



## **STUDIJŲ KOKYBĖS VERTINIMO CENTRAS**

### **UTENOS KOLEGIJOS**

### **VEIKLOS VERTINIMO IŠVADOS**

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## **INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW REPORT**

### **UTENA COLLEGE**

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## I. INTRODUCTION

1. This report describes a review of Utena College (the College) carried out in 2012 by a team of experts from Lithuania and other European countries (the team).
2. The College provided the team in advance with a Self-Evaluation Report (SER) supported by detailed annexes. The SER covered the information required to prepare the team for its visit to the College and was presented in a clear format, although it contained a large quantity of unnecessary detail. The SER was better at describing the College's activities than at evaluating them, and where it did report evaluations it was often not clear how they were arrived at.
3. Before visiting the College, members of the team reviewed the SER with its annexes, commenting on the points it made and the questions it prompted. They were able to request additional documentation in advance of the visit. The team was provided with other background documentation in advance of the visit and met for a day's training, including an overview of the education system immediately before the visit to the College. An external assessment of the Academy's learning resources was provided for the Institutional Review by Lithuania's Research and Higher Education Monitoring and Analysis Centre (MOSTA). This visit took place over the three days 27 – 29 March 2012, including 12 formal meetings and a tour to review facilities and speak to staff and students. The team spent the day after the visit drawing together material for its report and conclusions, which were refined and finalized by correspondence over the subsequent month.
4. The experts have also been presented with the results of the evaluation of learning resources and associated infrastructure conducted by MOSTA and with the evaluation decision of 22 June 2012.
5. The review team consisted of the following members.
  - Professor Bob Munn (team leader): independent consultant on quality in higher education, emeritus professor of chemical physics and formerly Vice-President for Teaching and Learning at the University of Manchester, U.K., with experience of reviewing institutions in the U.K., South Africa and Saudi Arabia;
  - Professor Johann Schneider: former Rector of the University of Applied Sciences (Fachhochschule) Frankfurt am Main, with experience of evaluation and accreditation for agencies in Germany, Switzerland and Lithuania;
  - Ms Danutė Rasimavičienė: Dean of the Faculty of Business Management at Vilnius College and SKVC expert for education study programmes, with experience of evaluating European programmes;
  - Ms Gintarė Vaitkienė (employer representative): director and rehabilitation physician at Gemma, a company that specializes in health and rehabilitation;
  - Ms. Lina Jonaityte (student representative): student of English and German pedagogy at Kaunas College Kėdainiai Jonušas Radvila faculty;
  - Mr. Mark Wainman (review secretary): Director of Quality Assurance, Leeds Metropolitan University, U.K. and previously at Sheffield Hallam University, with experience of reviewing institutions in the U.K.

The team was supported by Ms Daiva Tereščenko, SKVC, evaluation coordinator.

## II. BACKGROUND INFORMATION ABOUT THE INSTITUTION

6. Utena College is the only higher education institution in the Eastern Highland region of Lithuania. It was established on 1 September 2000 by merging Utena Business School and

Utena School of Medicine, which still form the basis for its present structure and activities. The College was granted permanent status in 2005, and its graduates have been able to gain professional Bachelor's Degrees since 2006.

7. The College started with nine programmes of study and has continued to develop its portfolio so that in the academic year 2011–12 it offered 18 programmes. In that year there were 2398 students enrolled, of whom 60% were female, reflecting the subject mix among the programmes offered. In 2010 – 11 there were 290 staff, of whom 102 were permanent teaching staff, plus 77 part-time teaching staff.

### III. STRATEGIC MANAGEMENT

8. The College's mission, vision and aim are strongly oriented towards training professionals in applied sciences and facilitating life-long learning, thereby serving local and national needs. It has had separate strategic plans for the three-year periods 2005–07, 2008–10 and 2011–13, of which the last two are action plans within the framework of an overall Activity Strategy for the year 2008–2013.
9. The College provided evidence that its strategic plan complies with its mission, the strategic documents of the national policy on research and studies, and the principles of the European Higher Education Area and the European Research Area. However, it did not use this evidence to compile a detailed mapping that would provide better assurance of compliance. Similarly, the College provided examples as evidence that it ensures validity and interoperability of the components of its strategic plan by following standard methodology.
10. The Activity Plan comprises five strategic goals with numerous sub-aims, which need to be prioritized before suitable actions can be implemented. Priorities are not based on clear criteria and decisions made within a consistent and sustainable planning framework, but rather are determined by various deliberative bodies through discussion, often in what appears to be an opportunistic way. External programmes, cooperative projects and the available financial resources naturally have an important impact on planning, but these factors are also not always systematically integrated into the College's strategic planning process.
11. In relation to reasonableness and comprehensiveness of the quantitative and qualitative indicators of the implementation of its strategic plan, indicators of planned and actual performance show that graduate employment and income were underestimated but student numbers were overestimated, and this has been corrected for future planning. In monitoring the implementation of its strategic plan, the College assembles components of the indicators for annual reports. For most indicators the emphasis is on annual review, although financial reports are compiled at least quarterly.
12. Information on the implementation of the strategic plan is actively made available to the founders, stakeholders, the academic community and the public at large. Internal and external communication channels are used to disseminate information, but in response to national demographic changes leading to a decline in the number of school leavers the College's main target is schoolchildren. A wide range of channels is employed, including visits to and from school, conferences, print and broadcast media and the internet. Activities are also directed towards increasing international awareness of the College and what it offers. A public opinion survey is planned that will assess the value of this high level of activity.

