the light of the SVK strategic intention to become more research active, the Team came to the conclusion that the **College needs to review its strategic approach to the management of applied research and scholarship. There is a need for more consistent central leadership to ensure research oversight at College level. This should include a research strategy that makes clear the College expectations of teaching staff as well as for research active staff. The strategy would be capable of generating output measures that demonstrate the effectiveness of action plans and**

**the impact on staff performance, student achievement and the regional partnerships that highly value applied research collaboration.**

**The Team recommends that SVK should:**

- **establish a well-balanced strategy for applied research that underpins the strategic goals;**
- **put in place research leadership at institutional level that provides appropriate governance and oversight of applied research activities to raise the external profile and support the strategic plan;**
- **Review the costing base for external projects to ensure that they are fully costed and support appropriate laboratory infrastructure.**

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

## **VI. IMPACT ON REGIONAL AND NATIONAL DEVELOPMENT**

67. The College is strongly rooted in the region and makes a significant impact to regional growth and development. This is so significant that any threat to the viability of the College is also a threat to the local economy. This is due to the intimate relationship between the College and employers in the region. This impact comes through training professionals, stimulating innovation, and influencing the local social and cultural environment. The College makes explicit its commitment to the maintenance of the region's traditions and culture that support the retention of the local population and diminish the continued emigration from the region.

68. College staff are actively engaged in regional public affairs, including outreach from professional activities and student groups. The Director of the College is highly respected in the Region and participates in the regional development and other major business representative organisations. The College is very proud of its regional role and has a number of examples where recognition has been gained for its contribution to particular projects. Less evidence is provided in terms of measures that enable the College to quantify its contribution and assess the impacts of different types of engagement. Indeed, the team came to the view that the College is better than its measures allow it to demonstrate in relation to its goals for regional impact. To this extent the College is

encouraged to find ways of improving its impact measures in ways that demonstrate regionally and nationally the significance of its contribution.

69. There is considerable evidence of the involvement in voluntary service activities. The college is highly committed to serve its community. Senior staff are on regional and national committees. Academics are afforded a one year sabbatical in practice within the community to enhance their skill development. A range of community focused voluntary work is undertaken including a focus on needs of vulnerable people such as the programme for people with visual impairment and the community work with schools.
70. The College's focus on supplying graduates for the labour market creates a clear focus on work-skill development. Employers who met the team spoke very positively of the way in which the College supports local companies. For some organisations the College was a lifeline in attracting highly skilled staff and retaining the workforce.
71. The impact of the college investment in the region, however, is largely anecdotal and not measured systematically. This underplays the significant role of the college in the region. It is difficult to assess, for example, the extent to which the college brings new human capital to the region or creates new jobs. The measurement of business incubation would strengthen this account.
72. The region is proud of the college and its impact is undoubtedly positive. The outcomes of the important range of research projects is not systematically analysed for their impact. Strengthening the assessment of regional impact would highlight and strengthen the external profile of the college in the region and beyond. It would also highlight the scientific potential of SVK which the Team believes is significant.
73. The Team came to the view that the College is moving into a period of strategic growth and development that will raise its profile and enable it to play a significant role regionally and nationally. Stronger high level strategic alliances would help build the forward strategy to support these strategic goals. This means an increased external focus at a higher level with strategic alliances to gain competitive advantage. This could mean new alliances with other Colleges or Universities or high level regional alliances that underpin strategic investment and influence. Alliances could focus internationally to develop new opportunities across the international Baltic region. This could build on

some of the unique programmes at SVK such as the experience of the Foremen programme.

74. The Team also came to the view that the college has the potential to become leading in delivering innovative solutions through applied research and consultancy but needs to establish systematic impact measures. Identifying opportunities through benchmarking would strengthen the focus. In particular the use of business incubation, Technology Transfer devices, coaching and mentoring programmes and leadership development within the college would assist SVK in becoming the Leading Edge College it seeks to be. This would play to the strengths of the college and the region.
75. The Team also recognised the emergent recognition of the role played by Colleges of Higher Education in Lithuania that is starting to value the role played by Professional Higher Education in Vocational subjects. The role played by SVK should not be underestimated and the Team would recommend that the Ministry recognises this role in maintaining regional stability within a difficult demographic and economic climate.

### **Summary: Regional Impact**

76. The Team came to the view that the College plays an important part in regional life. Its contribution to the development and retention of the workforce is important and supports the regional stability and viability. New strategic alliances would support SVK in playing a more significant role nationally and internationally. These alliances should be strategic and embrace educational and business partners in seeking new funding streams nationally and internationally.
77. **The Team recommends that:**
- **impact measures of the SVK regional contribution should be developed;**
  - **strategic alliances should be sought to underpin the more ambitious goals of the new strategic plan;**
  - **the Ministry considers what, if any, adaption should be made to support the applied research endeavours of higher education vocational education and recognition for their regional contributions.**

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

## **VII. REPORT SUMMARY, RECOMMENDATIONS AND COMMENDATIONS**

78. The Team was impressed with the quality of education provided at SVK. There is a strong focus on student learning and a commitment from all of the staff who met the Team to ensure contemporary, high quality professional education is supported by a sound theoretical programme that meets the standards of the European Higher Education Area.

