



CENTRE FOR QUALITY ASSESSMENT IN HIGHER EDUCATION

EVALUATION REPORT
STUDY FIELD OF RELIGIOUS STUDIES
at Klaipeda University

Expert panel:

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2. **Assoc. prof. Olga Schihalejev**, *academic*;
3. **Prof. dr. Pauline Claire Hannah Kollontai**, *academic*;
4. **Dr. Gediminas Jankūnas**, *representative of social partners / academic*;
5. **Mr. Rimvydas Burba**, *students' representative*.

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Study Field Data*

Title of the study programme	<i>Spiritual Counselling and Assistance</i>
State code	6211NX054
Type of studies	University cycle studies
Cycle of studies	Second cycle
Mode of study and duration (in years)	Full-time studies, 2 years
Credit volume	120
Qualification degree and (or) professional qualification	Master of Humanities
Language of instruction	Lithuanian
Minimum education required	Higher university education (Bachelor's Degree)
Registration date of the study programme	21 June, 2010

** if there are **joint / two-fields / interdisciplinary** study programmes in the study field, please designate it in the foot-note*

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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 (hereinafter – 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 (hereinafter – 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 5 May, 2021. Due to the coronavirus pandemic, the Review Visit was organised online using video-conferencing tool (Zoom).

1. **Prof. dr. Peter Jonkers (panel chairperson)**, *emeritus, former full professor of philosophy at the Tilburg University (School of Catholic Theology), member of the advisory board of the German accreditation agency for theology (AKAST) and member of the scientific committee of the Vatican agency for quality evaluation and promotion of study programs in theology (AVEPRO) (Netherlands)*;
2. **Doc. dr. Olga Schihalejev**, *associate professor of Religious Education and Deputy Head of the School of Theology and Religious Studies at University of Tartu (Estonia)*;
3. **Prof. dr. Pauline Claire Hannah Kollontai**, *Awarded Emeritus Professorship of Higher Education in Theology and Religious Studies at York St. Johns University (UK)*;
4. **Dr. Gediminas Jankūnas**, *Rector/pastor at Basilica of the Assumption of Our Lady in Krekenava and Upytės parish; Chaplain at Panevėžio County Police Department; lecturer at Vytautas Magnus University (Lithuania)*;
5. **Mr. Rimvydas Burba**, *Vytautas Magnus University, the Second Cycle Study Programme Diplomacy and International Relations (Lithuania)*.

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, during and/or after the site visit:

No.	Name of the document
1.	Study subject descriptors
2.	External Evaluation Report of Klaipeda University study programme <i>Religious Counselling</i> (621V80005) (Year of 2013)”
3.	Final master degree theses
4.	MOSTA (current name STRATA) final report for the Unit of Assessment of the Comparative Expert Assessment of Research and Development Activities (in the area of Humanities) of 2018 Lithuanian Universities and Research Institutes
5.	Information about student’s feedback
6.	Information about placement experience of internships
7.	Translations of most significant publications of the teaching staff

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

Klaipėda University (hereinafter: KU, University), founded in 1991, is a centre of science and education in Western Lithuania (with a population reaching over 600 thousand). KU is a multidisciplinary national and Baltic region centre of marine science and studies, integrated into international academic networks, meeting the needs of Western Lithuania and Klaipėda city. Currently, KU serves 3 Faculties: the Faculty of Social Sciences and Humanities, the Faculty of Marine Technologies and Natural Sciences and the Faculty of Health Sciences. University teachers and students can use the services of the University Library and of several support centres. The University offers all cycles of studies, from Bachelor to Doctoral, and has a total of about 2700 students from Lithuania and abroad, studying in full-time and part-time study-programmes. In 2020, a total of 108 three-cycle study programmes were implemented at KU. KU carries out over 60 international and national research projects every year; it has research and academic partners in Europe and worldwide, participates in the activities of international foundations, programmes and networks, notably EU-CONEXUS and HORIZON.

The Faculty of Social Sciences and Humanities (hereinafter: FSSH, the Faculty) has 7 departments and 5 centres, including the John Paul II Centre for Christian Studies. The FSSH study programmes are implemented in 4 areas of studies (mostly in Social Sciences and Humanities) and 21 fields of studies. In 2019, 18 Bachelor’s degree and 19 Master’s degree study programmes and a professional pedagogy studies were operative (total of 38 study programmes). The third cycle of study covers the area of Social Sciences and Humanities. Studies take place full-time (based on full-time and session-based distance learning timetables) and part-time. Over 1100 students study at the FSSH.

