



CENTRE FOR QUALITY ASSESSMENT IN HIGHER EDUCATION

EVALUATION REPORT
STUDY FIELD of MARKETING
at SMK University of Applied Social Sciences

Expert panel:

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Study Field Data

Title of the study programme	<i>Marketing and Advertising Creation</i>
State code	6531LX055
Type of studies	College studies
Cycle of studies	First cycle
Mode of study and duration (in years)	Full-time (3 years), part-time (4 years)
Credit volume	180
Qualification degree and (or) professional qualification	Professional Bachelor's Degree in Business Management
Language of instruction	Lithuanian
Minimum education required	Secondary education
Registration date of the study programme	31/03/2011

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I. INTRODUCTION

1.1. BACKGROUND OF THE EVALUATION PROCESS

The evaluation of study fields is based on the Methodology of External Evaluation of Study Fields approved by the Director of the Centre for Quality Assessment in Higher Education (hereafter – SKVC) 31 December 2019 Order [No.V-149](#).

The evaluation is intended to help higher education institutions to constantly improve their study process and to inform the public about the quality of studies.

The evaluation process consists of the main following stages: 1) *self-evaluation and self-evaluation report prepared by Higher Education Institution (hereafter – HEI)*; 2) *site visit of the expert panel to the higher education institution*; 3) *production of the external evaluation report (EER) by the expert panel and its publication*; 4) *follow-up activities*.

On the basis of this external evaluation report of the study field SKVC takes a decision to accredit study field either for 7 years or for 3 years. If the field evaluation is negative then the study field is not accredited.

The study field and cycle are **accredited for 7 years** if all evaluation areas are evaluated as exceptional (5 points), very good (4 points) or good (3 points).

The study field and cycle are **accredited for 3 years** if one of the evaluation areas was evaluated as satisfactory (2 points).

The study field and cycle are **not accredited** if at least one of evaluation areas was evaluated as unsatisfactory (1 point).

1.2. EXPERT PANEL

The expert panel was assigned according to the Experts Selection Procedure (hereinafter referred to as the Procedure) as approved by the Director of Centre for Quality Assessment in Higher Education on 31 December 2019 [Order No. V-149](#). The site visit to the HEI was conducted by the panel on 30 April, 2021. Due to the coronavirus pandemic, the site visit was conducted online using video conferencing tools (Zoom).

Dr. Kristiina Tõnnisson (panel chairperson), Head of Johan Skytte Institute of Political Studies, University of Tartu, Estonia;

Dr. Dario Miočević, Associate Professor of Marketing at the Faculty of Economics, Business and Tourism, University of Split, Croatia;

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Mr. Žilvinas Kulvinskis, Communication project manager, “Topo Centras”, part of EURONICS alliance, Lithuania;

Ms. Alicia Presencio Herrero, 1st year PhD student of Audiovisual Communication, Advertising and Public Relations, Complutense University of Madrid, Spain.

1.3. GENERAL INFORMATION

The documentation submitted by the HEI follows the outline recommended by SKVC. Along with the self-evaluation report and annexes, the following additional documents have been provided by the HEI before and during the site visit:

No.	Name of the document
1.	Virtual presentation of learning facilities used by marketing field students at SMK University of Applied Social Sciences.
2.	SMK Strategic plan 2021-2030 (part of internalization: objectives and indicators)

1.4. BACKGROUND OF THE STUDY FIELD/STUDY FIELD POSITION/STATUS AND SIGNIFICANCE IN THE HEI

SMK University of Applied Social Sciences (hereafter – SMK) is a non-state higher education institution, operating since 1994. Headquarter of the University is located in Klaipėda, but since 1999 the University has its branch also in Vilnius and since 2018 it has also its branch in Kaunas. SMK is the largest non-state higher education institution in Lithuania. Based on the data of 1 October 2020, the SMK has 4695 local and 85 international students. The University implements 17 first cycle college study programmes in the groups of the fields of computer sciences, arts, social sciences, health sciences, law, business and public management studies. Two study programmes are implemented in English. One study programme – Marketing and Advertising Creation (MAC) – is implemented in the field of Marketing studies. This programme is delivered in all three locations – in Klaipėda, Vilnius and Kaunas. Implementation in each city is coordinated by the Heads of the Study Programme.

II. GENERAL ASSESSMENT

Marketing study field and **first cycle** at SMK University of Applied Social Sciences is given **positive** evaluation.

Study field and cycle assessment in points by evaluation areas

No.	Evaluation Area	Evaluation of an Area in points*
1.	Intended and achieved learning outcomes and curriculum	2
2.	Links between science (art) and studies	2
3.	Student admission and support	4
4.	Teaching and learning, student performance and graduate employment	3
5.	Teaching staff	3
6.	Learning facilities and resources	3
7.	Study quality management and public information	3
	Total:	20

*1 (unsatisfactory) - there are essential shortcomings that must be eliminated;

2 (satisfactory) - meets the established minimum requirements, needs improvement;

3 (good) - the field is being developed systematically, has distinctive features;

4 (very good) - the field is evaluated very well in the national and international context, without any deficiencies;

5 (excellent) - the field is exceptionally good in the national and international context/environment.

III. STUDY FIELD ANALYSIS

3.1. INTENDED AND ACHIEVED LEARNING OUTCOMES AND CURRICULUM

Study aims, outcomes and content shall be assessed in accordance with the following indicators:

3.1.1. Evaluation of the conformity of the aims and outcomes of the field and cycle study programmes to the needs of the society and/or the labour market

In the SER, SMK provides various sources of data and statistics which substantiates the need for the study programme under evaluation (SER, p. 7-11). In this section, SER reflects on required marketing competencies, salaries and employment data from various reports that corroborate the importance of the marketing profession both internationally and in Lithuania.

