



## **STUDIJŲ KOKYBĖS VERTINIMO CENTRAS**

### **VILNIAUS KOOPERACIJOS KOLEGIJOS**

### **VEIKLOS VERTINIMO IŠVADOS**

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## **INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW REPORT OF VILNIUS COOPERATIVE COLLEGE OF HIGHER EDUCATION**

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## CONTENTS

I. INTRODUCTION.....	3
II. BACKGROUND INFORMATION ABOUT THE INSTITUTION.....	4
III. STRATEGIC MANAGEMENT .....	5
IV. ACADEMIC STUDIES AND LIFE-LONG LEARNING .....	12
V. RESEARCH AND ART.....	16
VI. IMPACT ON REGIONAL AND NATIONAL DEVELOPMENT.....	18
VII. GOOD PRACTICE AND ENHANCEMENT RECOMMENDATIONS.....	20
VIII. JUDGEMENT .....	23
ANNEX. VILNIUS COOPERATIVE COLLEGE OF HIGHER EDUCATION RESPONSE TO REVIEW REPORT .....	23

## I. INTRODUCTION

1. This report presents findings of a review of Vilniaus Kooperacijos Kolegija / Vilnius Cooperative College (referred to below as VKK or the College) conducted in 2014 by a team of experts from Lithuania and other European countries (the team).
2. The review was organised by the Centre for Quality Assessment in Higher Education (SKVC). It was carried out in accordance with the Procedure for the External Review of Higher Education approved by Government Resolution no. 1317 of 22 September 2010 and the Methodology for Conducting an Institutional Review in Higher Education approved by Order No. 1-01-135 of the Director of SKVC of 25 October 2010 ('the Methodology').
3. VKK submitted a Self-Evaluation Report (SER) with annexes and other documents as requested by the team. The team was also presented with the results of the evaluation of learning resources and associated infrastructure carried out by MOSTA (Research and Higher Education Monitoring and Analysis Centre) and with the evaluation decision of 14 June 2013. The site visit was preceded by one-day training and a preparatory meeting of the team. The team visited the College between 20 and 22 May 2014 and had meetings with the VKK community, college graduates and social partners. After the visit it met to discuss findings and agree the main conclusions and recommendations. The report was subsequently finalised by correspondence.
4. The SER provided the evidence required by the team to prepare for the site visit, though it would have been more informative if it had discussed, at least briefly, various arrangements which were in place rather than referring to detailed documents (not attached to the SER) where the relevant matters were regulated. It contained self-critical comments and mentioned in this context a number of changes which had been introduced recently or were planned in the coming months (e.g. organisational changes). The changes could have been discussed in greater detail to show how findings from the critical analysis of VKK's activities had been or would be used for improvement. These points were clarified during the site visit.
5. The team explored the four main areas of VKK's activity as set out in the Methodology: strategic management, academic studies and lifelong learning, research and / or art activities, and impact on regional and national development. In discussing the evidence collected and reaching its conclusions, the team made appropriate reference to the criteria and sub-criteria of the Methodology.
6. The team consisted of the following members:
  - Prof. David Timms (team leader): higher education consultant, Chair of many European reviews including those of ENQA, United Kingdom;
  - Prof. Tiiu Paas (team member): Professor at Faculty of Economics and Business Administration, University of Tartu, Estonia;
  - Lars Lynge Nielsen (team member): former President and Vice-President of EURASHE, Head of International Relations and Head of Department of Social Education at University College Lillebaelt, Denmark;
  - Mindaugas Juodaitis (team member, social partner representative): Director of JSC „WEB Partners“, Director of JSC „WEBGROUP projektai“, President of the Board of the Finance and Credit Management Association, Lithuania;
  - Darius Vizbaras (team member, student representative): Vice-President of the Student Union at Vilnius College, Professional Bachelor of Management of Cultural Activity at Vilnius College, Lithuania;
  - Ewa Kolanowska (team secretary), higher education consultant, Poland.

## II. BACKGROUND INFORMATION ABOUT THE INSTITUTION

7. *Vilniaus Kooperacijos Kolegija* is a non-state college located in Vilnius, with a branch campus in Kaunas. It originates from the School of Economics in Kaunas which was established in 1930 and taken over in 1945 by the Union of Lithuanian Cooperatives (*Lietkoopsajunga*, hereafter referred to as the ULC), VKK's Founder / Stakeholders<sup>1</sup>. Since then it has changed its status and name several times and has operated under its present name since 2000.
8. The mission of VKK is "to execute higher education college studies, providing the higher education qualification, satisfying the society and labour market needs; to develop applied research, provide counselling for business and social stakeholders and training services for people and entities; [and] to develop the entrepreneurial, socially responsible and civic personality."
9. VKK provides seven first-cycle programmes leading to professional Bachelor's degrees in the following fields: Accounting; Business Management; Business Economics; Sales Management; Catering Business Organisation; Information System Implementation and Maintenance; and Communication Business English. The last four programmes are new ones accredited in 2012. Two other accredited programmes, Communication and Information Management, and Retail Banking Economics (also established in 2012), are not provided due to low numbers of applicants. In 2013, Information System Implementation and Maintenance was recognised as a 'unique' programme and awarded public funding. The programmes are delivered by the Departments of Economics and Finance, of Management, and of Information Technologies and Humanities. The three 'academic' departments are supported by the 'administrative' Divisions of Full-Time and Part-Time Studies.
10. The College also offers non-degree postgraduate programmes in accounting, business and marketing fields and runs various adult education or professional development courses and seminars. Adult education is provided by the VKK Adult Education Centre established in 2002.
11. The College had 780 students in the academic year 2013/14, including 603 in Vilnius and 177 in Kaunas, as compared to 2 024 in 2008/09 (SER, Annex 10; 2013 Performance Report). Total enrolments rose by 4.6% in 2013 as compared to 2012, which resulted from increasing enrolments in three programmes. In the last five years the number of part-time students was more than twice as high as that of full-time students. While the proportions varied, part-time students outnumbered full-time students in most programmes available in both study modes.
12. In the academic year 2013/14, the total number of staff was 146, including 33 administrative staff (SER). The College employed 88 academic staff as compared to 105 in 2008/09 (SER, Annex 13) (a reduction of the total number combined with that of teachers' workload). The number of permanent staff dropped from 57 in 2008/09 to 34 in 2013/14, and that of temporary staff increased slightly from 48 to 54. In 2013/14, 17 staff held the position of Associate Professor (19 in 2008/09), and 17 staff had a PhD, including 1 permanent staff member and 16 temporary staff (as compared to 4 and 8 respectively in 2008/09).
13. The previous review of the College (2005) resulted in nine recommendations. They stated that the College should: adopt regulations and / or arrangements increasing efficiency of research, encouraging the involvement of staff in, and improving the quality of, research, and boosting students' motivation; host international students and staff; extend partnership with external stakeholders; develop a Quality Manual; and introduce an internal financial control system. All recommendations were implemented, but the SER acknowledges that measures taken to follow those related to research and the motivation of staff and students have not been sufficiently effective.

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<sup>1</sup> The term 'stakeholder' is used in key VKK documents as referring specifically to the ULC Founder. Thus, for the sake of clarity and consistency, this report also uses the term only as a legal one rather than a broader one describing persons or groups who have an interest in the activities of an institution, including students, staff and managers of an institution, graduates, their employers and other social and business partners.