79. The strategic plan of the College raises its aspirations with the intention of creating a more significant profile nationally and internationally. Within this report are a range of recommended actions that should be considered to support these new goals.

80. In summary the Team makes the following recommendations for action to address issues that will support the College in the next phase of its development:

### **SVK should:**

- improve the College decision-making and governance structures to ensure that the achievements and potential of the college are benchmarked and reflected in ways that give a stronger external focus on the impact of its high quality applied research and teaching;
- make strategic investment in research leadership that ensures that resources, performance measurement and scientific outputs are coordinated at institutional level to achieve the ambitious goals defined in the strategic plan;
- introduce a phased plan of internationalisation that is underpinned by KPIs and an impact analysis programme;
- improve the public information provided to represent the innovative nature of the college activity more effectively to its stakeholders, especially to potential strategic research partnerships;
- develop the role and function of the college's longer range strategic alliances, to support the strategic goals in contributing to the development of the region.

**It is recommended that the Ministry:**

- considers what, if any, adaption is needed to support its directions for applied research within vocational state colleges of higher education
- explores ways of strengthening the recognition of the contribution of Higher Education State Colleges to the national agenda and to stability of the regional workforce
- considers whether the current accreditation guideline for experiential learning that permits 75% exemption from a programme of studies continues to be credible in a European context and a level that is appropriate for undergraduates entering a higher education institution.

**81. SVK is commended on:**

- the College's contribution to the provision of specialist skills in the regional workforce;
- the extent to which applied research for students is anchored in programmes that include work placements and field based studies;
- the teaching and learning facilities that supports a wide range of teaching approaches;
- success in attracting European funding, including the support for international conferences;
- the enthusiasm, commitment and support from graduates and alumni;
- staff and employers who are focussed on the student learning experience;
- the skilled management of resource that has ensured that SVK remains stable, viable and has met all of its funding goals.

## VIII. JUDGEMENT

Šiauliai State College is given positive evaluation in all sections of the Review criteria.

Grupės vadovas: Team leader:	Prof. dr. Erich Hoedl
Grupės nariai: Team members:	Dr. Jacques Kaat Dr. Tiit Roosmaa Mindaugas Paunksnis Greta Kasperavičiūtė
Vertinimo sekretorius: Review secretary:	Prof. Sue Frost

# ANNEX. ŠIAULIAI STATE COLLEGE RESPONSE TO REVIEW REPORT

## ŠIAULIAI STATE COLLEGE RESPONSE TO THE PROJECT OF REVIEW REPORT

Hereby Šiauliai State College confirms that the project of institutional review report was received on 31 January 2014.

The College is grateful to expert team for professional assessment of the College activities, recommendations and valuable comments, which will undoubtedly help to improve the College activities.

Key factual errors were not noticed in the project of the review report.

Being acquainted with the conclusions of the project of the review report, we would like to point out a few trivial, which do not change the essence, findings:

1) **Paragraph 5** the statement "... with the evaluation decision of June 2006..." is inaccurate. The assessment was carried out in November of 2006 thus, it should be changed to

"... with the evaluation decision of 2006..." (*see SER Introduction, page 3.*)

2) **Paragraph 11** the statement "The College was the first College to become a certified higher education institution in April 2007 subsequent to the Order of the Ministry of Education and Science of the Republic of Lithuania ("On Permission to Grant the Professional Bachelor Degree", dated 16 April, 2007). In 2010, Šiauliai College was reorganized into a public institution with full State budgetary and finance structures." should be changed to

"The College is an accredited institution of higher education (the Order of the Ministry of Education and Science of the Republic of Lithuania "On Permission to Grant the Professional Bachelor Degree", dated 16 April, 2007, Order No. ISAK-666) (*see SER Introduction, page 3.*) and "was the first of the country's colleges reorganized into a public institution (*see SER paragraph 29.*)

3) **15 paragraph** statements "a total of 2767 students in 2011 (headcount)" and "virtually all undergraduates being enrolled on full time programmes" should be changed to

"a total of 2767 students in 2012 (headcount)" (*see SER Annex 8*) and

"75.6 percent of undergraduates being enrolled in full time programmes in 2012 " (*see SER Annex 27*)

4) **Paragraph 16** statement "The College has a Directorate that oversees the academic-support departments that do not have a direct academic function." to should be changed to

"The College has a Directorate which considers organisational, study, research, economic and other issues, activities of College subdivisions helps the Director to implement decisions made by the College Council and the Academic Council." (*see The Statute, SER paragraph 78 of Annex 1.*)

5) **35 paragraph** the statement "...the teaching staff ratio will not be reduced" should be changed to

"...the teaching staff : students ratio will not be reduced (see SER Annex 3, page 33. The evaluation criteria of the strategic plan of action: *number of students, pers. for one teacher post*).

6) **53 paragraph** the statement "...approximately 50 students and staff were able to benefit from European mobility funding" should be changed to

"... in 2012 50 students and 27 staff members were able to benefit from European mobility funding (see SER Annex 20).

Once again we express our gratitude for the thorough work and the precious time spent to assess our institution.