13. The College's internal quality assurance system for higher education studies is described by its Quality Guide. This describes itself as 'A model of quality assurance system, an instrument for assessment of activity areas'; it covers the activities comprehensively and gives detailed criteria for assessment of performance, on a three-point scale where possible. However, the Guide does not address what is to be done with the results and hence how quality is assured and enhanced once it has been assessed. The College recognizes that the Quality Guide does not cover the quality system itself, and has started a project to develop this, including more surveys of stakeholders. The team agrees that the Quality Guide would be more useful if it was part of documentation describing the overall quality system including such matters as evaluation tools and process flowcharts, and responsibilities for determination of performance indicators and assessment criteria. The team also recommends that the system should explicitly take account of the European Standards and Guidelines. At present it appears that evaluation is not always systematic and is largely based on discussion among colleagues rather than on defined criteria. The team also found that the College does not appear to use all the information available to it: although the external evaluations of its programmes of study were mentioned in the SER as part of a process of analysis, staff told the team that there is no process for looking at a whole year's evaluations together in order to see what general lessons may be learned from them.
14. There is a rational system of responsibility for collecting information on quality through office holders and committees. The results are used to plan improvements, including building these into development plans for the next year, although concentrating assessment after the end of the year can restrict the opportunities for improvement in the following year. Generally, steady year-on-year improvements are found.
15. The College gave a coherent and persuasive account of the rationale, implementation and effectiveness of changes in the organisational structure since the last review, arguing that the present structure is fit for purpose. The account was necessarily backward-looking but could perhaps have been linked to forward planning for change.
16. The College identifies four levels of process management; although these are said not to be hierarchical, the first is described as the highest level.
  - i. At level 1, the College Board governs, receiving reports from the Director and employing the staff; until 2011 it also approved strategy. The Academic Board oversees academic activities in their broadest sense. The Director is the chief executive, and is assisted by two vice-directors, for academic affairs and for science and development. The Director's Office meeting fulfils a sort of cabinet role, not only managing business but also deciding whether proposals for new programmes of study will proceed farther.
  - ii. At level 2, the organization of academic activities is through two faculties (Business & Technologies and Health Care & Social Care), which simply reflect the activities of the two precursor schools. The faculties are managed by their deans, who are assisted by vice-deans. The faculties are in turn composed of five and three departments respectively. Some activities are led by cross-college units under heads who report to the Vice-Director for Academic Affairs. The main deliberative bodies are the faculty boards. At levels 1 and 2 the independent body Students' Representation speaks for the interests of students in relation to all issues related to their studies; despite some seeming irregularities in its constitution, students appear satisfied with its work.
  - iii. At level 3, financial resources are overseen by the department of Accountancy and Finance led by the chief accountant, and material resources are overseen by the House

Economy service; the heads of both services report to the Director. This level also includes the library (whose head is responsible to the Vice-Director for Academic Affairs) and computing (whose head is responsible to the Director), which covers electronic media.

- iv. At level 4 come cross-cutting activities such as public relations and personnel management (whose heads are responsible to the Director); projects and non-formal education, under the Department of Strategic Development (whose head reports to the Vice-Director for Research and Development); and careers (whose head reports to the Vice-Director for Academic Affairs).
17. This distribution of responsibility and accountability is matched by a distribution of roles in a system of monitoring, evaluation and reporting that is suitably linked to the strategic plan but seems rather elaborate. This includes the idea that quality is everyone's responsibility at their level of activity, and describes a sequence of data collection and analysis tied to the academic year. Similarly decision making is carried out by a sequence of deliberative bodies. External stakeholder involvement is briefly stated to come through representation on the College Board and the Academic Board and through advice obtained via many informal channels.
18. The management of human resources is supported by compiling trends in staff numbers and qualifications. Teaching staff are assessed every five years, and staffing and staff development needs are analysed. Staff have various opportunities to take part in the deliberative structures of the College, including (since 2009) an advisory Labour Board. The tables show a steady increase in professional updating by staff, and for teaching staff the College is focusing on improving technical competence, doctoral qualification levels, and foreign language competence.
19. In trying to increase the proportion of academic staff with a doctoral degree, as required to meet national minimum levels, the College faces problems because it is difficult for its staff to combine attendance at a university with their normal duties (even though these are modified in order to help, as staff confirmed), and the team was told that universities prefer to enrol their own masters graduates. In the view of the team, it would be helpful if the national expectation that colleges will meet minimum levels of doctoral qualifications for academic staff was matched by a national expectation that universities will meet minimum levels of enrolment of staff from colleges for doctoral studies.
20. For process analysis in relation to change management and process optimization, the College assigns great importance to student, employer and client opinions, which are explored through surveys and other means indicated in the Quality Guide. These are likely to change with the new 'study management' process that is to be introduced, the description of which indicates greater emphasis on taking action to remedy weaknesses. Self-assessment, carried out regularly, is said to incorporate risk analysis. However, there is no mention of this in the Quality Guide, nor any indication of any formal risk analysis, but the team learned that SWOT analysis is widely used. Changes are clearly monitored, and although no detailed risk assessment was offered, the conclusion that the main current risks lie in falling student numbers seems sound. The team learned that recruitment of international students is one way in which the College is seeking to mitigate this financial risk, although it was not clear whether the different risks presented by international recruitment had been analysed.
21. The College acknowledges the importance of material resources for learning and of managing them well to support academic activities in times of financial constraint. Its

priority is strengthening and modernizing material resources, and it is active in securing external funding for building and renovation of student areas. Within this overall priority, a detailed and systematic approach to funding the library and IT is evident, but the process for deciding priorities is not clear; students who met the team said they would welcome better computer provision and more equipment. The provision of computer workstations is benchmarked against the national average. However, in the case of library provision it did not seem that any indicators were analysed against national data, and the team considered this to be a missed opportunity to evaluate and enhance the provision.