The John Paul II Centre for Christian Studies (hereinafter: the Centre) traces its origins to 1995. Today, implementing the principle of interdisciplinary, not only university teachers of the Centre, but also from the Department of Psychology are employed in the Master’s degree programme in Spiritual Counselling and Assistance. Accordingly, KU’s experience in the field of religious studies is sufficient. Since 2019, the Centre has also acquired an ecumenical feature, as a new staff member was hired by the Centre.

Since the approval of the Centre for Quality Assessment in Higher Education (hereinafter: CQAHE) in 2010, the Centre offers an innovative Spiritual Counselling Master’s study

programme in Lithuania in the field of Religious Studies. It results from a letter from the Lithuanian Bishops' Conference, expressing a favourable attitude towards the pastoral care of patients, as well as from a decision of the Ministry of Health of the Republic of Lithuania to establish chaplain and spiritual assistant positions in hospitals. Therefore, there is a clear need for training spiritual counselling specialists, in this case in hospitals and nursing institutions, providing spiritual assistance and helping to provide religious services to patients, their relatives and staff. Taking into account the recommendations of the previous Self-Evaluation report in 2014, the title of the programme was changed to Spiritual Counselling and Assistance (state code - 6211NX054) (hereinafter – study programme, programme). The volume of the following 2-year Master's study programme is 120 ECTS.

II. GENERAL ASSESSMENT

Religious studies study field and second cycle at Klaipeda University 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	3
3.	Student admission and support	3
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 (not applicable to HEIs operating in exile conditions)

(1) Factual situation

The aim of the *Spiritual Counselling and Assistance* study programme is to train spiritual counsellors/assistants, who are able to consult and provide spiritual-pastoral support to people experiencing spiritual shocks and crises, existential and internal value and family conflicts and difficulties. It is a unique interdisciplinary study programme, which combines achievements in science and practice of two fields – religion and psychology. During the studies students' professional knowledge, skills and abilities are deepened and expanded, enabling them to think critically, and effectively apply the acquired knowledge in research and practice in accordance with values based on the consultant's ethics.

In order to respond more effectively to the mentioned problems, students learn to understand human experiences, a person's spiritual world, and to effectively provide spiritual assistance to those in need, thereby integrating psychological and religious expertise.

Graduates can work in hospitals and health care institutions, nursing homes for elderly, psychological support centres, caritative organizations, diocesan family centres, general education institutions, academic pastoral care, youth organizations, addiction treatment facilities, etc.

(2) Expert judgement/indicator analysis.

The study programme responds to an important and even growing need in Lithuanian society, which has been officially recognized by the state authorities and the Catholic church. The conformity of this programme with the societal needs becomes even more apparent if one realizes that it is the only of its kind in Lithuania. The programme prepares students for working as spiritual counsellors and assistants in hospitals, health care institutions etc. through a combination of psychological and religious studies, and of theoretical study and practical training (see the SER, no. 8-10 and the interview with the programme management). The conformity of this programme with a real societal need is illustrated by the fact that the overall majority of the graduates of the programme work or volunteer in the field of spiritual counselling and assistance in various institutions and organizations, mostly in Western Lithuania (SER, no. 75). During the interview with the alumni, the employers and the social partners it became clear that they value the graduates' combination of academic knowledge and practical skills, and their deep understanding of the patients' spiritual needs (see also the two letters from social partners: the Diocese of Telšiai and the Public Institution St. Francis Oncology Centre). Moreover, the alumni proved to be very satisfied with the content of the study programme, offering them not only theoretical expertise and practical skills, but also personal and spiritual enrichment. Because of these strengths of the programme, alumni feel well equipped for their job. Although the Centre is Catholic, the graduates are well placed to

relate to non-confessional persons too (information based on the interview with the programme management and the alumni).