## **FINDINGS OF THE REVIEW TEAM**

### **General comment**

14. The VKK Director and Deputy Director for Development, Research and Quality were appointed in 2013. An analysis of the performance of the College initiated subsequently identified some weaknesses or areas for improvement. As a result, action has been or will soon be taken to introduce changes, and a number of key documents and arrangements which (are expected to) provide a framework for activities of the College have recently been, are now being or will soon be revised or developed. The latter include, in particular, the Statutes which lay down the structure of VKK and the responsibilities of its governing bodies, the Strategic Plan and the Quality Manual together with their indicators, (elements of) a staff policy, a research activity plan, and a visibility strategy. Thus, the review team looked at VKK as an institution in a period of transition, and in exploring the four areas covered by the Methodology, it took into account the direction of changes initiated and planned and the potential of the College for success.

### **III. STRATEGIC MANAGEMENT**

#### **STRATEGIC PLANNING: THE STRATEGIC PLAN, ITS FITNESS FOR PURPOSE AND IMPLEMENTATION**

15. The mission of VKK was defined as an integral part of the current Strategic Plan (2010-2015) and as based on an analysis of the environment of the College underpinning the Plan. The analysis of the environment does not seem to have been used to identify a niche for VKK in the Lithuanian education and labour markets, as the mission statement is generic, basically restating the objectives set for colleges in the Law on Higher Education rather than identifying any unique or distinctive features of VKK.
16. During the team's site visit, the VKK Director pointed to a very strong link between the College, the labour market and social partners (a strong focus on practical training, topics of students' final projects agreed with companies, and graduate employment rates) – a distinctive feature which results to a large extent from the fact that, unlike other non-state colleges, VKK was established by a business organisation (ULC). Some of the students interviewed by the team chose VKK because it provided a programme which was either not available elsewhere or offered by very few other Colleges. These aspects may be taken into account when the College considers features that could differentiate it from its competitors.
17. The Union of Lithuanian Cooperatives as the VKK Founder / Stakeholders is evidently an invaluable asset of the College in terms of ensuring its close link with the labour market and social partners. At the same time, the 2012 VKK Annual Report and the team's discussions with the VKK Stakeholders, management, staff and graduates indicate that there is some tension, or at least a relationship which could usefully be clarified, between what may be called the cooperative mission and identity of the College and its practical strategic needs. All groups interviewed agreed that it was imperative for VKK to increase student enrolment and that new programmes could be a solution to recruitment problems. The VKK management, staff and graduates also pointed to the name of the College as a liability or burden in this context as it carries negative historical connotations. A change of name would require consent of the Stakeholders; requests submitted in recent years have not been approved. The Stakeholders stated that they would support any new programmes, even if not directly responding to the needs of the ULC member cooperatives, but also that their 'vision' for the College is to train professionals primarily in fields covered by cooperatives; this is also clearly reflected in the VKK Statutes. The team considers that VKK would need to go beyond the needs of the ULC and reach out to other social and business partners as well, in order to ensure its viability on the education market and its sustainable development in the future.

18. **Recommendations:** The team recommends that VKK revise its mission statement to make it more specific and identify any distinctive features of the College which may give it an advantage over its competitors and which could be highlighted as part of its 'brand name' (and possibly, 'brand new' name) in its external communication policy.

In reconsidering its mission, the College should try to identify a niche for itself in the education and labour markets which takes into account a balance between legitimate interests and needs of VKK's cooperative Stakeholders and its strategic imperatives which require going beyond the Stakeholders' immediate interests and needs. Such a possible niche would also need to be a focal point around which the College develops its next Strategic Plan.

19. The 2010-2015 Strategic Plan complies with the mission, linking its main goals, objectives and activities with the aims of VKK. The Plan is consistent with the national higher education and research policies and the main principles of the European Higher Education Area (EHEA). Its relevance to national higher education priorities is also confirmed by VKK's success in bidding for publicly funded student places on its IT programme. Student-centred learning (SCL), a key theme in the EHEA, does not feature strongly in the Strategic Plan, but it emerged as a distinct priority of the EHEA only when the Plan was being finalised, and the Plan includes the development of distance learning as a way of responding to the needs of students. Nevertheless, VKK is **encouraged** to give more consideration to SCL in the process of developing the next Strategic Plan, in particular considering the diversity of the student population, the decline in student numbers in recent years, a high dropout rate, and low motivation of students identified as an issue by VKK itself.
20. There is no explicit reference to the European Research Area (ERA) in the Plan, and during the site visit staff did not seem to be fully familiar with the concept of the ERA. However, as the SKVC explained to the team, the ERA-related criteria of institutional reviews are not applicable to colleges which, though required by law to conduct applied research, are established primarily as training institutions. In this context, it is worth noting that the strategic objectives of applied research approved by a 2012 Order of the VKK Director are, nonetheless, in line with the current principles of the ERA related to partnerships with social and business organisations, international research projects and research mobility.
21. The current Strategic Plan is based on a quite thorough analysis of the external and internal environment of the College, except that in discussing the performance of study programmes, it does not refer to student dropout (which has contributed to a decline in student numbers over the years) and its causes which may be inherent in the content of, or ways of delivering, established programmes. The Plan clearly defines four strategic goals together with operational objectives, logically linked with the analysis of the environment, and implementation measures and expected outcomes. No consideration is given in the Plan to necessary human and financial resources; hence, for example, as the SER acknowledges, a mismatch between the number of indicators for monitoring the implementation of the Plan and available resources. However, the evidence collected by the team shows that the current VKK management team takes a realistic approach and, thus, resourcing is likely to be given due attention in the next Strategic Plan.
22. Considering the above, the Strategic Plan is, overall, fit for purpose, though, as the SER acknowledges, it does not reflect recent changes in the economy and education system. These are, however, addressed through annual plans which define priorities within the strategic goals and operational objectives of the Strategic Plan. Ideally, the Annual Plan should also provide some background information on recent changes within and outside the College and on the progress in the implementation of the Strategic Plan to set a context for, and justify, annual priorities.
23. In the team's view, the two main strategic challenges currently facing VKK are to recruit more, and lose fewer students at a time when the population of 19-22 year olds is falling. The former is clearly reflected in both the Strategic Plan and the 2013-2014 Annual Plan and in action taken accordingly in recent years. The answers developed by VKK in response to the challenge are valid. It established four new programmes in 2012, including two (Catering

Business Organisation, and Information System Implementation & Maintenance) where student enrolment increased this year; the latter also meets state priorities and, thus, students receive public funding. Further, the College is developing new modes of delivery (distance learning to be introduced as from the academic year 2014/15) that might open up new markets both within Lithuania and abroad (discussions are under way with institutions in Belarus and Ukraine). Its intensive and extensive promotion campaign launched in 2013 (the website updated in three languages; visits to secondary schools and new agreements signed with vocational schools; participation in fairs; advertisements in the media) resulted in a slight increase in total student enrolments as compared to the previous year.