22. The College set out the sources of its funds, stating that they are distributed with reference to the strategic plan. It appears that the distribution among competing priorities is decided by extensive discussion rather than by reference to explicit criteria. It is clear that the funds are limited and decreasing, and steps are being taken to reduce expenditure. The cost of purchasing is kept down through use of central facilities. The team found that the College actively seizes opportunities to secure external funding for projects to extend and enhance its activities, but it was not clear to the team that these projects were part of an overall academic strategy.
23. In considering external trends, the College sees that the field of life-long learning and the provision of other services of high quality are becoming more and more important as a third area of activities besides programmes of study and research. To date the new Strategic Development Department has coordinated the different projects in this area, but this does not seem to provide a good structural fit. In this respect it is not clear whether feasibility projects and pilot studies always include an assessment of the sustainability of such initiatives, i.e. whether the College will have the resources to continue the activity once the initial funding has ended. It appeared to the team that sometimes preliminary work was carried as far as preparing materials that could not then be delivered for lack of continuing funding.
24. The College has ethical codes for staff and students, which seem to cover relevant areas of concern. There are sanctions for failing to observe the codes, which are overseen by the Committee of Academic Ethics, which has student representation. These arrangements seem sensible in their nature and scope.
25. At the time of the visit, the Constitutional Court had ruled that certain aspects of the Higher Education and Research Law 2009 contradicted the Constitution, and legal arrangements to fill the resulting gaps were planned but not yet in place. However, the team was satisfied that the College was continuing to operate effectively during this interim period.
26. Overall, the College has a clear view of its strategic aims, but would benefit from a tighter strategic focus on evaluating opportunities and developing plans into actions. It manages its activities effectively, but its evaluation of quality needs to be less episodic, more transparent and more systematic, with more use of defined procedures and less reliance on extended discussion or individual judgement. This will help to manage risk and facilitate enhancement.

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

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

27. The College's strategy documents ensure that the qualifications it awards comply with its mission documents, and with the needs of the national economy and social and cultural

development. It has taken steps to match the awards it offers with the needs of the workforce, and regional partners who met the team strongly endorsed the value of the College's graduates as employees (who in some cases formed the majority of their workforce). The experience of students on practice placements is particularly appreciated by the students, by the enterprises that provide the placements, and by the eventual employers of the graduates. Graduates and employers confirm that the College's programmes of study strike a good balance between theoretical understanding and practical preparation. Some of the College's graduates also proceed to academic bachelor's and master's degrees at universities.

28. To date, evaluation of non-formal study and lifelong learning has been fragmentary, but the College is seeking to develop a coherent framework of competences. It has sought to ensure that its qualifications match the expectations of the European Higher Education Area, and to develop joint study programmes. As in other areas, these processes could benefit from being more systematic. In particular, there appears to be no detailed mapping against the Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area (European Standards and Guidelines) that would clearly demonstrate compliance and help to ensure that it continues.
29. In adult education, both full-time and 'extended' part-time programmes are offered, and a wider range of degree patterns and disciplines is being introduced alongside study at other sites and in collaboration with other universities, as well as distance learning. This all seems quite enterprising. However, the team learned that the provision of these additional opportunities depends largely on the initiative of the teaching staff rather than on any strategic choice by the College.
30. Distance learning may be supported by electronic means such as e-mail and video-conferencing, but although the College provides the virtual learning environment Moodle, there does not seem to be any plan to extend its use. Teaching by staff at sites remote from the College was also described as distance learning. The team recommends that the College should consider the strategic purpose of providing study opportunities for students away from its own site or at other sites, and develop a systematic plan to deliver the intended benefits. The College should also require increasing and more consistent use of the virtual learning environment by academic staff to provide enhanced learning opportunities for students on and off the campus.
31. In the area of non-formal study there is a great range of activity clearly oriented towards the needs of the labour market. This matches the College's aim to be the regional centre for such education. Its work with the unemployed and the inmates of penitentiaries seems particularly noteworthy. Uptake of non-formal study has been increasing over recent years, boosted in 2010–11 by a very large new programme on computer literacy for older residents. The College has also sought to systematize its offerings and improve its record keeping in this area of activity. It provides support for a variety of self-development schemes. In this area the College is working very hard and apparently to excellent effect. The team felt that the College needs to be able to make strategic decisions about the balance among the various activities offered, and that the College might be missing opportunities to be a regional and in some cases a national provider of professional updating courses in relevant areas. Overall the College seems to be both proactive and responsive in this area.
32. Employment and careers of graduates are monitored and analysed. This monitoring is supported by a fairly new Career Centre, by collaboration with the Lithuanian Labour Exchange, and by enquiries made by academic staff. Unemployment of graduates seems to



have increased over time but is now decreasing again. The College has carefully analysed unemployment across its programmes, and referred to the views of employers and graduates that for employability not only knowledge but also generic transferable skills are required. There is clear evidence for revision of programmes to enhance employability.