Provided data clearly indicates the societal need for the study programme under evaluation (Marketing and Advertising Creation). Reflection on internationally-relevant data further confirms the justification for the study programme in English (both full- and part-time). Competitive analysis is provided to justify the need and uniqueness of the programme. Also the expert committee commends SMK study programme management for conducting qualitative research in collaboration with employers to justify the need for the study programme which eventually gives input for setting the appropriate enrolment quota. However, the members of the expert committee unanimously agree that a more formalized process on managing revisions and updates should be included.

3.1.2. Evaluation of the conformity of the field and cycle study programme aims and outcomes with the mission, objectives of activities and strategy of the HEI

SMK has a strategy with mission and strategic goals which are tied to 11 study programme's LOs that are complex enough to address the aims of the study programme. The SMK has defined five working strategic goals (SER, p. 12).

By carefully assessing and juxtaposing the content of LOs and strategic goals, the expert panel concludes that the study programme contains sufficient alignment between the two thus offering concrete qualification for students (Annex table 3). However, the strategy should be made more explicit towards internationalization since there is a strong tendency to offer some courses in English. Expert committee concludes that such an activity can strengthen the skills of students to operate not only in domestic but also in the global environment. During the session with SMK management, it became evident that further internationalization is on the school's agenda; however, very little activities are currently conducted to support this goal.

3.1.3. Evaluation of the compliance of the field and cycle study programme with legal requirements

Alignment with legal requirements is presented in SER by listing all important rulings and regulations upon which the study programme rests. The scope of the study programme is 180 credits. The scope of the Programme was planned considering the aims, specific competences aimed at and foreseen learning outcomes of the Study Programme. Total number of hours of the Study Programme is 4800. Studies in the full-time study form last 3 years, in a part-time – 4 years. At the end of the studies, a final bachelor thesis is prepared and defended. Special attention was given that both Internship and Final Thesis have adequate ECTS allocation.

The presented data shows diligently how the study programme fits the legal requirements and enables the achievement of aims and LOs. The ECTS workload in courses ranges from 4 to 6 sufficiently covering the complexity of each course and also securing that students will be able to achieve the LOs by engaging in all course activities. According to feedback generated through meeting with SMK students, it became evident that the composition of ECTS is mostly balanced and according to students the level of workload in courses is mostly justified.

3.1.4. Evaluation of compatibility of aims, learning outcomes, teaching/learning and assessment methods of the field and cycle study programmes

The SER presents the interrelation matrix between study programme's LOs and specific courses taught in the programme (Annex table 3). The courses in the programme seem to rely on a wide array of teaching methods that include case study analysis, creative thinking, teamwork projects among others. The same goes with assessment methods where these are specifically tied to the nature of courses. The assessment system of SMK rests upon the application of a cumulative assessment system. Every course unit is completed by a final exam.

It seems that the proposed courses and their curriculum fairly load onto core LOs of the study programme. The teaching methods seem robust enough to deliver on the promises indicated in study programme LOs and are tailored to the specific need of the courses and programme – creative methods in advertising. However, according to the expert committee's assessment, it is unclear how SMK ensures that teaching and assessment methods are in line with student's expectations at one end, and actual workload expressed through ECTS. Strength of the programme is the inclusion of practical component through guest lecturers, company visits, and the majority of teachers hold significant business experience in the courses they teach.

3.1.5. Evaluation of the totality of the field and cycle study programme subjects/modules, which ensures consistent development of competences of students

The study programme *Marketing and advertising creation* is provided in both full- and part-time form (Annex table 1a and 1b). Part-time programme is secured for students who are already actively working. The study programme rests upon generic courses and specialized advertising courses. The generic courses include *Basics of Economics and Management, Marketing, Basics of Advertising, the Lithuanian Language and Document Management, Communication Psychology, Public Speaking, Professional Foreign Language, Story Creation and Telling*. During one study year a student can get 60 credits. A balance of credit layout by semesters helps to maintain a consistent study work-load. The actual contact hours are complemented with consultations to help students in attaining the designated study programme goals.

The evidence seems to corroborate that the study programme offers the totality in terms of advertising education. There is a diligent approach towards managing the Internship where students are monitored formally by the Head of the study programme and supervisor ensuring that the LOs in internship are achieved. According to the expert committee's judgement, the programme lacks content that would enhance students' analytical skills. This was corroborated during the session with Alumni who founded their own business after graduation. The level of personal development component in the study programme is at satisfactory level and is supported by the school's organizational culture that promotes inclusiveness and "student as a partner" approach.

3.1.6. Evaluation of opportunities for students to personalise the structure of field study programmes according to their personal learning objectives and intended learning outcomes

To personalize their study preferences, students can choose from optional courses which are approved yearly by the Director. Additionally, the study programme envisions a possibility for students to choose course units from eight alternatives (SER, p. 18). Expert committee agrees unanimously that personalization options for students exist but can be further exploited. During the session with students, the expert committee found that they would be more open to more contemporary content in other areas such as IT and psychology in order to make their studying more effective. Most of the students are confident to start an entrepreneurial career but they indicate that they would need more competencies (e.g. entrepreneurial/start-up finance).