24. The intensive work carried out recently to establish distance learning courses in response to not only external but also internal demand also shows that VKK is seeking to make its established programmes more attractive, and thus to retain its students. This is also confirmed by efforts to introduce more flexible 'individual study plans' (though, as the SER acknowledges, this option is still limited to a small number of courses). Further, the College has some imaginative ways of encouraging the community of students with activities such as arts classes.
25. Nevertheless, the College does not yet pay sufficient attention to keeping its students despite the fact that the dropout rate has been high in recent years (over 30% in 2013; SER), even if – as the team was informed during the visit – between 2 and 8% of those dropping out return after some time. In identifying causes of the dropout, the College tends to focus on external factors (emigration; limited financial resources available to students; family or work commitments; insufficient prerequisite knowledge of newly enrolled students; low motivation of students). There appears to be some reluctance to investigate whether there are any internal factors (e.g. the content of programmes, the ways they are delivered or insufficient student support) that make the situation worse or could make it better and, thus, whether any changes in established programmes may be necessary. Further, while detailed data about dropout is collected, it is analysed only or mainly for individual students, whereas a comparative analysis in a breakdown by programme would identify those in which changes may be necessary.
26. **Recommendations:** The team recommends that VKK adopt a balanced approach to student recruitment and retention where due consideration is given not only to factors which may be pulling students to VKK (e.g. new programmes, promotion), but also to internal factors which may be pushing students away (e.g. content of programmes, the ways they are delivered, insufficient learning support). (See also a related recommendation in par. 40).
27. VKK currently uses two different set of indicators for monitoring, defined in the Strategic Plan (for the monitoring of its implementation) and the Quality Manual (for quality assessment and improvement). As it acknowledged in the SER and discussions with the team, the two sets are not fully compatible; there are too many indicators in the Plan in relation to the resources available, which makes it difficult to measure achievement; and most of the indicators in the Plan are quantitative. The College plans to consolidate and rationalise the indicators. Thus, it has recently set up a working group which will propose arrangements to improve data management and a smaller and coherent set of indicators to monitor quality and the implementation of the Plan.
28. **Recommendation:** The team recommends that VKK urgently finalise its work on a shorter list of indicators so that it is used for the purposes of the next Strategic Plan, making sure that the indicators selected have an added value in terms of monitoring the implementation of the Strategic Plan and making improvements.
29. As a general comment going beyond Strategic Plans, measurement and data management are areas where VKK needs to make considerable progress. Overall, it collects a lot of data (especially considering its limited staff resources), but some data relevant to institutional performance is not collected or available data is not analysed. For example, aside from the above-mentioned lack of internal research on causes of dropout by programme, too little is done to measure graduate employment despite the fact that it is considered to be the main

measure of VKK's impact on regional and national development (for details, see par. 98). While the College has put in place some arrangements to provide learning support to students (group supervisors, 'consultations' with teachers / individual tutoring, counselling, and an electronic system registering meetings with teachers), it does not systematically collect and analyse data to assess their effectiveness. Reviews of first-cycle programmes do not make use of all available data (see paras 36-40). A working group for data management created at the beginning of 2014 is a very good initiative in this context.

30. **Recommendation**: The team recommends that, in line with preliminary arrangements, VKK define a set of data necessary to measure its performance in key areas of its regular activity, develop ways of measuring performance and regularly collect and analyse data.
31. The SER explains that the Strategic Plan "is implemented by annual plans and annual budgets". As the team learned during the site visit, each VKK unit collects data on an annual basis to monitor progress against the objectives of the Strategic Plan, and overall progress is assessed annually, though this is difficult due to the excessive number of indicators on the one hand and limited staff resources on the other hand. Various reports are also produced annually for internal use (e.g. reports from teachers on their performance, reports on student performance, departmental reports, etc.) and provide the basis for Annual Reports of the College. This appeared to the team to be too little monitoring and too infrequent. There are no clearly defined procedures for the on-going monitoring of progress in the implementation of the Strategic Plan, identifying problems and taking action during the year in areas where progress is not sufficient.
32. The 2013-2014 Annual Report shows a focus on the goals and objectives of the Strategic Plan insofar as it is structured according to them. However, more attention could be paid to the progress towards expected outcomes based on indicators as defined in the Strategic Plan.
33. As confirmed by VKK during the site visit, general information about the implementation of the Strategic Plan is provided to staff at regular meetings. However, the only way in which the College as a whole records and shares findings from its monitoring against the Plan is through the Annual Report by the Director to the ULC Stakeholders. The Report is published on the VKK website and, thus, is available not only to the VKK community but also to the general public. As the team learned during the visit, all interested parties seem to be satisfied with this arrangement. The team believes that more frequent reports in different forms (newsletters, better use of the website, etc.) during the year could be used as a way of internal consciousness raising and ensuring that responsible bodies like the Stakeholders and the Academic Council are in a better position to oversee progress.
34. **Recommendation**: The team recommends that VKK put in place mechanisms for more frequent monitoring of, and reporting on, progress in the implementation of its Strategic Plan, and for ensuring that follow-up will happen.

#### **EFFECTIVENESS OF MANAGEMENT**

35. VKK has a 'hybrid' internal quality assurance system (Internal Education Quality Management System, IEQMS) combining ISO 9001 (for administration and management purposes) and the European Standards and Guidelines (ESG) (for academic purposes), with key arrangements described in the Quality Manual and more detailed documents for each process. The IEQMS was certified by external experts hired by the College as compliant with the ESG. As VKK acknowledged in the SER and during the site visit, the system puts a quite heavy strain on limited staff resources (and, thus, is to be adjusted to the real needs and capacity) and in some cases (e.g. in staff recruitment) only a token effort is made to carry out procedures.
36. The team confirms that, overall, the IEQMS conforms with the ESG, and changes made show that it is quite effective. However, certain aspects of the procedures, in particular those related to the approval, monitoring and review of programmes are not yet fully developed or not yet in place. As the Academic Council (responsible for approving new and evaluating the quality

of established programmes) explained to the team, they receive a description of a new programme which VKK plans to establish on the basis of a market analysis. VKK referred to some market research which underpinned the establishment of the new IT programme and the programme is indeed successful. On the other hand, the fact that enrolments on two other new programmes have been falling may indicate that the decision to establish them was not based on a sufficiently reliable analysis of the education and labour markets. Some of the social partners that the team met also suggested that VKK could interact more with companies to 'clarify the demand' for specialists. (See a related recommendation in par. 61).

37. Various arrangements are indeed in place to review the programmes delivered (as well as to ensure the quality of teaching staff); these include, in particular, student course evaluation / satisfaction surveys; collection and analysis of data on student performance; staff appraisal / 'certification'; graduate surveys (though see the comments on their limitations in par. 63); employer surveys; semester and / or annual reviews by Programme Committees involving staff, students and social and business partners). The team also notes that the Programme Committees look at findings from surveys and feedback from teachers at the end of each semester. However, the College does not appear to take the opportunity to put together and systematically analyse all collected data not only for individual programmes but also across programmes. In particular, this would need to involve linking the performance of students in programmes with, for instance, findings from surveys of satisfaction with teachers, data on the effectiveness of learning support provided to students (see par. 29), results of staff appraisal, etc. (see also related comments in par. 25). Students are, overall, satisfied with their participation in processes related to the review of programmes but would welcome more information on how their feedback is acted upon.
38. In the context of attracting more students, some of the social partners encouraged VKK to revisit 'problematic' programmes and identify what is redundant in them, which duplicate other programmes, etc. as there are, for example, too many programmes in Management in Lithuania. Moreover, as not only the IT one but also other VKK programmes (e.g. Accounting) are based on rapidly evolving information technology, the team believes that more frequent reviews, involving experts from the business sector, may help to ensure that latest developments on the market are integrated into programmes. This seems important, in particular, because VKK does not currently conduct applied research in areas covered by its new programmes, including the one in IT (see also par. 75).
39. Various reports now produced by VKK (see above), including the Annual Report available to the ULC Stakeholders and the Academic Council, do not seem to provide a sufficient basis for the improvement of programmes. Discussions held regularly by the Programme Committees could provide a major input to a comprehensive report on the individual and comparative performance of programmes.
40. **Recommendation**: The team recommends that VKK put in place promptly a procedure to report on individual and comparative performance of programmes each year and every five years, and make sure that reviews underpinning reports cover all relevant data. (See also a related recommendation in par. 26.)
41. The College gave a clear and convincing account of the rationale and implementation of recent and ongoing changes in the organisational structure (e.g. a new IT department; job descriptions (being) revised to clarify responsibilities and avoid duplication; the appointment of Programme Coordinators). The changes are clearly geared towards streamlining management processes, including the management of programmes. The team **encourages** the College to continue streamlining job descriptions of administrative staff so that it makes most effective use of a quite small number of staff employed. The VKK management is willing to make further changes to ensure effective implementation of the next Strategic Plan.
42. There are three main governing bodies: the Meeting of Stakeholders representing the ULC Founder of VKK, the Director and the Academic Council. Students have a self-government body and are members of other bodies (e.g. Programme Committees). The Academic Council is composed of representatives of the College and of other higher education institutions and

social and business partners. The distribution of powers and responsibilities among the three main bodies ensures effective decision-making, and there is an element of external scrutiny in making key decisions through external members of the Academic Council. VKK has strong and active top management. At the same time, there is a strong commitment to the principle of collegiality, evidenced by involving representatives from all constituencies in the development of Strategic and Annual Plans and in the life and work of the College. Strong leadership provided by the top management combined with the principle of collegiality is an example of **good practice**. Procedures for allocating resources are consultative and fit for purpose. The only problem may be the relationship between the timing of budget setting (by calendar year) and the academic year, where the College seems to pose itself difficulties of revising budgets in the light of recruitment because of different time-frames. VKK **could consider** coordinating the timetable for budget setting and student recruitment.