However, there is an important concern in this respect. Some members of the programme management, lecturers and (more importantly) students and alumni did not always seem to be aware of the important differences between spiritual counselling/assistance, psychological counselling and psychotherapy. The result is that some interns and graduates fulfil tasks that don't require proper expertise and training (e.g. brightening up elderly people, talking with patients, organizing various activities) and/or tasks for which they are not qualified (psychological counselling, especially in small villages where there are no trained psychologists). This problem may be caused by the fact that the programme does not include a course on spirituality and on the *religious* dimension of spiritual counselling, which would make the students more aware of their own specific expertise in comparison with psychological counsellors and psychotherapists. Moreover, the psychological learning aims of the programme are defined in much more detail than the spiritual and religious ones (SER, no. 18). Therefore, the expert panel deems that the programme management needs to critically evaluate the conformity of the (mandatory) courses with the intended professional expertise and skills, in particular as regards (Christian) spirituality, defines the spiritual/religious learning outcomes more specifically and integrates them more explicitly in the individual courses in religious studies. The interview with the programme management confirmed the trend that general spiritual counselling is becoming more important in Lithuanian society, to a certain extent to the detriment of Christian/Catholic spirituality. In the light of this development, the expert panel recommends that the programme management takes this development into account. It may lead to include a course on non-Christian spirituality in the programme in order to respond better to the needs of secular people and/or people with a non-Christian religious background (SER, no. 10).

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

(1) Factual situation

The *Spiritual Counselling and Assistance* study programme corresponds to the Strategic Action Plan of KU and to its mission, according to which KU implements its educational mission, focused on humans and intellectual society, fosters the development of educational, cultural, consulting and experimental activities, contributes to the human and intellectual development of society, etc. (SER, no. 13, see also no. 17). After several mergers, the Centre is now part of the FSSH. One of the results of this organizational restructuring is that it enables the Centre to offer a genuine interdisciplinary programme in spiritual counselling and assistance (SER, no. 6, 9). Furthermore, several faculty members have joined one of the research programs of KU (Socio-educational Research on Human Well-being), and have published in a journal edited by KU (SER, no. 5, 31).

(2) Expert judgement/indicator analysis.

According to the interview with the teaching staff, there is a good cooperation between the various disciplines involved in this program. Faculty members and students discuss the balance of the program, in particular the interaction between psychology and religious studies. Furthermore, through the project "Human Spiritual Welfare in a Christian Context" they contribute to the research programs of the FSSH (SER, no. 30-33), thus strengthening the mission of KU in a way that corresponds with the core of the study program. All in all, one can conclude that the organizational restructuring of KU, in particular the integration of the Centre into the FSSH has been a good decision, since it contributes considerably to realizing

the interdisciplinary character of the study program, and this, in turn, strengthens the interdisciplinary aims of KU (SER, no. 1).

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

(1) Factual situation

The study programme was created and is operated in accordance with the Lithuanian Qualifications Framework, the Description of General Requirements for the Provision of Studies, the Descriptor of Study Cycles and Klaipeda University Study Programme Regulations.

The Course units of the study programme are consistently arranged during the semesters. Course units of the first semester are related to religious studies and provide the theoretical basis for spiritual counselling. In the second semester, students are prepared for spiritual counselling on the basis of psychology and theology. During the third semester, the student theoretically and practically delves into the practice of counselling and conducts Professional Practice. The acquired theoretical knowledge and practical skills enable the students to write their Master's Theses in the fourth semester. Each course unit is allocated an appropriate number of credits, consisting of classes, distance learning, independent work, and preparation for reports and exams. The scope of the student self-study is more than 50% of the study programme. A total of 9 ECTS are allocated for students' electives. Students can choose one of the three course units of religious studies from the list provided (SER, no. 21-22). For a schematic overview of the study program, see Study Plan 2020.

(2) Expert judgement/indicator analysis

The study programme complies with the legal requirements. Semester 1: 30 ECTS; semester 2: 30 ECTS (25 ECTS compulsory modules + 5 ECTS for one elective module); semester 3: 30 ECTS (16 ECTS compulsory modules + 4 ECTS elective modules + 10 ECTS Professional Practice); semester 4: 30 ECTS MA-thesis. According to the interview with the students the competence of the teachers guarantees that distant learning works well. Courses are well prepared by the teachers; distant learning does not cause loss of quality.