3.1.7. Evaluation of compliance of final theses with the field and cycle requirements

The procedures and regulations underlying the final thesis preparation, writing and defence are in place and transparently listed (SER, p. 18-20). According to SER, during thesis preparation, writing and defence, students are tackling all the important aims and LOs of the study programme. As noted by the HEI, there are concrete guidelines for thesis preparation and defence which provide guidelines for both students, supervisors and reviewers (who can either be academics or practitioners) and are easily accessible through the e-learning management system. The final list is approved and coordinated by the Study Programme Head. The list of example thesis (Annex table 2) suggests that there is a tight connection with the study programme's aims and LOs.

The students undertake concrete specific projects that address the real world advertising situation (e.g. creating an advertising campaign for a specific company) which directly involves social partners in the process of envisioning the final theses. In such a way, the practical component is streamlined through final theses. However, there is a lack of academic depth and there is no evidence how students, besides basic regulations, attain much needed support in writing the thesis.

Strengths and weaknesses of this evaluation area:

(1) Strengths:

1. Practical component in the study programme is strong.
2. Personal development seems to be well streamlined through study programme as well as through SMK's organizational culture that supports inclusiveness.

(2) Weaknesses:

1. The internationalization component is present in strategic framework but still very little is done in practicing it in study programme management.
2. Positioning of the school's study programme must be re-assessed and new potential venues of competitive advantage need to be sought (for example: making the study programme more tailored towards students aspiring for entrepreneurial career in advertising and marketing).
3. Personalization in study programme needs to be strengthened especially in terms of introducing more digitalization content, psychology and entrepreneurship.
4. More emphasis should be put in providing academic depth and also focus on developing students' analytical skills.

3.2. LINKS BETWEEN SCIENCE (ART) AND STUDIES

Links between science (art) and study activities shall be assessed in accordance with the following indicators:

3.2.1. Evaluation of the sufficiency of the science (applied science, art) activities implemented by the HEI for the field of research (art) related to the field of study

According to the self-evaluation report and the site visit, the SMK puts strong emphasis on practical methods, which can be considered as an asset. The expert committee welcomes the idea of carefully planning the science and applied research activities. It includes an organizational formal structure (coordinated by Heads of Study Programmes and organized by Science and Business Centre).

The academic research publication is close to non-existent. The expert committee suggests that the output rate must be elevated significantly. From the expression “applied science”, focusing exclusively on “applied” without “science” might pose a threat to generate not just narrowed graduates but less cooperation opportunities.

Regarding the internationalization aspirations, the expert committee would also like to point out a shortcoming: we feel that further strengthening of international research (with a stronger focus on the field of marketing) would be advised. As the institute seeks for internationalization, it would be advised to publish research papers on an international, top tier level. This could provide a strong validation for such aspirations. Furthermore, it would be advised to provide a wider variety of courses for two reasons: in order to avoid overlaps and to provide a growing interest in further aspects in the field of marketing. Currently, the research focus is on a broader area (management and economics), therefore an emphasis added to marketing is advised.

The self-evaluation report of SMK states that their strategic aim is to significantly contribute to the growth of Lithuanian economy. As the expert committee sees, they aim to achieve such a goal that can be achieved via practical teaching, giving a broad range of skills and knowledge required by marketing related jobs. This impression was confirmed by alumni, saying that they have strong personal connections with professors and students in general, but only weaker formal channels of communication exist from the school.

3.2.2. Evaluation of the link between the content of studies and the latest developments in science, art and technology

The expert committee acknowledges the amount and quality of conferences that were organized by SMK. The expert committee also admits the fact that SMK made high investments into facilities. It poses great opportunities for further development in research. The expert committee also has to mention strong entrepreneurial mentality, and the focus on the domestic market. The expert committee recognises the up-to-date teaching approaches as they reflect to the latest applied research outputs by the professors.

During the site visit the expert committee found the theoretical foundations weak. Putting this strong emphasis on practical methods and approaches indeed can be an asset, but it also poses a threat as the students' knowledge will be undesirably fragmented.

By strengthening the theoretical background, SMK could release more balanced graduates who can answer to a broader range of challenges in their career (starting from being able to

find a wider variety of job opportunities). The conferences listed in the self-evaluation report further strengthen the idea that more emphasis should be on academic scientific approaches. The expert committee recommends reshaping (or updating) the skillsets the study programme is currently focusing on, by giving skills that encourage students to be motivated for further self-improvement. The strong domestic focus also poses a threat as being an obstacle for the expressed desire for internationalization.

3.2.3. Evaluation of conditions for students to get involved in scientific (applied science, art) activities consistent with their study cycle

Analysis of documents and data allows to state that SMK creates conditions for students to get involved in scientific (applied science) activities. SMK organizes student scientific conferences, promotes the solution of business problems of social partners creation (e.g. business case analysis). Despite the formal conditions created, information received during the meetings indicates that it is not being used properly. Both students and social partners emphasize collaboration only in the internship process. Despite the assurances of the administration and teachers that they encourage, the results of students' research activities are very minimal.

Strengths and weaknesses of this evaluation area:

(1) Strengths:

1. SMK has invested a lot into facilities which could support scientific activities.
2. The programme is applying up-to-date teaching approaches based on applied science results of professors.

(2) Weaknesses:

1. Academic research papers are almost entirely missing.
2. There is a lack of marketing theoretical knowledge among the students.