43. Staff development features prominently in the Strategic Plan as one of its four key goals. Staff confirm that their needs are assessed regularly, their feedback is acted upon (e.g. the recent and on-going revision of job descriptions based on findings from a staff survey), and that the College provides opportunities for them to upgrade skills and meet the needs of professional development, in relation to both new directions taken by the College and their self-identified needs. This is also evidenced by a number of projects with a staff development component carried out by VKK in recent years. Staff appraisal ('certification') is underpinned by relevant procedures and the data provided to the team shows that the procedures are strictly adhered to. At the same time, as VKK acknowledged in the SER and discussions with the team, the motivation of some staff to pursue activities that are in the interest of the College, such as applied research (see paras 78-79) or initiatives which may contribute to local, regional or national development (see par. 99), is still quite low. The team also notes that there appear to be few or no incentives to encourage the participation of staff in such activities and in international mobility (see par. 70). This is to be addressed by a new staff policy which will be designed in the third quarter of 2014.
44. **Recommendation:** The team recommends that, in line with VKK's plans, existing arrangements related to the management of human resources be integrated into an overarching staff policy, including a scheme of incentives for staff to participate in international mobility, applied research and voluntary activities.
45. With regard to change management (process optimisation), there is evidence of the introduction and regular revision of written procedures geared towards quality improvement (The Quality Manual). The Manual is updated annually and will be revised soon to adjust procedures to ensure that they are the most efficient ways of achieving the ends sought. There is also evidence of consultation on contents of such procedural manuals as well as blueprints for change such as the Strategic Plan.
46. Despite its limited staff resources, VKK conducts many surveys (among students, staff, graduates and employers) as well as regular internal audits. The examples given to the team show that it acts upon the feedback collected (e.g. job descriptions revised in response to findings from a recent staff survey and an internal audit; quality assurance procedures to be simplified in the next academic year in response to a recent staff and student survey). Various changes referred to in this report have been initiated on the basis of a recent analysis of VKK's performance initiated by the new management, and the self-evaluation carried out as part of this institutional review seems to have provided some further impetus to change. There is no formal mechanism for risk analysis. However, VKK has correctly identified a need to extend the range of programmes offered and enhance its visibility in view of falling enrolments and, accordingly, has established new programmes and launched a vigorous promotion campaign. On the other hand, the effectiveness of change management is hampered by weaknesses in the data management and monitoring system (see paras 29-31). The newly created working group mentioned above is likely to support improvement in this respect. The evidence collected by the team also shows that the new management of the College has a strong sense that change will help secure the College's future.

47. The College meets all MOSTA requirements. Despite financial constraints, it acknowledges the importance of adequate material resources, as evidenced by one of the goals in the Strategic Plan specifically referring to, and investment made every year in, the upgrading of infrastructure. Available learning facilities, including lecture halls, classrooms and computer laboratories, appear satisfactory for both students themselves and the delivery of programmes. The library is well-resourced, offering both digital and printed publications and providing access to relevant databases; all compulsory reading items as well as a variety of additional publications in both Lithuanian and English are available. The IT infrastructure is well managed and VKK makes a good use of project-based funding to develop and upgrade it. It is also commendable that the College is now establishing a distance / blended learning system, and that the premises will be adapted to the needs of disabled students by the end of the year. The management of learning resources is an example of **good practice**.
48. Although the total income has dropped in recent years due to falling enrolments, the decreasing income from tuition fees has been quite effectively balanced by increasing income from the renting of premises, project grants and, to some extent, by State-budget funding for the first-cycle IT programme. The annual budget setting process is geared towards the goals and objectives of the College, with the Strategic Plan and likely risks to its implementation taken into account as part of modelling processes and planning their outcomes. There is also an effective procedure for collecting information on resource needs from various spending departments which are directly involved in activities leading to the achievement of VKK's goals and objectives. The successful implementation of the 2013-2014 Plan, based on the Strategic Plan, shows that the budget is well planned and managed and that funds are used in an effective way to achieve the goals and objectives set. Efficient financial management is an example of **good practice**.
49. VKK has a Code of Ethics, published on its website, which covers all relevant issues, including procedures for plagiarism, and provides for sanctions for breaching the Code. Provisions of the Code are included in the VKK Student Manual. There is also an Ethics Committee which deals with cases where staff or students are considered to have breached the Code. Both staff and students confirmed during the site visit that they were familiar with the Code and its procedures were adhered to (e.g. expulsion for cheating in an exam).
50. Finally, the team would like to emphasise the importance of an effective external and internal communication policy (an element which extends beyond the individual criteria covered above) for further development of the College. VKK is aware that much depends on how successfully it promotes itself. Thus, it has recently initiated an intensive campaign to attract students and intends to design a comprehensive visibility strategy in the third quarter of 2014. The team **strongly supports** VKK's plan to develop a strategy which is based on VKK's distinctive features, covers all areas of its activity, including the training of students, lifelong learning opportunities for other groups of learners, research and consultancy, and contains specific measures for reaching out to each of clearly identified target groups. Additionally, VKK is **encouraged** to consider whether some of its internal communication arrangements could be even more effective. There seems to be effective vertical communication (from the top management down to Heads of Units, Programme Coordinators, etc.) through weekly and / or monthly meetings. Horizontal communication (among staff within each unit and among units, below the level of Heads, Programme Committees or Coordinators) appears to rely mainly on informal links, though this is understandable in a small community. There are some 'channels' for exchange or peer learning among staff across the College such as the website, annual events devoted to the presentation of good practice examples or open lectures, but staff might benefit from more frequent, cross-departmental face-to-face meetings specifically devoted to the sharing of knowledge. This could also help to increase the motivation of staff to participate in research and voluntary activities in departments which are not sufficiently active.
51. In summary, the mission of VKK would provide a better framework for the Strategic Plan if it was less generic and based on a clearly identified niche for the College which takes into

account both the needs of the ULC Founder and practical strategic interests of the College itself; the latter seem to require reaching out to other social and business partners as well.

The Strategic Plan is, overall, fit for purpose; where it does not sufficiently reflect changes in the environment, it is updated through annual priorities set within its strategic goals. However, while VKK's strategic focus on student recruitment is understandable in view of generally falling enrolments, more consideration would need to be given to student retention. The Plan has been successfully implemented, but there are no clearly defined procedures for the on-going monitoring of its implementation; hence too much reliance on annual progress reviews and reporting. The effectiveness of monitoring is also hampered by too many and not fully compatible indicators, which reflects a more general weakness of arrangements for measurement and data management.