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

(1) Factual situation

The *Spiritual Counselling and Assistance* study programme is aimed at supporting people with spiritual problems or needs based on interpersonal communication, Christian values, faith and general knowledge, skills and abilities stemming from religion and psychology. Spiritual problems usually arise in the event of a personality conflict with a situation that is manifested in four directions: with God, with the world (environment), with another person (one's relative), with oneself. During the studies, the following practical abilities necessary for counselling are acquired: 1) Ability to identify weaknesses and strengths of a person by distinguishing psychologically-religiously sensitive issues; ability to identify pathological conditions, and, if necessary, refer the client to another specialist. 2) Mastering basic skills of spiritual counselling: making and maintaining contact, structuring conversation, active listening, application of counselling techniques and procedures, analysis and assessment of one's own work. 3) Ability to develop an individual and group counselling programme, create prevention and correction programmes by maintaining a dialogue between faith and science. 4) Ability to provide spiritual and religious assistance to clients, their relatives, and

colleagues. 5) Ability to work in teams that provide comprehensive assistance in the event of a crisis; ability to call upon volunteers and specialists – experts, and religious communities while providing assistance. 6) Practical application of methods for cognition of a person. The learning outcomes of this programme are developed for competences of different levels and are divided into 4 groups: knowledge, cognitive, practical, and transferable abilities. The content of these outcomes corresponds to the aim of the study programme. Learning outcomes of the programme form the totality of abilities necessary to be acquired. (SER, no. 18, 19).

In order to ensure active work of students throughout the study semester, their ability to apply theoretical knowledge in practice and objectively assess learning outcomes, the University applies a cumulative evaluation system. When applying cumulative evaluation system, learning outcomes are evaluated by interim assignments (test, individual work, written work, etc.), and the final evaluation is the sum of cumulative grades and an exam grade. The study programme is completed by the defence of the Master's Thesis (SER, no. 23).

(2) Expert judgement/indicator analysis

The aims and learning outcomes of the programme correspond by and large with its general focus and are compatible with its interdisciplinary character. Furthermore, the learning outcomes are in line with the fact that the programme combines theoretical knowledge and practical skills, and prepares for working as spiritual counsellor. Yet, it struck the panel that the psychological competences are defined in much greater detail than those in of religious studies; in particular, what exactly distinguishes spiritual counselling from psychological counselling remains unclear. Furthermore, the programme needs to distinguish more clearly between psychologically and religiously sensitive issues.

When comparing the general learning aims and outcomes with those of the individual course descriptions (provided by KU as the additional information) the limited way in which knowledge of and training in the ins and outs of *spiritual* counselling is integrated in the programme is conspicuous again. The learning outcomes of the course "Professional Practice" (10 ECTS) don't have any references to *spiritual* counselling, and those of the courses "Prayer and Meditation in Spiritual Counselling", "Psychological Spiritual Counselling" and "The Process of Counselling" make no clear distinction between psychological and spiritual counselling; furthermore, the courses on specific aspects of pastoral care, like "Personal Religious Development", "The Phenomenon of Death in Religions", "Christian Palliative Care", "Christian Sexual Ethics", "Pastoral Care of Sick" are certainly relevant for a programme in spiritual counselling, but their relation to the specific practice of spiritual counselling remains unclear as well. Hence, the programme urgently needs a central course in spiritual counselling, to which the other courses and the professional practice can relate; furthermore, the courses in religious studies and professional practice need to pay more attention to the *spiritual* counselling.

There is a good mix of teaching and assessment methods throughout the program, and the they are consistent with its general aims and learning outcomes.

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

(1) Factual situation

According to SER, no. 25, the volume of the *Spiritual Counselling and Assistance* study programme is 120 ECTS. Main course units are the following: *Christian Anthropology, Personal Religious Development, Guilt and Forgiveness in the Bible, Marital Life Crisis Management,*

Formation of a Person in a Family: Solutions to Spiritual Problems, Psychology of Crisis and Spiritual Trauma, Pastoral Care of Sick. In the second semester, students can choose religious course units: *Christian Sexual Ethics, Prayer and Meditation in Spiritual Counselling, The Phenomenon of Death in Religions* (5 ECTS each course unit). In the third semester, students can choose psychological course units: *Stress Coping Strategies, Health Psychology.* Both course units are 4 ECTS each. 38 ECTS are allocated for the development of practical counselling competencies. This group includes the following theoretical course units: *Phenomenology of Religious Experiences, Process of Counselling, Christian Palliative Care,* and two practical course units: *Psychological Spiritual Counselling* and *Professional Practice* in the real work environment. Teaching of the *Process of Counselling* course unit is based on teamwork: members of the John Paul II Centre for Christian Studies and Department of Psychology teach together. *Professional Practice* is supervised by teachers of the John Paul II Centre for Christian Studies and is carried out in medical institutions, psychological aid institutions, religious communities and organizations. 30 ECTS are allocated for scientific work, in particular for writing the master's Thesis (4 sem.).