3.3. STUDENT ADMISSION AND SUPPORT

Student admission and support shall be evaluated according to the following indicators:

3.3.1. Evaluation of the suitability and publicity of student selection and admission criteria and process

Admission rules are provided on the website of the SMK. During academic years 2017-2020 the study programme in Klaipeda admitted one group annually and a group of part-time students was formed only in academic year 2018-2019. On average, 53 applicants participated in the admission process every year. Enrollments have increased over the years, and in addition, enrollments have increased as the first option in the Degree, something that is valued positively. The consolidation and growth efforts of SMK are recognized. The information on the admission criteria is public, complete and accessible. During the meeting with the expert panel, all the students stated that they were satisfied with this criterion and found no problems.

3.3.2. Evaluation of the procedure of recognition of foreign qualifications, partial studies and prior non-formal and informal learning and its application

The SMK has introduced the order of assessing and acknowledging the competences gained in an informal and self-contained mode. The order regulated assessment and acknowledgement of competences gained in the working environment and informal learning. SMK has mechanisms to collect the assessment and acknowledgment of informal and self-contained learning. During the period of 2017–2020, study programme had no applicants who would be interested in the recognition of non-formal and informal learning competencies. It is recommended that the procedure be explained to future students, as they may be unaware of this process from which they can benefit. SMK consistently applies pre-established and public standards that cover all phases of the 'life cycle' of students: admission, advancement, recognition and certification.

3.3.3. Evaluation of conditions for ensuring academic mobility of students.

For student encouragement to take part in Erasmus+ mobilities, SMK organizes Erasmus+ weeks, students implement joint activities with the incoming Erasmus+ students. 12 marketing programme students in all the divisions of SMK participated in the exchange programme during the period 2017-2020. During this period, there were no incoming students as the SMK was not offering English taught study programmes in the field of marketing.

Students express interest in the Erasmus program, especially when choosing southern European countries for their stays. SMK plans to add studies in English so that foreign students could choose their Erasmus experience there. Information on internationalization processes is accessible thanks to the International Relations Department and stakeholders have all the clear procedures.

3.3.4. Assessment of the suitability, adequacy and effectiveness of the academic, financial, social, psychological and personal support provided to the students of the field

Students have the Introductory Week of Studies, where they are introduced into the system. They are informed of issues such as study programme's aims, foreseen learning outcomes, studied course units, timetables, assessment of learning outcomes, independent work and consultations, possibilities of choosing course units, requirements for final thesis and order of organizing internships, library usage rules, electronic catalogs, information search on the internet, etc. They are also provided with information on the possibilities of using IT in the study process, the opportunities of Erasmus+ program. During the period 2017-2020, programme students in Vilnius and Klaipeda were granted with 15 monetary awards and incentive gifts from social partners. SMK participates in the program of "Strengthening Mental Health of Students in Lithuanian Higher Education Institutions". This project supports the consultations of a psychologist for the students. SMK also has an active mentorship.

It is a very positive point that SMK each year awards students for extraordinary results in studies and applied research and art activity. In 2019-2020, incentive scholarships were granted to 6 marketing students. In 2018-2019, there were 4 awarded students. SMK offers psychological care seminars to students, like Self-help after suffering negative (post-traumatic) emotional experiences; Dependency on Technologies; Psychology of Positive Habits; Sexual Harassment: How it Occurs, How to Recognize it and Where to Apply? This prevents or prematurely detects psychological problems that may interfere with their studies. During COVID-19 situation, free online consultations were offered, in English, Lithuanian and Russian.

3.3.5 Evaluation of the sufficiency of study information and student counselling

Information related with studies is detailed, consistent, presented on time and openly available on its website. With the application SMK Life, students can keep in touch with their representatives. The app will provide notifications about lectures, upcoming settlements and new assessments received. Students will be able to contact their study programme manager, administrative employee, lecturer or group, order various certificates, pay for studies. It is proved that stakeholders participate in the design and continuous improvement of the Quality Plan, with meetings every semester in which they are informed of the results of the quality surveys and the measures of the improvement plan. SMK also implements individual counselling for students on the issues of studies and they are organized in accordance with an approved monthly timetable. Counselling has different forms: individual meetings, online counselling, phone talk.

SMK takes into account and addresses the diversity of students and their needs, allowing flexible learning pathways. The students know the student council, however, no concrete evidence has been provided of its activities. Generic actions are specified, but should be more specific. It is very positive to incorporate an App that provides information to students. The culture of quality is implanted.

Strengths and weaknesses of this evaluation area:

(1) Strengths:

1. The university offers to the public complete, clear and accessible information.
2. SMK encourages actions that consolidate the Erasmus+ experience among students.

(2) Weaknesses:

1. The recognition of prior credits should be explained to students more. It might be that they do not ask for it because they do not know the procedure.
2. Actions to introduce more English into the programme should be reinforced in order to allow the attendance of Erasmus+ students (incoming students).

3.4. TEACHING AND LEARNING, STUDENT PERFORMANCE AND GRADUATE EMPLOYMENT

Studying, student performance and graduate employment shall be evaluated according to the following indicators:

3.4.1. Evaluation of the teaching and learning process that enables to take into account the needs of the students and enable them to achieve the intended learning outcomes

According to the SER, SMK implements an experiential learning process, where knowledge is acquired through the development and implementation of specific projects, and the teacher becomes a facilitator of the learning process. In the order set by SMK, at the beginning of each semester teachers of the Programme coordinate the distribution of classroom and independent workload of students during a semester, set the dates of interim and final tests and interdisciplinary relations. Teachers together analyze the conformity of the content of the course unit to achieve the foreseen learning outcomes, logical links between course units, in order to avoid duplication of content and overlapping topics. According to the SER, each semester, before starting to teach a course unit, a teacher prepares an advanced programme

for independent work, where he/she plans independent work of the course unit studies, including content, tasks.