33. The College values the contribution made by external members of the College Board and Academic Board towards the life-long studies and learning that it provides. There are strong relationships with professionals, underpinned by over a hundred formal agreements in the areas of practice for which the College provides programmes, and these relationships play a significant role in developing new programmes and evaluating and improving existing ones, as partners confirmed. Similar relationships are evident through Qualification Commissions and with academic and social partners, from abroad as well as in Lithuania. A comparable pattern is reported in terms of non-formal education and lifelong learning. Overall the College seems to be extremely busy in this area, and although faculty practice supervisors oversee the relevant formal agreements, the team was not confident that the College has a high-level overview of them .
34. The College did not fully demonstrate that its strategy in respect of its degree programmes and life-long learning complies with the provisions of the European Higher Education Area and EU documents relating to higher education. However, it did present arguments showing relevant engagement with European expectations and identifying where there are shortfalls at the College, particularly in knowledge of foreign languages. The College seems well aware of the expectations but is having to work hard to move towards meeting them all.
35. The College has a clear picture of international inward and outward mobility of its staff and students. It has steadily increased international agreements, and has been taking an active part in the Erasmus programme. Students who met the team spoke positively of the arrangements for study and practice abroad and of the benefits they had derived from doing so. Staff and student mobility is greater outwards than inwards, in part presumably because the Lithuanian language is a barrier to inwards mobility. However, incoming students may be provided with classes that use another language such as English or Russian. The College actively promotes international mobility, with modest but beneficial effects that are reasonable for a small institution in a country that has a less-known language. Because attracting more students from abroad is important for the College in increasing overall student numbers, it is very important for the College in marketing itself to decide what specific characteristics it can promote as its Unique Selling Points.
36. Overall, the College provides a set of formal programmes of study with the possibility of part-time and some distance study. These programmes are well aligned with its mission and its regional focus, as are its less formal and lifelong learning programmes. The College could make better use of existing information to evaluate its offerings more systematically, and could support its programmes better by encouraging staff to provide materials on its virtual learning environment.

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

## **V. RESEARCH AND ART**

37. Research – consistently referred to as ‘science applied research’ – features only in the later versions of the College’s strategy, but the College argues that it is now well embedded, with clear strategic goals, namely better organization, more publications, regional relevance,

organizing national and international conferences, and competing for research funding. To achieve this has required developing the academic staff and providing incentives for them, as well as exploring what the role and nature of research at the College should be, including active partnership and collaboration, consistent with its other activities. In particular the College has taken part in a project with national and international partners to develop systematically what it calls ‘tailored applied research’, which may be conducted by groups of students as part of their studies or by groups of staff. The College aims to ensure that research is not seen as totally separate from teaching and learning, and is conducted in the areas where it offers programmes of study.

38. The College provided a detailed account of its research projects, often undertaken in collaboration with partners and with a clear regional focus. It also highlighted the more active researchers and recent appointments expected to increase research output, as well as scholarly work related to research such as reviewing. Results are disseminated through meetings as well as publications, but peer-reviewed publications have not increased since a sharp jump in 2008, although unpublished reports have been increasing since that year. The College attributes this levelling off in part to confidentiality of commissioned research, but this could be overcome by suitable agreements with sponsors involving a set time delay before open publication, and by anonymization of results if necessary. The list of publications shows very few in journals from outside Lithuania, and many in the College’s own peer-reviewed journal for publishing the results of original research *Ižvalgos (Insights)*, which has national standing. The College does not take part in the evaluation of research conducted by the Research Council of Lithuania. The team encourages the College to consider taking part in this evaluation. This would provide a benchmark for the standard of the College’s research, and although the current standard might be rather low, this would provide both an incentive to enhance research and a way of measuring success in doing so.
39. The College’s research seems to match its mission well, but its international standing could be enhanced by introducing a strategic goal to increase the number of publications in journals and conference proceedings outside Lithuania. The College’s own journal is no doubt valuable in giving its staff initial experience of publication, which can be in English or Russian as well as Lithuanian, but the College needs to develop staff skills including language competence that will support wider publication: research on Lithuanian topics is publishable internationally if it is good research. The College might also consider what being research active should mean for its staff, particularly in terms of expected outputs, and what proportion of its staff should be research active.
40. The College says that its research and related activities are explicitly directed towards national and regional goals, and a list of projects classified according to topic (marketing and management, education, law, environmental science, health, social care, and regional and national studies) confirms this. As the only higher education institution in its region the College recognizes the importance of its research to the region, and makes effective use of student research projects directed towards supporting regional needs. However, more could be made of this research if the academic staff supervising the projects were encouraged to integrate the results from successive projects into coherent research programmes that could develop into specialized centres of excellence producing original contributions to knowledge. Involving students in research that addresses regional and national priorities reflects the emphasis of the College’s programmes of study, and should help student employability as well as external relations.
41. The College’s research is complemented by consultancy provided for a fee or free of charge for the public good. In its efforts to develop additional funding to support its research, the

College should explore whether it can develop a stronger culture of costing and payment from its business partners for research services and knowledge transfer activities. This would increase the funds it has available to spend at its own discretion outside the constraints of research contracts and could be used as concrete evidence of the value that the users of its services place on its applied research.

42. The College's academic and social and business partners have a wide range of positive influences on its research and related activities. These influences have come through projects, networks, research commissioned by business and social partners, and opinion surveys. As a result, the College argues that its research is more responsive to local needs, its staff and students are more effective, and its partners are better supported. The influence of the College's partners appears to be quite widespread and beneficial, consistent with its research strategy. However, it is not entirely clear how far this influence arises from a specific strategy beyond the College's general intention to build and maintain a wide range of partnerships, nor how far the influence extends to providing general rather than designated research funding.
43. The College's research strategy complies with the expectations of the European Research Area as far as is reasonable for a small institution in one of the smaller European countries. The College recognizes that although it encourages research mobility and research productivity, these still need stimulation, but nevertheless the range and level of activity seem sensible.
44. The College has engaged in two European Union Framework Plan 7 projects, but lack of capacity in various respects has restricted its ability to compete for funds and take part in international research projects. A low level of participation in European research projects is not surprising while the College's research develops to a level where it will be able to make a significant contribution in its own right.
45. There is limited outward mobility of the College's staff, restricted by the lack of doctoral qualifications among its staff, although there are now more full-time staff. There is modest inward mobility. Detailed descriptions of individual examples of mobility were presented, and the benefits of inward and outward mobility are clearly appreciated. Inward and outward mobility of researchers are likely to increase as research capacity develops and more of the College's research becomes internationally known.
46. Overall, the College's research areas are suitably matched to its teaching programmes and to regional needs, but it was not clear to the team what relative priority the College assigns to regional, national and international recognition of quality in deciding how much effort to put into different types of research and what standard to aim for. What is achieved is reasonable in the College's present state of development, but a more ambitious publication strategy and participation in external evaluation would help to enhance the standing of its research and further the College's aims.