The internal quality assurance system is, overall, quite effective, but there is still room for improvement in procedures for the approval, monitoring and review of programmes. Changes in the organisational structure have been clearly geared towards streamlining management. There are reasonable arrangements for process and change management, though improved measurement and data management would make them even more effective. A number of good arrangements for human resources management would need to be integrated into a coherent policy which also includes a scheme of incentives. Ethics is given due consideration. Material (learning) resources are very well managed, and funds are used efficiently in line with the strategic goals.

In most areas which require improvement, VKK has taken, is currently taking or will soon take remedial action in line with its 2013-2014 Plan. Changes within Strategic Management and in the areas analysed in the following sections could be supported by a comprehensive external and internal policy which is also envisaged in the 2013-2014 Plan.

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

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

52. All qualifications awarded by VKK comply with its mission and key documents. Decreasing enrolments on two of the four new first-cycle programmes and the low popularity of non-degree postgraduate programmes and adult education courses / seminars may suggest that they were not established or are no longer in line with the demand on the education and labour market. However, there are more signs that what VKK offers is generally geared to the needs of the Lithuanian economy and society. Two of the four new programmes (Catering Business Organisation, and Information System Implementation and Maintenance / IT), where enrolments are rising, cover areas of priority importance to the development of the economy; one of them (IT), recognised as 'unique', has been awarded public funding. Courses for accountants and IT courses for senior company staff are good examples of how the College responds to in-service training needs. Data for Lithuanian colleges shows that the unemployment rate for VKK graduates was among the lowest in 2012. The team's discussions during the site visit confirm that graduates are well trained for their jobs and are highly valued by employers, both ULC members and other companies, for their knowledge and skills.
53. The College currently offers seven first-cycle programmes in the fields of economics, finance, management and IT. VKK's strong focus on these areas reflects primarily the demand for professionals among consumer cooperative members of the ULC as the Founder of the College; hence, as explained by the Stakeholders during the site visit, the new programmes in Catering Business Organisation and IT. This definitely helps graduates find employment but might also pose constraints on the development of new programmes which would respond to the demand on the labour market beyond the ULC and enable VKK to attract more students. (See also paras 17-18.)

54. A lack of ‘a long-term strategy for the development of studies’ is identified as a weakness in the SER; VKK intends to develop such a strategy in the next academic year and the team **advises** it do so. As regards the choice of programmes to be developed, the team notes that there is, in particular, no formal mechanism for regular collection and analysis of feedback from a representative number and variety of social and business partners / employers (including those outside the ULC) on the current and predicted demand for professionals that could be trained by the College. Only some of the social partners that the team met occasionally receive questions from VKK about the development of new programmes, and some had suggestions which VKK may find worth considering, for example a full IT programme in Programming likely to attract 50-60 students (see a related recommendation in par. 61). With regard to specific programmes to be developed or which are delivered, VKK would benefit from improving procedures for the approval, monitoring and review of programmes as part of its internal quality assurance system (see a related recommendation in par. 40).
55. Six of the seven programmes are both full-time and part-time, and part-time students outnumber full-time students in most programmes. Programmes are currently offered only in a face-to-face classroom setting. However, distance learning is a priority in the Strategic Plan and the 2013-2014 Plan, a Moodle-based system is being established, and some courses in different programmes are being piloted with a view to introducing distance or blended learning as from the academic year 2014/15 (ultimately, 70-80% of courses to be offered). This is appreciated by students, especially those in part-time programmes who combine work and study, as confirmed by feedback collected by VKK through teachers and by the team directly from students. Thus, overall, the variety offered by the College is satisfactory in terms of modes of study, and desirable improvements are being made in terms of modes of delivery.
56. In terms of expanding choices available to students, it is also commendable that some programmes enable graduating with a ‘minor qualification’ (e.g. a ‘minor qualification’ in Business Management for graduates of the IT programme) and that VKK delivers some ‘double study programmes’ jointly with other institutions (e.g. a university in Finland).
57. As mentioned in par. 19, student-centred learning as such does not feature strongly in VKK documents, but the College is now becoming more responsive to students’ learning needs. This is evidenced by efforts it has recently made to introduce distance / blended learning and flexible ‘individual study plans’; the introduction of ‘individual plans’ on a larger scale in the next academic year will depend on findings from a survey to be carried out among students this year. With regard to curriculum content, as the team learned during the visit, students value very highly a strong practical orientation of their programmes, but they would like to have even more practical training, real-life cases (such as a website translated for a company), practical tests and meetings with practitioners, and more English language classes. This may be taken into account in the next review of programmes. The introduction of distance learning, special training for several teachers, the purchase of special equipment, and the adaptation of premises planned for this year show that the College also caters for the needs of students with special needs – an example of **good practice**.
58. The College is to be commended for consideration given to the practical training of students. Students, graduates and employers agree that VKK programmes ensure a good balance between theoretical and practical training. All programmes include a practical placement in companies which accounts for around 17% of the total course-load. The College helps students find hosting companies, placement agreements are signed and feedback is collected to make improvements. Topics of students’ final projects are suggested by, or agreed with, companies and, thus, projects are devoted to real-life cases. There is a mock company lab at VKK. As part of their programmes, students develop entrepreneurial skills and learn how to run their own business. The proportion of teachers with at least three years of practical experience (over 80%) is far above the minimum required by law. The preparation of students for employment is an example of **good practice**.

59. The College runs seven non-degree postgraduate programmes and various other adult education courses and workshops, including tailor-made and regular seminars. Programmes and courses are currently offered only in face-to-face classroom settings but, as the team was informed during the visit, in the future some will also be delivered via the Moodle-based system for distance or blended learning. VKK has successfully run a number of both vocational and non-vocational adult education courses as part of externally funded projects (e.g. for target groups such as accountants, teachers and parents). However, the SER acknowledges that VKK's adult education offer is 'underdeveloped' and regular non-degree postgraduate programmes and seminars are not very popular. The team notes that this is to be addressed through the above-mentioned 'strategy for the development of studies' which will cover non-degree postgraduate programmes and non-formal education.
60. As in the case of first-cycle programmes, a problem that the team sees here is that the College does not systematically canvas social and business for their views on what learning opportunities it could offer to them; for non-vocational adult education, the range of partners consulted could also include civic organisations. The somewhat passive approach of the College in this respect was also confirmed during the visit by social partners who stated that they were more used to thinking in terms of what they could do for the College than what the College could do for them.
61. **Recommendation** (paras 54, 59-60): The team recommends that the College put in place a formal mechanism for regular collection and analysis of feedback from a representative range of social, business and other partners, both within and outside the ULC, on their (current and predicted) demand for professionals and lifelong learning needs to inform its decisions on first-cycle and other training programmes and courses to be developed.
62. To support lifelong learning, VKK has adopted and tested methodologies for the recognition of non-formal learning, still a relatively new concept in Lithuania. Using the methodologies developed for four first-cycle programmes, VKK has recently assessed competences and skills of 23 individuals. This is an example of **good practice**. The SER presents these arrangements mainly as facilitating mobility between different sectors of education (e.g. vocational and higher education; 9 agreements recently signed by VKK with vocational training institutions). In broader terms, they may also attract to the College more adult learners interested to obtain partial or full qualifications, if combined with the development of adult education courses in line with the demands of the labour market and society, the introduction of distance or blended learning for adult learners and an extensive promotion campaign.
63. As acknowledged by VKK, much needs to be done to establish an effective system for employment and graduate career monitoring. The staffing resource of the Careers Centre is very low (0.25 FTE), even considering that the Centre is supported by other units. The College has a database of graduates, though not all data is regularly updated. It keeps track mostly of recent graduates and, in particular, those who are likely to be invited to work as teachers at VKK or involved in its projects. It tries to conduct surveys among graduates every year, but this is not always possible due to limited staffing resources and heavy workload. An Alumni Club was established a few years ago but, as VKK and graduates admit, it is not very active. On the positive side, graduate surveys provide data on the relevance of knowledge and skills acquired at VKK and any possible gaps in training; data is used to improve existing programmes. The College is currently involved in a national project which aims to establish a fully-fledged system for employment monitoring at Lithuanian higher education institutions, but the system is not likely to be operational soon.
64. **Recommendation**: The team recommends that VKK increase staff resources devoted to career planning and monitoring and systematise the collection and management of data about graduates (including not only recent but also older graduates) still before a system currently being developed in the national project on graduate employment monitoring is in place.