Presented above factual information, analysis of the submitted data and facts gathered during the virtual visit allow to state that adaptation of the teaching and learning process to the individual needs of students in order to enable them to achieve the intended learning outcomes is very one-sided. Adjustment of teaching and learning process is oriented to teaching personnel, cooperation and coordination between them. Poor supply of elective subjects indicates limited opportunities for students to adapt teaching and learning process to their personal needs (and enable them to achieve the intended learning outcomes), and this assumption was confirmed during a meeting with the Social Partners.

3.4.2. Evaluation of conditions ensuring access to study for socially vulnerable groups and students with special needs

Students with a disability or a temporary health disorder can individualize their studies. Administration and teachers of the SMK try to adapt the study environment and study material to the individual needs of students. Since 2014, the University has participated in the project of State Studies Foundation "Increasing study availability". 6 SMK teachers and administration employees participated in the trainings organised within project activities. In 2017-2020, there were 3 students with special needs in marketing field Study Programme. The collected and analyzed information, available university resources, acquired staff competence and students with special needs in the Study Programme suggest that conditions ensuring access to study for socially vulnerable groups and students with special needs is drawn up appropriately.

3.4.3. Evaluation of the systematic nature of the monitoring of student study progress and feedback to students to promote self-assessment and subsequent planning of study progress

According to SMK, several times a month the Head of the Study Programme in each city contacts teachers of the Programme and gets their feedback on the students' lecture attendance, participation in interim tests, independent works. The Head of the Study Programme personally contacts (*by e-mail, phone*) students who do not participate in interim tests or do not do independent works and tries to find out the reasons for the student's failure to attend lectures or to do interim tests. Head of the study process in each city, considering analysis of interim evaluations of students, makes timetables of teacher consultations and announces them in advance. At the end of the semester, the Head of the study process prepares reports on academic debts and submits them to the Head of the Study Programme, who contacts each student personally and discusses the terms of rescheduling academic debts. If necessary, a personal schedule for the liquidation of academic debts is drawn up. The Head of the study process, several times a semester, organizes meetings with group elders to discuss how students are integrating into the process or whether all information is accessible and clear. Problems encountered and possible solutions are discussed. Feedback is shared with the Head of the Study Programme.

Based on the analysis of the process described above, provided documents, facts collected during virtual visit, it can be concluded that a system of the monitoring of student study progress and feedback to students to promote self-assessment and subsequent planning of study progress exists both in documentation and in practice. However, it follows that the system may be vulnerable and not function properly due to an increase in its load because of its: a) one-sidedness and non-integration (almost all workload is dedicated to one and only

Head of the Study Programme); b) exceptional personalization (each student is communicated individually, through personal type information channels, like e-mail and phone).

3.4.4. Evaluation of employability of graduates and graduate career tracking in the study field.

SMK implements a Programme of Graduate Career Observation, which provides feedback on the graduate employment and career, and forms guidelines for improving study programmes or preparation of new study programmes as well as helps to improve study quality. Graduates are provided with services of self-cognition as well as recognizing career possibilities, career assessment and planning, job search. Provision of these services is coordinated by the Head of Partnerships and Head of Strategic Partnerships. In the analyzed period, 90 graduates graduated from the Study Programme of marketing field (31 in Klaipėda, 59 in Vilnius branch). It is noted that the majority of the surveyed are employed by their specialty.

According to information received during the meeting with Social Partners and Alumni, there is a properly documented and formalized graduate career tracking procedure, which, unfortunately, seems to be not working in reality: comparing the procedures described in the SER and leading documents with wide range of examples of good practice of collaboration with Social Partners (relations with Career Management Information System (KVIS); development of “HeyReady” brand initiative; involvement of Graduates, Alumni, Social Partners in SMK decision making processes, Final Thesis defences and etc...) with feedback provided by Alumni/Graduates and Social Partners during virtual meetings (they were exclusively dominated by the subject of internship only) it cannot be stated that relations with graduates, which are theoretically properly described and planned, are in reality functioning properly. It seems that the abundance of initiatives, events and procedures carried out by the SMK simply requires that all of them be properly grouped, systematised, and optimised in one direction, in order to increase the efficiency and quality of activities in this area. Nevertheless, the employability of graduates is sufficient. Employers' feedback on the University's activities in the field of employability of graduates is positive, distinguishing constructive and mutually beneficial cooperation in the organization of student internships.

3.4.5. Evaluation of the implementation of policies to ensure academic integrity, tolerance and non-discrimination

SMK community updated The Code of Academic Ethics in 2018 in order to strengthen academic integrity, tolerance and non-discrimination as an essential norm in a study process, and form universally accepted provisions of academic ethics, tolerance and non-discrimination setting them out in one document which is announced publicly. The implementation of The Code of Academic Ethics is supervised by the Academic Ethics Commission, which bases its activities on The Regulation of Academic Ethics Commission. Idea of academic integrity is introduced to both the teachers in the courses of deepening pedagogical competences and students, starting their studies in the SMK, during the first introductory lectures while explaining the idea, aim of academic integrity and the consequences for not following the norms of academic integrity.

The analysis of the collected information shows and allows to conclude that process of implementation of policies to ensure academic integrity, tolerance and non-discrimination is properly documented and formalized, the activities are consistent, properly publicized and implemented.