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

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

47. The College's impact on regional and national development comes through training professionals, stimulating innovation, and influencing the local social and cultural environment, all of which are embedded in its mission, which contains a range of suitable

measures. In practice, the College has a wide range of regional and national interactions that fully support its mission.

48. The staff of the College are variously engaged in regional public affairs, and there is a range of activities including outreach from professional activities and student groups. Students have won a range of external awards. The College felt that it is effective in this area, but it described the range of activities rather than analysing how well they are achieving their intended purpose. Accordingly, the College presented rather little evidence in relation to how its impact complies with national or regional economic, cultural and social development priorities, but stressed that its strategy and activities do align with regional and national priorities. The College's partners in the region confirm that its activities fully support their endeavours.
49. The College's strategic focus on supplying graduates for the labour market necessarily means a focus on the world of work and employers and hence is relevant to national and regional development. In particular student projects are systematically used to explore areas of direct interest to employers, in accordance with what the College calls tailored applied research. It reported an analysis showing that 80% of student theses are applicable to real-world problems. Students also undertake practice placements, preferably related to their final thesis, which local employers help to assess. The College gave cogent examples of relevance and impact of some of this student work. In this area the College appears to be fulfilling its aims rather well, but it was not clear what relative priority the College assigns to regional, national and international significance in deciding how much effort to put into different programmes of study: for example, in some areas, meeting national needs might be neglected because meeting regional needs is so successful.
50. The College reported that various staff are members of a wide range of relevant regional, national and international voluntary and professional bodies. Overall the College's staff appear to be highly engaged in such outside activities, with benefit to the College as well as to its community. Business and social partners confirmed this engagement, which extends to ensuring that visitors to the College are given the chance to make a local radio broadcast so that the community can share in their expertise.
51. Overall, the work of the College is clearly oriented towards regional and national development goals and appears to be successful, although more systematic evaluation would be valuable to support this impression and to guide further development.

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

## VII. BEST PRACTICE EXAMPLES AND RECOMMENDATIONS

52. Utena College is a small institution with a clear sense of its position in its community and of its proper mission in supporting and developing that community, extending from widening local participation in higher education and lifelong learning to developing an international perspective. Its systematic use of students in meeting regional needs for trained staff and for applied research and its provision of learning opportunities in the community (for example, in penitentiaries and in developing computer literacy among older members of the population) are greatly appreciated by its partners, and are commendable.

53. The College's processes for quality management are broadly effective but seem to rely rather heavily on discussion rather than on formal criteria and transparent procedures to manage risk. The team found several examples where the College was content to describe performance rather than analyse it and others where the College did not make effective use of the results of external evaluations of its activities. The team therefore recommends that the College should develop a culture of self-evaluation in which its activities are not only described but are also analysed (for example by comparison with suitable benchmarks) and in which the analysis is used to inform future actions to enhance its provision. In particular, the team encourages the College to pursue vigorously its intention to develop its quality system, and to ensure that the system is wide-ranging in its use of data and self-critical in its analysis of the data.
54. In various areas the team found activities and projects that were consistent with the College's overall aims individually but together did not seem to reflect a clear set of choices among competing aims and opportunities. For example the team was unable to obtain an understanding of the relative priority the College assigns to regional, national and international significance in deciding how much effort to put into different programmes of study; or of the relative priority the College assigns to full-time and part-time study, on-campus and off-campus study, contact and distance learning, and face-to-face, blended and e-learning in deciding how much effort to put into different modes of study; or of the relative priority the College assigns to regional, national and international recognition in deciding how much effort to put into different types of research. The team therefore recommends that the College should strive to develop more tightly focused strategic planning in which competing priorities are explicitly recognized and evaluated in order to make clearer strategic choices about how to allocate limited human, financial and material resources in order to progress faster and farther towards the College's goals.
55. The College recognizes that the competence of its staff and students in other languages needs to be increased to help meet its goals. In particular, many aspects of modern life and many academic disciplines and professional activities rely on familiarity with English. However, the team found that few of the staff or students whom it met accepted the invitation to speak in English if they felt able to do so, and so the team endorses the College's view that increasing foreign language competence should be a priority, especially if it is to meet its ambition to present programmes of study entirely in English.

## VIII. JUDGEMENT

*Utena College is given a positive evaluation.*

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Mark Anthony Wainman

## ANNEX. UTENA COLLEGE RESPONSE TO REVIEW REPORT

Utena University of Applied Sciences (the College) appreciates the team of experts from Lithuania and other European countries (the team) for its sincere and professional activity in the evaluation of the College and providing with valuable conclusions and recommendation for its future improvement. This will undoubtedly help the College to progress consistently and purposefully to reach for renewal, improvement of the quality of studies, systematic implementation of the College mission and the goals.

The College has familiarized and analysed the Institutional Review Report of Utena College developed by the team and would like to respond with some remarks regarding factual inadequacies found in the report and the content of the report.

**Paragraph 2** of the Report states that the Self-Evaluation Report (SER) „... *was presented in clear format, although it contained a large quantity of unnecessary detail. The SER was better at describing the College's activities than at evaluating them, and where it did report evaluations it was often not clear how they were arrived at.* We would like to attract the team's attention that the issues regarding the SER text were not detailed during the meetings, the SER development group was not asked any questions related to the above mentioned statements. In addition, „Methodology for a Higher School Assessment“ (2010), which served as the basis for the SER development, does not stress that a higher educational institution when presenting its self-evaluation shall indicate the ways in which they are reached. Therefore, we should think that by providing much factual information on the College activity during the period under report in the SER we have indicated not only what has been achieved and should be improved, but also provided the team with the material that could hardly be obtained in one somewhere else. Analysis is not possible without the material under evaluation. With reference to all that we should think that the Self-Evaluation Report presented by the College should be treated as a descriptive-analytical document.