VKK is also strongly encouraged to develop the activities of its Alumni Club to make sure that graduates support the College in its further development efforts.

65. Both the SER and the evidence collected by the team during the visit show that VKK has a strong relationship with its academic, social and business partners. This is to a large extent promoted by governance arrangements, with the ULC as the Founder / Stakeholder and the Academic Council including representatives of the ULC as well as other social, business and academic partners. VKK's partners are involved in many aspects of its work: teaching courses; providing placements, suggesting topics of students' final projects and assessing projects; serving on programme committees, contributing to programmes under development, providing feedback on programmes delivered; and sharing their expertise at VKK conferences devoted to programmes and research. The added value they bring to the training of students is confirmed by employers' satisfaction with the quality of graduates. Although social and business partners should be more systematically consulted about possible programmes and courses to be developed (see the recommendation in par. 61), their overall extensive involvement in VKK's activities is an example of **good practice**.
66. Strategic documents relating to academic studies and lifelong learning explicitly refer to the EHEA and relevant European or EU documents. They include provision for credit rating, specification of intended learning outcomes and recognition of credit earned elsewhere. Employability of graduates is a key aspect behind the relevant objectives and related activities in the Strategic Plan. Key documents also give attention to the internationalisation of education in the College, including student and staff mobility. Therefore, the strategic documents are in compliance with the provisions of the EHEA and EU documents concerning higher education.
67. In recent years VKK has built up a network of 44 international partners (as compared to 13 in 2008) in 20 countries across Europe. The numbers of outgoing students varied from 13 to 19 between 2008 and 2013. Although their number again declined slightly in 2013, considering that the total number of VKK students dropped by over 60% in the same period, there seems to be an upward trend in outward mobility. Nevertheless, outgoing students still represented only 1.7% of all VKK students in 2013 (above the 2012 European Erasmus average of 0.95%, and below the average of 3.9% for Lithuania, according to the most recent statistics of the European Commission). (See a related recommendation in par. 71.)
68. The numbers of incoming students grew significantly from 0 in 2008 and 12 in 2009 to 54 in 2012 and 45 in 2013. As a result, unlike many institutions in Central and Eastern European countries, the proportion of outgoing and incoming students is clearly in favour of the latter. This shows that VKK is an attractive place for study and could be used to raise the profile of the College in Lithuania and attract more local students. The College is also to be commended for support it provides to incoming students in terms of various practical arrangements, tutoring and integration, with the Student Mentor Club doing a lot to help international students feel comfortable. Arrangements in place to attract and host international students are an example of **good practice**.
69. There is no clear trend in outward staff mobility: the numbers of outgoing staff varied from 8 in 2008 to 14 in 2009 and then back to 8 in 2010 and 16 in 2013 (except for two years when it grew considerably as VKK was involved in European Social Fund (ESF) projects devoted to the development of teachers' skills). The numbers of incoming staff also varied in recent years (e.g. 15 in 2011, 6 in 2012 and 18 in 2013), but, overall, there has been an upward trend (no incoming staff in 2008 and 3 in 2009).
70. Students and staff confirm that the College promotes mobility under schemes such as Erasmus, those who take up the opportunities offered clearly benefit from them, and mobile students and staff share their experience upon return. There is also some evidence that students who travel to VKK are used to encourage mobility in 'home' students. However, as VKK acknowledged in the SER and during the site visit, a lack of motivation and insufficient language skills are the main barrier to outward mobility. Students also point to a psychological barrier ('difficult to get out of a comfort zone'). There are no specific incentives (e.g. financial or promotion-related) to encourage staff mobility and regular language courses are not available to staff. Although the Mentor Club helps VKK students

develop their language skills through everyday contact with incoming students, they would like to have more language English language training (now only one semester).

71. **Recommendation:** The team recommends that VKK do more to encourage outward student and staff mobility and eliminate current barriers, including a language barrier, and make a better use of incoming and outgoing staff for encouraging mobility.
72. In summary, VKK trains students in line with its mission and strategic documents, current needs of the economy and policy developments in the EHEA and EU. It responds to the needs of students by offering most of its programmes as both full- and part-time, currently introducing distance or blended learning and aiming to introduce 'individual study plans' on a larger scale. A strong focus of the College on the practical training of students and their employability and its strong relationship with social and business partners are particularly noteworthy. At the same time, the graduate employment and career monitoring system is definitely underdeveloped, and there is no formal mechanism for regular collection and analysis of feedback from a wide range of social and business partners which might guide the College in developing new first-cycle programmes and increase the relevance and attractiveness of its adult education offer. The network of VKK's international partners has expanded in recent years and there seem to be an upward trend in outward student mobility, but participation levels are still quite low and the College could do more to encourage both students and staff to gain experience abroad.

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

## V. RESEARCH AND ART

73. Provisions of the Law on Higher Education concerning applied research and the involvement of staff and students in research activities are reflected in the Statutes of VKK. Its mission explicitly refers to applied research, and the development of applied research is a priority objective in the Strategic Plan. A recent (2012) Order of the (previous) Director relating to research, which may be considered a sort of a research policy document, defines five strategic goals together with related activities and expected results (e.g. a specific number of research publications). These include the development of applied research involving students, of consultancy activities, research competence of staff, international research mobility and projects, and research publication activities. Overall, despite VKK as a college being primarily a training institution, much consideration is given to applied research in its strategic documents.
74. VKK has been involved in applied research projects which include, in particular, consumer surveys, feasibility studies, financial and other business analyses, etc. It has also organised scientific and practically oriented conferences, with some of these now held on an annual or biannual basis (e.g. Science and Business Interaction). A list of research projects and the information about conferences provided to the team show that VKK's applied research and research-related activities are, overall, consistent with its institutional profile and strategic documents.
75. Since the College has specialised for some time in the training of students in the areas of economics, finance and management, it is understandable that its applied research projects have focused on these areas. The College is to be commended for ensuring a close link between the first-cycle programmes in these areas and research projects, and for using research findings to improve the programmes. However, as VKK acknowledges, it has not conducted any applied research in areas covered by its programmes established in 2012, and, in particular, in IT. This is an area where it provides its only programme that has been awarded public funding and which, as confirmed by several groups interviewed by the team, is of special interest not only to the VKK Stakeholders but also to other companies. On the other hand, new cooperation agreements have recently been signed with IT companies, and the College intends to extend the range of areas of its applied research to cover those of new first-cycle programmes.