3.4.6. Evaluation of the effectiveness of the application of procedures for the submission and examination of appeals and complaints regarding the study process within the field studies

SMK's Provisions of Appellate Commission regulates the order of forming and work of the University's Appellate Commission, as well as the order of submitting and analyzing appeals. The SMK Provisions of Appellate Commission (2014) distinguishes that appeals and complaints can be submitted regarding procedural violations during exams, the final evaluation of the achievements in the course unit, the procedures of final thesis defence, admission results and/or violations of admission rules.

Head of the academic division assesses the validity of an appeal and its conformity to the requirements for the procedure of submitting and analyzing an appeal. Appeals are registered and passed to the analysis by Appellate Commission. Anonymous appeals are not considered. Students are introduced to the possibilities of appeal and complaint during introductory lectures. The main documents regulating appeals and complaints are presented as well as the order of submitting and hearing appeals and complaints.

The analysis of the collected information shows and allows to conclude that the process of the application of procedures for the submission and examination of appeals and complaints regarding the study process within the field studies is properly documented and formalized, the activities are consistent, properly publicized. Since the Appellate Commission has not received any complaint from a student in 2017–2020, possibilities to check effectiveness are limited.

Strengths and weaknesses of this evaluation area:

(1) Strengths:

1. Well-organized student internship process (in the sense of cooperation with Social Partners).

(2) Weaknesses:

1. There are limited opportunities for students to adapt their teaching and learning processes to their personal needs (and enable them to achieve the intended learning outcomes).
2. The system for monitoring students' study progress and giving feedback to students to promote self-assessment (and subsequently planning of study progress) could be updated.
3. The relations with graduates are fragmented and superficial (graduate career tracking procedure).

3.5. TEACHING STAFF

Study field teaching staff shall be evaluated in accordance with the following indicators:

3.5.1. Evaluation of the adequacy of the number, qualification and competence (scientific, didactic, professional) of teaching staff within a field study programme(s) at the HEI in order to achieve the learning outcomes

Qualification requirements of teachers are aligned with the respective regulations and requirements and evidence shows that all teachers delivering in the study programme have at least 3-year of experience (Annex table 5). The student/teacher ratio is favourable throughout

the years (SER, p. 40). Study programme is implemented by 24 teachers in Klaipeda, 26 teachers in Vilnius and 23 teachers in Kaunas campus. There is evidence of experience of teachers in both academia and business practice. Some of the teachers engage actively in scholarly research.

The composition of teaching staff is adequate in terms of their qualification to deliver the courses which contribute to the study programme's aims and LOs. Expert committee commends the SMK for securing a significant number of practitioners as teachers. Also, the teachers have combined academic and practical experience which provides a convenient blend of academic depth and practical relevance. From conducted sessions, the expert committee concludes that there is good communication between administration/management and teachers as well as sharing of experience between teachers working in different campuses of the school. However, research activity seems to be happening ad hoc with no systematic and strategic approach. Although this is a University of applied sciences study programme, there should be stronger emphasis on supporting research activities. For instance, some lecturers who are PhD candidates should have lower teaching load to focus more on finalizing their dissertations.

3.5.2. Evaluation of conditions for ensuring teaching staffs' academic mobility

SMK teachers are encouraged to use the Erasmus+ mobility programmes for teaching and training. Also, the possibility to use other funding and support sources exists. There are currently 94 signed Erasmus+ agreements with international partners (SER, p. 40-41). There is evidence of strategic approach to mobility on the conditions under which a teacher can undertake mobility. The international mobility of teachers has been growing in the last three years. The data also shows the international incoming mobility of teachers from other universities (SER, Table 13, p. 41).

Although teacher mobility is encouraged and teachers have the possibility to enhance their cross-cultural skills and mindset, there is rather lack of justification on why it is strategically important for the study programme per se. Also, during the talks with SMK management, there seemed to be no predefined set of guidelines on how the mobility partners are chosen. Preferably, the chosen partners should have a fit in study programmes at least so that students could have a smoother transition between the SMK and host institution. Also, the expert committee agrees that there is a lack of formalized mechanisms on how the know-how from mobility is transferred into the study programme.

3.5.3. Evaluation of the conditions to improve the competences of the teaching staff

There is evidence in SER, also corroborated through session with teachers, that SMK organizes a wide array of training workshops which are aimed at strengthening teaching and research capacities of the staff involved in teaching (SER, p. 41-42). The trainings have been organized for each campus individually, thus being tailored to the actual didactic needs of the teachers delivering courses at those campuses.

Although the teachers stated that they are satisfied with the system of support for activities rather than teaching (projects, research), the expert committee came to a conclusion that a more proactive and systematic approach towards the development of teacher's key pedagogical and research competencies is required. As noted by the committee from earlier evaluation, the SMK should come up with an organized support system that would enhance the research capacities of its teachers. Although this is not among the key goals for colleges of

higher education, the benefits accruing from a more research-oriented approach are evident for both teachers' and students' personal development.

Strengths and weaknesses of this evaluation area:

(1) Strengths:

1. SMK has an organizational culture that promotes collaborative work and inclusiveness, teachers take into account and address the diversity of students and their needs, allowing flexible learning pathways.
2. There is a strong association of teachers with business practice.

(2) Weaknesses:

1. Research activity is still low and more emphasis is needed in creating a system that supports research (support PhDs and publications in more relevant journals).
2. Despite the international mobility of teachers has been growing in the last three years, it should be further supported and motivated.