**Paragraph 9 of the Report on the strategic plans of the College**, indicates that „*Priorities are not based on clear criteria and decisions made within a consistent and sustainable planning framework, but rather are determined by various deliberative bodies through discussion, often in what appears to be an opportunistic way. External programmes, cooperative projects and the available financial resources naturally have an important impact on planning, but these factors are also not always systematically integrated into the College's strategic planning process*“.

By not agreeing with the statements regarding the lack of clear criteria, we would like to stress that all the priorities distinguished in the strategic plans are based on very specific criteria of effect, outcome and product that have been presented in the descriptions of the programmes of the mentioned plans and in the tables of the summaries of evaluation criteria (e.g., Table 3 in the plan for 2008-2010). The following order for criteria delivery is foreseen by the Methodology for Strategic Planning approved by the Government of the Republic of Lithuania (2010). Following the above mentioned methodology, strategic plans as well integrate financial and other resources, that are available to the College through various *external programmes, cooperative projects and other resources, etc.* Therefore, we would also not agree with the statement regarding resources that is stated in the same paragraph.

We would hardly agree with another statement in the above mentioned paragraph of the Report regarding decision making in an opportunistic way, i.e. seeking for a maximal interest and do not following any principles. Part 1.2.3. of the SER describes in very detail the distribution of responsibilities and accountability and the process of decision making related to that and which

always follows its main guidelines – the College mission, strategic goals, the provisions of the Statute. This is stressed throughout the whole text of the SER as well as was highlighted in the meetings with the team.

**Paragraph 11** states that *„in response to the declining number of students the College’s main target is schoolchildren“*. We would discuss the accuracy of the underlined statement. To our point of view, the focus of the above mentioned statement should be made on the fact that the general number of schoolchildren declines across the country due to demographic changes, while through purposeful efforts of the College, the rate of the declining number of entrants is significantly lower in comparison to the average rate of other higher schools of the country.

**Paragraph 12** presents remarks regarding the College’s Quality Guide which are accepted by the College as a good recommendation to implement the system of study quality management. However, we would not like to agree unconditionally with the conclusion that *„it appears that evaluation is not always systematic or transparent and is largely based on discussion among colleagues“*. We would partly accept the remark regarding the systematic character of evaluation (it should be improved), but would not agree regarding transparency of evaluation and its basing on discussions. We think that a discussion is an act that guarantees publicity and transparency, which was also indicated by the team during its visit to the College.

The same paragraph also states that *„...although the external evaluation of its programmes of study were mentioned in the SER as part of a process of analysis, staff told the team that there is no process for looking at a whole year’s evaluation together...“*. The latter statement is not fully true, as there exists such a process, yet is not described in the College’s quality documents: the conclusions of an external evaluation of a study programme are always analysed in the meetings of a department, Dean’s Office and Director’s Office, where they find out such issues as what are the negative factors of an evaluation, the goals not achieved, at which stage of a study process there are certain drawbacks. The heads of all the study programmes take part in the Dean’s Office meetings, the Director’s Office meeting involves the College managers and the managers of the faculties. All this results in clear overview of all the study programmes evaluated during that respective year, the problems and issues to be improved. After the analysis is carried out, a plan for improvement of a study programme quality is designed. In order to guarantee the effectiveness of the plan, the control of the executed tasks is performed every half a year by accounting to the appointed people in the Dean’s and Director’s Office meetings. All this is described in part 1.2.1. of the SER.

We have noticed an error in **Paragraph 15** in naming the number of departments within the faculties *„at level 2, the organisation of academic activities is through two faculties (Business and Technologies and Health Care and Social Care)... The faculties are in turn composed of three and five departments respectively“*. In reality it is on the contrary: five and three departments respectively.

In **Paragraph 18** the team expressed the idea that *„it would be helpful if the expectation that colleges will meet minimum levels of doctoral qualifications for academic staff was matched by an expectation that universities will meet minimum levels of enrolment of staff from colleges for doctoral studies“*. The College welcomes and supports this attitude and thinks that this conclusion could be formulated in a more imperative manner by making focus on target opportunities for college teachers to enter doctoral studies and addressed not only for the College but for the Ministry of Education and Science as well.

**Paragraph 19** remarks that: *„... it remains unclear how the results of the surveys are interpreted and used to plan future actions“*. We would argue with the statement by indicating that there is



such a process which involves the analysis of the results of surveys and other evaluations of the quality of studies and are used later to plan the future actions. This is not described in the Quality Guide, but the process that is really used is described in part 1.2.1. of the SER, it has also been discussed during the meetings with the team.

In **paragraph 20** the team mentions that „... students who met the team said they would welcome better computers and more equipment. The provision of computer workstations is benchmarked against the national average. However, in the case of library provision it did not seem that the published data and national norms were analysed, and the team considered this to be a missed opportunity to evaluate and enhance the provision“.

When analysing the content of this conclusion we noticed that the team could misunderstand the data presented in the text of the part 1.2.6. and table 6 of the SER. In the parts mentioned, the number of computers for 100 students is indicated, i.e. a quantitative expressions of the College's computer resources and its comparison to the situation in all the colleges in Lithuania. It should be noted, that this is only reflection of the real situation and is not a "national norm" to be achieved. The provision of these indicators shows that the situation is being analysed and constantly improved. Meanwhile, we could think, that students during their meeting with the team have expressed the wish not for the number of computers to be increased but their quality ("better computers"). This is a little bit different issue that has been expressed in the present conclusion.