76. **Recommendation**: The team recommends that, in line with its plans, the College seek to conduct applied research in all areas covered by its first-cycle programmes, and in particular in the area of IT where it offers its only publicly funded first-cycle programme and where research projects may contribute to further development of the programme, of the research capacity of the College and of the network of VKK's research partners.
77. Job descriptions of teachers require that they carry out applied research activities and report on them. The assessment of 'methodological scientific work of teachers' is a criterion in the 'certification' (staff appraisal) process. Thus, expectations of the College are clearly defined. Staff conduct applied research projects individually or jointly with national and international partners and publish their articles in national and international journals (examples given by VKK); some support is provided for their participation in conferences. Students' final projects include an element of applied research, and there are some other initiatives aimed at developing their applied research skills (e.g. the annual Best Final Project Competition and the Club of Young Researchers). This is all in line with VKK's key documents.
78. However, while the development of applied research features strongly in the Strategic Plan, the SER acknowledges that the number of commissioned research projects and of VKK's research publications has declined in recent years, the extent of involvement in research varies greatly between the departments, the motivation of some teachers is low, and the Club of Young Researchers is yet to expand its activities. This also shows that measures taken earlier by the College to implement research-related recommendations of the 2005 VKK institutional review (see par. 13) have not been sufficiently effective. Further, the team learned during the site visit that the 2012 Order of the Director was not well known to staff. A scheme of incentives or 'rewards' for staff is not yet in place, and opportunities for the development of research competence have been quite limited in recent years (one project related to intercultural competence mentioned in this context).
79. As mentioned by some staff in their meeting with the team, research projects are initiated by teachers, though their initiative is indeed appreciated by the College. However, the SER states that teachers rarely initiate research and research activity relies to a large extent on the initiative of VKK units which invite teachers to participate in research or consultancy projects which have been commissioned. The different perspectives confirm varying levels of involvement in, and of the motivation to conduct, applied research across the VKK departments.
80. On the other hand, in line with the 2013-2014 Annual Plan, some specific measures are taken this year to develop research activity and a staff policy, including a scheme of incentives for staff, should be developed in the third quarter of 2014. In February 2014, a VKK window was established on a Lithuanian Money Generation website where staff can use resources to develop their research competence and which can offer some benefits to those who publish research articles.
81. **Recommendation**: The team recommends that VKK take steps to promote its applied research priorities among staff and, in line with its preliminary arrangements, encourage greater participation of staff in applied research by developing a scheme of incentives of various kinds and by offering wider opportunities for the development of research competence. (See also a related recommendation in par. 44.).
82. It is explicitly stated in VKK's strategic documents that its applied research should respond to the needs of the economy and society and should be in line with national priorities. Research topics are approved at departmental meetings to ensure that projects are geared towards national and regional goals. An arrangement where topics of students' final projects, which are research-based, are suggested by, or agreed with, companies ensures their relevance to real needs of the business sector.
83. Most of VKK's research and consultancy projects have been commissioned by companies and some by public institutions. Such commissioned research is, obviously, carried out in response to the needs of individual customers at regional and / or national level. Thus, also,

social and business partners have considerable impact on VKK's research activity and, actually, determine its direction, volume and subject areas.

84. On the other hand, such a strong reliance on needs and requirements of customers and, thus, only on funding 'offered' seems to indicate that the College has a reactive rather than proactive approach to its applied research activity. This does not, of course, help it attract new customers or research funding from other sources or engage in applied research in areas of priority importance to its own development (e.g. those of the first-cycle programmes established in 2012). In this context, the team notes that VKK intends to prepare an annual plan of research activities, look for various funding sources and promote its applied research services as part of a revised visibility policy. When developing the plan, it may take into account that, as the team learned during the visit, social partners would be interested to discuss what the College could offer to them.
85. **Recommendation:** The team recommends that VKK take a more proactive approach to its applied research activities, reach out to (potential) social and business partners to offer them its research services on the one hand, and actively seek funding for research in areas of priority importance to its own development on the other hand. (See also a related recommendation in par. 93.)
86. As explained by the SKVC, criteria 10.2.1-10.2.3 of the Methodology do not apply to VKK as the primary aim of colleges is to provide training and, thus, the compliance of their international research activities with the expectations of the European Research Area may only be considered an extra strength. In this context, the team commends the College on setting strategic research objectives which are in line with the current principles of the ERA (see also par. 20). Although VKK is not currently involved in any international research project, it carried out one (on experiential learning) including a component of applied research, and it is now preparing to submit some international projects this autumn.
87. In summary, VKK's applied research activities comply with its strategic documents and are strongly directed at requirements of social and business partners. At the same time, the College seems to be quite reactive rather than proactive in its research activity, it does not conduct research in all areas covered by its first-cycle programmes, the number of research projects and publications has declined in recent years. In line with the 2013-2014 Plan, this is being or will soon be addressed through some specific measures, including a revised staff policy with incentives for staff to participate in research.

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

## VI. IMPACT ON REGIONAL AND NATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

88. The SER states that VKK seeks to make impact on regional and national development through all of its statutory activities: training students and other learners, applied research and consultancy services. This is confirmed by VKK's mission and all key documents provided to the team. The Statutes emphasise a strong link to be ensured between college programmes and applied research and the needs of the economy, regional and national development. Although generic, the mission statement explicitly refers to the relevance of college programmes to the needs of society and the labour market, to applied research and consultancy services for social and business partners, and to supporting the development of individuals with entrepreneurial competence and a sense of social and civic responsibility. The key objectives and activities of the Strategic Plan are also defined with regard to VKK's contribution to regional and national development. Additionally, internal quality assurance documents, including the Quality Manual, place emphasis on social responsibility and environmental protection.
89. As confirmed during the site visit by graduates, social partners as well as students who combine work and study, VKK trains professionals whose knowledge and skills are highly

valued by employers. The relevance of first-cycle programmes is ensured through the involvement of social and business partners (as members of the VKK bodies and committees) in the development and review of programmes. Student practical placements are perceived by employers as a mutually beneficial arrangement where students develop their practical skills and in return provide up-to-date knowledge to companies. There is also a strong link between the needs of local businesses and students' final projects as business partners are engaged in defining topics of projects and in supervising and assessing them.

90. A close relationship between the College and social and business partners is further evidenced by the number of applied research and consultancy projects commissioned by corporate customers, training courses provided by VKK as well as regular and ad-hoc conferences hosted by the College and attended by its partners. However, as the list of projects shows and the SER acknowledges, the number of commissioned research projects has been dropping in recent years, which is explained by the lack of dissemination of research results. (See also related comments on communication policy in par. 51.)
91. In this context, the team notes as well that although new agreements have been recently signed with IT companies, the College does not have a clear strategy for reviewing existing and establishing new partnerships with social and business partners. Given its governance arrangements, VKK, naturally, establishes and maintains partnerships with member cooperatives of the ULC and organisations represented in the Academic Council. Otherwise, as the team learned from social partners, partnerships are created in response to immediate needs (e.g. when looking for a company to host a student practical placement), via personal links with graduates or quite accidentally (in the context of national projects or conferences). VKK does not make a systematic and targeted search for partners who may benefit from the research, consultancy or training services which it offers (and who could support the strategic development of the College). There is no mechanism for periodic assessment of the effectiveness of existing partnerships that takes into account local, regional and / or national development needs on the one hand and the strategic objectives and development priorities of the College on the other. These issues can be taken into account when the Strategic Plan is updated since, as the SER states, VKK intends to identify in the Plan priority areas for the development of cooperation with its external environment.
92. When priority areas are discussed, VKK is also encouraged to consider the team's recommendation to identify a niche for itself on the education market (see par. 18). A more proactive and targeted approach to partnerships, based on strategic goals, may also help the College to extend its lifelong learning activities (see a related recommendation in par. 61).
93. **Recommendation:** The team recommends that VKK put in place a mechanism for reviewing existing and establishing new partnerships in the context of local, regional and national development needs on the one hand and its own Strategic Plan on the other hand.
94. VKK has close links with Lithuanian secondary schools and higher education institutions developed as part of joint projects and other initiatives. Aside from, obviously, stronger links with other colleges, it is particularly worth noting VKK's close collaboration with the Vilnius University in the development of distance learning, and agreements recently signed with vocational schools to enable their students and graduates to continue education at VKK.
95. In its lifelong learning activities, the College focuses on training staff in companies and teachers; the focus on selected target groups is understandable as VKK is a training institution specialised in economics, finance, management and IT. While some adult education courses and seminars are also available (though not very popular), the College **could consider** offering a wider range of lifelong learning opportunities to society at large (including, as the SER suggests, a larger number of events popularising science). It hosts, however, various events for the general public which aim to strengthen a sense of community and national identity and its staff and students are involved in charity activities.
96. In 2014 VKK became a member of the Lithuanian Association of the Responsible Business (LAVA) which supports the development of the country and promote corporate social

responsibility. In 2013 the College received a National Responsible Business Award 2012 for its contribution to the promotion of social welfare and responsibility.