3.6. LEARNING FACILITIES AND RESOURCES

Study field learning facilities and resources should be evaluated according to the following criteria:

3.6.1. Evaluation of the suitability and adequacy of the physical, informational and financial resources of the field studies to ensure an effective learning process

Based on SER and the expert committee's meetings with SMK stakeholders, SMK seems to put a lot of effort into creating the best possible material base of resources and conditions for the students. It is not a simple task as the study programmes are scattered in 3 major towns. Nevertheless, the total number of 72 classrooms of which 12 computer classes, laboratories, different canteens and other social spaces in all these 3 towns are substantial to reach learning outcomes.

Management of the school has an exceptional drive to provide modern infrastructure for their students and teachers: Vilnius branch is located in the new premises with an exceptional architecture built especially for the SMK, Klaipėda will move to "Lighthouse" - biggest cooperational area hub. This move will bring SMK even closer to the practitioners and together establish and develop a digital innovation center that will let SMK be up to date as a business and share local infrastructure with companies residing in this hub.

Investment in updates of both hardware and software, technical and laboratory equipment, furniture seem to be substantial in the last 4 years period. According to SER, teaching literature in Vilnius and Klaipėda libraries reach 21.400 units and 5000 Eur are allocated to renew printouts each year. Both Lithuanian and international databases are available for teaching staff and students, but there should be a clear mechanism of encouragement to use these valuable resources. Another question is how to ensure study quality in Kaunas branch as there is no Library.

University provides very good hardware and software resources dedicated for training and development of practical skills, professional video and sound recording and editing. Once again: while the study programme is scattered through 3 different towns, it is a real challenge to make the same level of accessible resources and hence to ensure an equal study level. It seems that students at Vilnius and Klaipėda branches make the most use of these resources.

3.6.2. Evaluation of the planning and upgrading of resources needed to carry out the field studies

SMK has enough resources and well developed plans around upgrading of the resources needed to carry out the field studies. According to SER and meetings with SMK management, the process of updating resources is working smoothly and flexibly as SMK is relatively small and management is highly involved in day to day activities.

Strengths and weaknesses of this evaluation area:

(1) Strengths:

1. SMK has a clear vision for a constant modernisation of study bases, buildings and manages to acquire the latest equipment for classes, has distinctive tools and software.
2. Very strong base for visual and audio production with necessary hardware and software tools.

(2) Weaknesses:

1. Study programme is scattered in 3 towns and it is nearly impossible to keep the same level of resources to ensure equal quality of studies in all 3 locations.
2. Resource planning is highly dependent on certain people: in the future, together with a growth and internationalisation, clear processes around planning and deciding about the resources should be in place.

3.7. STUDY QUALITY MANAGEMENT AND PUBLIC INFORMATION

Study quality management and publicity shall be evaluated according to the following indicators:

3.7.1. Evaluation of the effectiveness of the internal quality assurance system of the studies

Regarding the internal quality assurance system, the expert committee finds its structure viable and long term sustainable. It has a coherent form, thoughtfully adjusted to the institutional matrix. The expert committee admits results of content management regarding the study programmes. The variety of subjects can ensure the possibility of giving up to date knowledge – especially by involving third party contributors.

The expert committee recognises the existence of Management Representative for Quality (see SER, p. 48), “who is responsible for the functioning of quality management system, monitoring of the processes of the SMK activity as well as their management and accountability, improvement of performance, management of internal communication, provision of methodical and information support on the issues of quality assurance”. The expert committee accepts the current structure of internal quality assurance. The Study Program Committees, whose main responsibilities are the study programme improvements, could act as the intermediators between social partners and professors.

The aforementioned approach (the Study Programme Committees to act as intermediators) is strongly advised by the expert committee: as SMK aspires to maintain the link between teaching and research activities, it could provide a solid basis to strengthen the formal relations.

3.7.2. Evaluation of the effectiveness of the involvement of stakeholders (students and other stakeholders) in internal quality assurance

The expert committee admits the efforts of SMK to involve their main stakeholders, the students in every step of the quality assurance process. The frequency of quality surveys seem to provide sufficient quantitative data for proper assessment. The social stakeholders involvement in internal quality assurance contains proper initiatives, but still needs improvement.

The self-evaluation report states that “Students are responsible for their learning outcomes...” (SER, p. 47). The expert committee recommends a change in this phrasing since the “learning outcome” itself is a statement of what a student is expected to be able to know, and this phrasing puts all the responsibility on the students, instead of acknowledging the common responsibility.

It is good to see the initiatives to involve third parties, such as students and social stakeholders. This aspect certainly could provide a higher standard in quality management. The expert committee also admits the efforts of evaluating feedback from students, teaching staff, social partners and alumni. However, the current level of cooperation with alumni is not satisfying: further strengthening of formal and informal ways of communication with alumni and social partners is advised.

3.7.3. Evaluation of the collection, use and publication of information on studies, their evaluation and improvement processes and outcomes

The data collection on general information, study programme content, study quality and study satisfaction has a systematic approach (annually) by the study programme’s management. The general information about the study programme (content, admission information) are available at the SMK website. The expert committee finds the current practice of collection, use and publication of information on studies, their evaluation and improvement processes and outcomes adequate, however, some development regarding social partners and alumni activity is necessary. The admission information on the website seems adequate. The “publishing information” in the self-evaluation report is just shortly elaborated, additional information would have been fruitful.