**Paragraph 21** states that „ It appears that the distribution among competing priorities is decided by extensive discussion rather than by reference to explicit criteria ... the College actively seizes opportunities to secure external funding for projects to extend and enhance its activities, but it was not clear to the team that these projects were part of an overall academic strategy“.

We would like to note that in all the cases – when attracting the funds for the development of the College activity, when distributing them, as it has been stated in the SER and as it has been noted by the team, the College always follows its strategic plans, the goals and measures indicated and stated there, as well as aforementioned criteria. This is one part of the criteria. Another part of the criteria is always related to a specific priority and measure, e.g. following the strategic plans (for the year 2008 and 2011) the College implements the priority of study modernisation which is linked to specific measures – to update the existing study programmes or to introduce new ones. In this case, the criteria for fund allocation are determined by the specific character of study programmes. Let us say that it is necessary to create a certain learning environment and informational basis for the study programmes of Cosmetology and Electric Energetic, as well as to create a specific learning environment for the study programmes of Social Work and Law. Those facilities are different and their criteria are determined by the national descriptors/standards of the respective study programmes, the description of a study programme. In addition, the faculties oblige themselves to guarantee the procurement of learning facilities that would match the requirements of a study programme when they provide the newly developed study programme for approval. A three-year plan for needed material means of a new study programme is designed. The update of learning resources of other study programmes is carried out according to the need expressed by a department and by giving strong argumentation to support that need. With reference to all this, a motivated plan for the update of material resources is designed annually by the faculties and is discussed in the Director's Office meeting. The funds are planned and distributed accordingly. Therefore, it should not be stated that there are no criteria for the fund distribution. It can only be stated that the College does not have a full description of the criteria in one single document (There is a part f criteria in the Quality Guide. It is under improvement).

**Paragraph 22** indicates that „...it is not clear whether feasibility projects and pilot studies always include an assessment of the sustainability of such initiatives, and it appeared to the team that sometimes preliminary work was carried as far as preparing materials that could not then

*be delivered for lack of continuing funding*“. Although it is not easy to understand what the team exactly means by saying „... *an assessment of the sustainability of such initiatives*“, we make an assumption that it speaks about the feasibility studies for the development of new joint study programmes and we think that the conclusion does not reflect the real situation. 2 feasibility studies are being mentioned in the SER which namely serve as the starting point for further activity – to submit applications to develop and start the development of 2 new specific joint study programmes this way finding a solution for the continuing funding. In addition, it should be noted that the developed feasibility studies created preconditions to sign memorandums with foreign institutions in higher education what in its turn has created an additional value – enhanced opportunities to overtake good practice from higher educational institutions of various countries, to strengthen academic mobility, to improve the quality of international studies and the competences awarded to students, etc.

**Paragraph 25 (it finds repetition in paragraph 52 as well)** stresses that „... *evaluation of quality needs to be less episodic, more transparent and more systematic, with more use of defined procedures and less reliance on extended discussion or individual judgement. This will help to manage risk and facilitate enhancement*“. We would like to argue the remark about the episodic character of evaluation. On the contrary, the focus made on the issue in part 1.2.1. of the SER illustrates the systematic character of evaluation. We have highlighted that during the meetings by stressing that not everything that covers the quality system is described systematically in the Quality Guide and the College documents. However, the team is informed that the College is implementing a project regarding study quality management where the above mentioned problematic issues are being solved and improved in the framework of the respective project. The team did not inquire about the details of this project during the meeting. Therefore, it could have a feeling that quality is evaluated episodically and the College does not improve anything in this respect.

It was noted in **Paragraph 27** that „... *there appears to be no detailed mapping against the Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area (European Standards and Guidelines) that would clearly demonstrate compliance and help to ensure that it continues*“. We would partially agree with the latter conclusion basing on the argument that the Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area highlight that there should be developed and implemented a continuous strategy for quality improvement within the higher school and the quality of studies is pointed out either to be a priority or a measure for study improvement in all the strategic plans of the College for the period under evaluation. Therefore, it may be stated that quality is an integral part of the College strategy, quality system exists and fundamentally matches the main requirements of the European Standards and Guidelines, however, is not shaped in a scheme/is described as an entire system.

**Paragraph 28** in respect to adult education states the following „...*the team learned that the provision of these additional opportunities depends largely on the initiative of the teaching staff rather than on any strategic choice by the College*“. This conclusion is not true as the goals of every strategic plan for the period under evaluation are linked to or stress directly the development of adult education. This is understood by the College as its strategic choice.

In **Paragraph 30**, when speaking of non-formal study of the College, the team pointed out that „... *it is not clear what individual or office has oversight of all this activity and can coordinate and evaluate it*“. It is difficult to say why the team felt like that and we would like to explain that it was pointed out several times in the SER (sections 1.2.2. and 1.2.3.), in supplementary documents of the College process description that the team was provided with and during the meetings, that the monitoring and coordination of non-formal and adult education is performed

by the coordinator for non-formal adult education (until 01-02-2012 – a specialist for adult education) who is subordinate to the head of the Strategic Development Department.

We envisage a certain contradiction between the statements in **Paragraph 31**: „*Employment and careers of graduates are monitored, but not very systematically. ... Overall the College seems to be both proactive and responsive in this area*“. In order to discuss the first statement, we think that the employment and career monitoring of the graduates is performed rather systematically by the College – twice a year the information on employment is collected, career monitoring is performed through Alumni Club and various events. Together with its partners the College participates in a national project on Career which will result in the opportunity to make use of SODRA data (State Social Insurance Fund Board of the Republic of Lithuania under the Ministry of Social Security and Labour) to monitor the employment indicators. That will significantly improve the regularity of career monitoring of the graduates.