97. Overall, there is convincing evidence that VKK is genuinely and extensively involved in various activities benefitting the local community, has a strong relationship with social and business partners, and its contribution to regional and national development is valued by partners and recognised even at national level.
98. Arrangements for assessing whether activities carried out achieve their intended purpose or impact and for measuring the impact achieved are much less convincing. The Strategic Plan includes indicators for each planned activity, but these relate to the volume or quantity of activity rather than to its effect or impact (e.g. at least 5 new agreements signed, at least two research projects per year or at least 150 company staff participating in training). As the team learned during the visit, the College identifies employment outcomes as a key measure of its effective contribution to regional and national development. However, the limitations in recording and analysing employment data (see par. 64), in particular beyond the period immediately after graduation, hamper the effectiveness of VKK's implementation of this measure.
99. VKK staff are members and / or participate in activities of various organisations which operate in fields directly related and those not related at all to their professional profiles (e.g. Lithuanian Accounting and Auditing Association, Lithuanian Responsible Business Association, Lithuanian Sport Bridge Association or the Lithuanian Union of Political Prisoners and Deportees). As the team learned from Heads of Departments and teaching staff during the visit, the College provides support for, and collects data on, the participation of staff in voluntary activities. On the other hand, the SER acknowledges that some staff are not sufficiently interested or involved in voluntary activities. This will be addressed through a revised staff policy, including a motivation scheme, to be designed in the third quarter of 2014 (as envisaged in the 2013-2014 Plan). (See a related recommendation in par. 44.)
100. In summary, in line with its mission and strategic documents, VKK is engaged in a wide range of activities geared towards regional and national development; its contribution is valued by others but not yet measured by the College itself. It has strong relationships with its partners but a mechanism for reviewing existing and establishing new partnerships would need to be put in place. A problem of low motivation of some staff to participate in activities benefitting the public is to be addressed soon through a revised staff policy.

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

## **VII. GOOD PRACTICE AND ENHANCEMENT RECOMMENDATIONS**

### **Good practice examples**

- Strong leadership provided by the top management combined with the principle of collegiality (par. 42);
- Importance given in the Strategic Plan to, and regular maintenance and upgrading of teaching and learning resources, including the IT infrastructure, despite financial constraints (par. 47);
- Active and effective search for sources of funding for the College at a time when the income from tuition fees is dropping, and effective use of funds to achieve the goals and objectives set (par. 48);
- Consideration given to the needs of students with special needs, and arrangements made to facilitate their learning (par. 57);
- Preparation of students for employment (par. 58);

- Extensive involvement of social and business partners in activities of the College, including the training of students, the development of and review of existing programmes (par. 65);
- Use of methodologies for the recognition of non-formal learning (par. 62);
- Support provided to incoming students (par. 68).

### **Recommendations**

The team recommends that the College:

- **revise its mission statement** to make it more specific and identify any distinctive features of the College which may give it an advantage over its competitors and which could be highlighted as part of its 'brand name' (and, possibly, 'brand new' name) in its external communication policy. In reconsidering its mission, the College should try to **identify a niche for itself** in the education and labour markets which takes into account a balance between legitimate interests and needs of VKK's cooperative Stakeholders and its strategic imperatives which require going beyond the Stakeholders' immediate interests and needs. Such a possible niche would also need to be a focal point around which the College develops its next Strategic Plan (par. 18);
- **adopt a balanced approach to student recruitment and retention.** Due consideration should be given not only to factors which may be pulling (groups of) students to VKK (e.g. new programmes, promotion), but also to internal factors which may be pushing students away (e.g. content of programmes, ways they are delivered, insufficient learning support) (par. 26);
- **urgently finalise its work on a shorter list of indicators** so that it is used for the purposes of the next Strategic Plan. The indicators selected should have an added value in terms of monitoring the implementation of the Strategic Plan and making improvements (par. 28);
- in line with its preliminary arrangements, define a set of data necessary to **measure its performance in key areas of its regular activity**, develop ways of measuring performance and regularly collect and analyse data (par. 30);
- **put in place mechanisms for more frequent monitoring of, and reporting on, progress in the implementation of its Strategic Plan**, and for ensuring that **follow-up** will happen (par. 34);
- **put in place promptly a procedure to report on individual and comparative performance of programmes** each year and every five years, and make sure that reviews underpinning reports cover all relevant data (par. 40);
- in line with its plans, **integrate existing arrangements** related to the management of human resources **into an overarching staff policy.** The policy should include a scheme of incentives for staff to participate in international mobility, applied research and voluntary activities (par. 44);
- **put in place a formal mechanism for regular collection and analysis of feedback from a representative range of social, business and other partners**, both within and outside the ULC, **on their** (current and predicted) **demand for professionals** and **lifelong learning needs** to inform its decisions on first-cycle and other training programmes and courses to be developed (par. 61);
- **increase staff resources devoted to career planning and monitoring and systematise the collection and management of data about graduates** (including not only recent but also older graduates) still before a system currently being developed in the national project on graduate employment monitoring is in place. VKK is also strongly encouraged to develop the activities of its Alumni Club to make sure that graduates support the College in its further development efforts (par. 64);

- **do more to encourage outward student and staff mobility and eliminate current barriers**, including a language barrier, and make a better use of incoming and outgoing staff for encouraging mobility (par. 71);
- in line with its plans, seek to **conduct applied research in all areas covered by its first-cycle programmes**. In particular, these should include the area of IT where VKK offers its only publicly funded first-cycle programme and where research projects may contribute to further development of the programme, of the research capacity of the College and of the network of VKK's research partners (par. 76);
- take steps to **promote its applied research priorities among staff** and, in line with its preliminary arrangements, **encourage greater participation of staff in applied research** by developing a scheme of incentives of various kinds and by offering wider opportunities for the development of research competence (par. 81);
- **take a more proactive approach to its applied research activities**, reach out to (potential) social and business partners to offer them its research services on the one hand, and actively seek funding for research in areas of priority importance to its own development on the other hand (par. 85);
- **put in place a mechanism for reviewing existing and establishing new partnerships** in the context of local, regional and national development needs on the one hand and its own Strategic Plan on the other hand (par. 93).

## VIII. JUDGEMENT

Vilnius Cooperative College is given positive evaluation.

Grupės vadovas: Team leader:	Prof. David Timms
Grupės nariai: Team members:	Prof. Tiiu Paas Lars Lynge Nielsen Mindaugas Juodaitis Darius Vizbaras
Vertinimo sekretorius: Review secretary:	Ewa Kolanowska

# ANNEX. VILNIUS COOPERATIVE COLLEGE RESPONSE TO THE REVIEW REPORT



## VILNIAUS KOOPERACIJOS KOLEGIJA

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Centre For Quality Assessment In Higher Education

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### ACCORDING TO INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW REPORT

Firstly we would like to thank you for the professionally prepared institutional review report of Vilnius Cooperative College of Higher Education.

We would like to draw your attention to the LVS - abbreviation of the Union of Lithuanian Cooperatives provided in par. 91. In our opinion the abbreviation should be LKS as it is defined in par. 7.

Sincerely,  
Director

Romualdas Pusvaškis