3.7.4. Evaluation of the opinion of the field students (collected in the ways and by the means chosen by the SKVC or the HEI) about the quality of the studies at the HEI

There are defined systems for collecting satisfaction information from the community. This committee considers the existence of a quality culture to be proven, since SMK not only collects the satisfaction of its stakeholders, but also reports on the results thereof. In addition, students are aware of the activities of the Student Council and are informed of its activities through different communication channels. Student autonomy is encouraged, while ensuring adequate support and guidance from teachers. The students highlighted the fluid virtual communication.

Strengths and weaknesses of this evaluation area:

(1) Strengths:

1. SMK is applying a systematic approach to quality management.
2. The school is involving students in quality management processes.

(2) Weaknesses:

1. This Committee recommends increasing the activities that serve as a relationship and link between SMK and employers and Alumni. Their contribution will have a positive impact on the university environment and will help increase employability.
2. The cooperations with external partners seem short-term, limited. To realize the desired “Talent Program”, SMK should formalize these existing cooperation in a more centralized, administrative manner.

IV. RECOMMENDATIONS

Evaluation Area	Recommendations for the Evaluation Area (study cycle)
Intended and achieved learning outcomes and curriculum	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Introduce more formalized procedures for study programme revisions that would include working tightly and directly with key constituents (students and employers), which already informally exists (e.g., qualitative interviews with employers). 2. Strategy towards internationalization should be more explicit and operational, especially within the study programme. 3. A more formalized system on addressing the appropriateness of teaching and assessment methods should be introduced (e.g., peer review). 4. To boost personalization, SMK should introduce more content related to contemporary issues (AI, machine learning) as well as to other social sciences (e.g., psychology). Some of these can be offered as generic or optional courses. Also, the project management skill should be incorporated at least in the form of optional courses. 5. Since students and alumni show a great deal of entrepreneurial savvy, SMK should work more on introducing courses that would enhance these skills among student entrepreneurs. 6. SMK should provide greater support to students in preparing and writing the final theses. These would include additional training on topics: how to properly cite other works, anti plagiarism, search for relevant literature and use of other secondary databases.
Links between science (art) and studies	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. To enhance and enable student participation in research activities. 2. Increase the academic scientific research output by the teaching staff.
Student admission and support	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. The recognition of credits should be explained to students, they often do not ask for it because they do not know the procedure. 2. Actions to introduce English into the program should be reinforced in order to allow the attendance of Erasmus +

	students (incoming students).
Teaching and learning, student performance and graduate employment	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Expand opportunities for students to adapt their teaching and learning processes to their personal needs (by increasing the number of electives, including non-formal competences etc.). 2. To systematize and intensify cooperation with graduates.
Teaching staff	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. The expert committee advises SMK to organize the in-house dissemination events (once per semester) where teachers who undertook the mobility will share their experiences and report on how they plan to utilize the generated know-how in the courses they teach. 2. SMK should increase the research-oriented culture in the institution. This would include stimulating various types of (applied) research as well as lowering the teaching load of faculty members that are in the process of obtaining a PhD.
Learning facilities and resources	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. SMK should put more effort into making the study programme, which is now scattered in 3 towns, to keep the same sense of resources, e.g. exceptional hardware could “travel” between towns. 2. Make resource planning less dependent on certain people.
Study quality management and public information	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Further strengthening of formal and informal ways of communication with alumni and social partners is advised. 2. More frequent updates of available quality management information (e.g., survey results) is advised both in Lithuanian and English, as bilingual information sharing could ensure higher quality for all stakeholders.

V. SUMMARY

Practical component in the study programme *Marketing and Advertising Creation* is strong. Personal development is well streamlined through the study programme as well as through SMK's organizational culture that supports inclusiveness. The programmes are applying up-to-date teaching approaches based on applied science results of professors. The school is involving students in quality management processes. At the same time, there are limited opportunities for students to adapt their teaching and learning processes to their personal needs. Also, the system for monitoring students' study progress and for giving feedback to students to promote self-assessment could be updated.

SMK offers to the public complete, clear and accessible information. On the other hand, positioning of the school's study programme must be re-assessed and new potential venues of competitive advantage need to be sought. Personalization in the study programme needs to be strengthened, especially in terms of introducing more digitalization content, psychology and entrepreneurship. More emphasis should be put on providing academic depth and also focus on developing students' analytical skills. There is a lack of marketing theory knowledge among the students.

The internationalization component is present in the strategic framework but very little is done in practicing it in study programme management. SMK encourages actions that consolidate the Erasmus+ experience among students, but academic research papers are almost entirely missing. Research activity is very low and more emphasis is needed in creating a system that supports research. Despite the fact that international mobility of teachers has been growing in the last three years, it should be further supported and motivated.

SMK has an organizational culture that promotes collaborative work and inclusiveness, teachers take into account and address the diversity of students and their needs. There is a strong association of teachers with business practice. There is some collaboration between SMK and employers concerning employability of graduates, especially in the field of the organization of student internships. At the same time, the relations with graduates, alumni and external marketing organizations are fragmented and superficial. The recognition of prior credits should be explained to students more. Also, the actions to introduce more English into the programme should be reinforced in order to allow the attendance of Erasmus+ students.

SMK has invested a lot into facilities. Physical environment is up to date and there are enough spaces and resources for formal teaching and informal learning.

Expert panel signatures:

1. **Dr. Kristiina Tõnnisson (panel chairperson)**, *academic*
2. **Dr. Dario Miočević**, *academic*
3. **Dr. Ákos Varga**, *academic*
4. **Dr. Giedrius Romeika**, *academic*
5. **Mr. Žilvinas Kulvinskis**, *representative of social partners*
6. **Ms. Alicia Presencio Herrero**, *students' representative*