**Paragraph 32** generalises the contribution of social partners and cooperation and the team notices that „... *seems to be almost hyperactive in this area, and although faculty practice supervisors oversee the relevant formal agreements, the team was not confident that the College has a high-level overview of all these activities*“. The analysis of the latter conclusion involves a certain doubt on what hyperactiveness of the College and what kind of high-level overview the team has in mind. We would therefore think that the text of the conclusion could be specified to sound unambiguously.

**Paragraph 36** in respect to the research area of the College states the following: „*In particular the College has taken part in a project with national and international partners to develop what it calls ‘tailored applied research’, which may be conducted by groups of students as part of their studies or by groups of staff*“. We would attract the team’s attention towards a certain inadequacy between the real fact and the underlined statement of the conclusion. The Project TARSI (which is particularly meant here) aimed not to develop ‘tailored applied research’, but to develop and implement the system of tailored applied research which has been really done. The uniqueness and systematic attitude towards tailored applied research is in the system.

**Paragraphs 37, 38 and 39 of the report** provide with valuable remarks regarding improvement of the College’s research and science applied activity. The College is well aware of the situation and problematic issues therefore a part of the recommendations has already been integrated into the Strategic Activity Plan for 2011-2013 and the Plan for the Development of Scientific Activity for 2011-2013.

**Paragraph 41** in respect to the influence of social partners on research and related activity states that: „*it is not entirely clear how far this influence arises from a specific strategy beyond the College’s general intention to build and maintain a wide range of partnerships, nor how far the influence extends to providing funding*“. We are not quite sure what the team means with the “specific strategy”. We think that the term should be specified or explained. The other issue under discussion is the extent of the influence of a partnership leading to funding provision. The “Methodology for a Higher School Assessment“ which served as the basis for the SER development does not make any focus on the evaluation of this kind of influence. Therefore, the third part of the SER speaks about the influence of social partners and points out that the funding issue of a partnership depends on many factors – the number of orders, the scope of the projects funded, etc., however, we did not point out any specific numbers and preferred to make focus on other aspects of influence that is related to the added value.

In **Paragraph 45** the team stressed that „*it was not clear to the team what relative priority the College assigns to regional, national and international recognition of quality in deciding how*

*much effort to put into different types of research and what standard to aim for*“. With regard to the priorities being mentioned here, we would like to note that they must have been lost “between the lines” in the third part of the SER, however we explained our position regarding this issue during the meetings with the team. We focused that on the regional level we will seek for orders of tailored research, will further consistently improve practical applicability of the research executed by teachers and students, on the national level we will try to intensify research projects funded through the national funds and Lithuanian Research Council, on the international level – together with academic and other partners – to get involved into research projects funded by the Seventh Framework Programme (FP7) and international funds.

**In Paragraph 48** (it also finds repetition in **Paragraph 53**) with regard to the impact of the College on regional and national development, it is noted that „ *In this area the College appears to be fulfilling its aims rather well, but it was not clear what relative priority the College assigns to regional, national and international significance in deciding how much effort to put into different programmes of study: for example, in some areas, meeting national needs might be neglected because meeting regional needs is so successful*“. To comment the latter conclusion, we should note that regional and national aspects are very often on the same level, international – depend on opportunities to attract foreign students, partners, international experience. E.g. technological study programmes offered by the College are significant to the region but they also meet national needs as their purpose is to train professionals able to optimize and modernize various technologies, this being one of the national priorities. Meanwhile, the study programmes of Business Management, Tourism and Hotel Administration are relevant to all the levels of significance.

**Paragraph 51** which discusses the best practice examples and presents recommendations, mentions „ *the local penitentiary* “. To our mind, these are Alytus and Panevėžys penitentiaries, where the College provided education services. However, these are not local institutions the way we would mean it (local – refers to Utena District or at least the region).

**Paragraph 53** notices that „ *the team was unable to obtain an understanding ..., of the relative priority the College assigns to full-time and part-time study, on-campus and off-campus study, contact and distance learning, and face-to-face, blended and e-learning in deciding how much effort to put into different modes of study...*“. It would be difficult to agree with the statement regarding identification of a priority for continual and extended forms of studies. The priorities are defined by the very character of study programmes or the conclusions of certain evaluations, needs analysis. For instance, such study programmes like General Practice Nursing, Physiotherapy, Dental Technology are not offered in the extended form of studies as they ask for constant balance between theoretical and practical training load. The need for continual or extended form of studies is identified by carrying out market research, inquiries of employers and prospect students, e.g. the text of the SER speaks about the appearance of the extended form of studies of Business management and Accounting at Ukmergė Technology and Business School following the order issued by the mayor of Ukmergė District Municipality which confirms the need of the region and after taking into account the demand expressed by employers; similarly, evening form of Accounting studies have been offered at Utena following the demand of students.

**In Paragraph 54** the team points out that „ *The College recognizes that the competence of its staff and students in other languages needs to be increased*“. We would like to specify a little bit the conclusion by stressing that we take the responsibility regarding the improvement of the competence of the staff in other languages, since e.g. the knowledge of the Russian language is of a very sufficient level and is also very topical for the College. We would like to attract the team’s attention towards the fact that a part of the staff did not respond to the team’s invitation to

express themselves in English during the meetings in order for everyone participating in the meeting to understand what was told to the team and not repeat themselves. There is a number of teachers who speak German or French as their second (third) foreign language. We would also like to mention that we would hardly take the responsibility for the students' competence in other languages, i.e. we can not teach them as this is the purpose of a basic and secondary education. The limited volume of the College study programmes does not allow increasing the number of hours for foreign language studies. However, students may improve their competences in foreign languages by selecting freely selective subjects in languages. This is greatly related to their personal needs and initiatives.