(2) Expert judgement/indicator analysis

Apart from what is written in section 3.1.4 about the need for a central course in spiritual counselling and the integration of this kind of counselling in the individual courses, as well as about the need specify and formalize the admission criteria, the set-up of the programme indeed ensures a consistent development of the competences of the students. In the first and the second semester students study various religious and psychological questions, directly related to spiritual counselling. The third semester consists of the preparation and the execution of internships; during this semester the students learn to develop their counselling competences in a theoretical way, thereby integrating a theological as well as a psychological perspective, and can train their competences further during their internship. This offers a good preparation for writing the MA-thesis in the fourth semester. From the interview with the students and the alumni it became apparent that this structuring of the study programme works well. The students are very positive about the balance between religion and psychology, and about the expertise and skills it gives them for doing their (future) work.

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

(1) Factual situation

Students' possibilities to individualize their studies are regulated by the *KU Study Regulations (2018)* and other internal documents. The following study individualization options are provided: creation of an individual study plan (possibility to include more (fewer) course units during the study semester); change time for examination sessions, final thesis defence (advance or postpone); performance of internships (practical training) that are not provided in the study plan; choice of the internship location; selection of topics for final theses; possibility to complete studies in a shorter study period, depending on their previous degree and/or formal or informal studies (SER, no. 26).

(2) Expert judgement/indicator analysis

Because of the small number of students, the teaching staff can accommodate the programme to a large extent to the individual needs, learning objectives and outcomes of the students. This impression was confirmed by the interview that the expert panel had with the students. They appreciate that the programme gives them a lot of freedom to organize their study and especially value that the programme and its teaching staff help them in their personal development in various respects.

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

(1) Factual situation

The principles of preparing final theses, forming the Committee, and defending thesis are established in the *KU Description of General Requirements for Students' Academic Papers*. The research adviser of a master's thesis must be a holder of the PhD degree and/or an academic title. The Committee for the Defence of MA-theses consists of 5 specialists competent in the study field – scientists, professional practitioners, representatives of social partners, having scientific degrees or pedagogical titles. At least one member of the Committee may be from another academic and study institution. The theses are reviewed by two reviewers, who are holders of the PhD degree and/or an academic title. The criteria for evaluation of final theses are: relevance of the examined problems and individual questions, degree of solution of the aim, tasks, and hypotheses (if any) of the work, reliability of used research methods and results, validity and independence of conclusions and recommendations, their theoretical and practical significance, academic level of research, results obtained and work prepared, presentation of the work, validity of answers to questions, correctness, ability to theoretically and practically substantiate statements, ability to discuss, etc. The topic of the final thesis must be relevant, i.e. important for science and practice and corresponding to the field of Master's studies. In determining its relevance, the starting point is the scientific hypothesis, i.e. result expected after carrying out research. The topic of the thesis has to be in accordance with the study programme and the research topic of the Centre: *Christian Contexts of the Human Spiritual Well-Being* (SER, no. 27-29).

(2) Expert judgement/indicator analysis

The research questions of most (but not all) theses are indeed related to the focus of the spiritual counselling programme, but only a minority of them combines a theological and a psychological perspective. The expert panel recommends the supervisors to pay close attention to the interdisciplinary character of the theses, since this is an important characteristic of the programme and a vital aspect of the work of the graduates as spiritual counsellors. Moreover, the panel was surprised by the exceptionally high grades of the theses (five theses were graded as excellent, four as very good, three as good, one as average and one as satisfactory). In the light of the fact that only a minority can be considered as interdisciplinary, the teaching staff needs to revise its grading policy of the theses.

Strengths and weaknesses of this evaluation area:

(1) Strengths:

- 1. The uniqueness and relevance of the programme in Lithuanian society.*
- 2. The interdisciplinary character of the programme, integrating psychology and religious studies.*
- 3. The combination of theoretical knowledge and practical skills, which is vital for working as a spiritual counsellor.*
- 4. Almost all graduates work in the field of their study, and the employers are very satisfied with the quality of their work.*

(2) Weaknesses:

- 1. The spiritual aspect of the programme is underdeveloped, resulting in unclarity among the graduates regarding their specific competence in comparison with psychological counselling and psychotherapy.*
- 2. The professional training and supervision of the internships is too general and should focus more on acquiring the competence of spiritual counselling.*

3. *The research questions of most theses are not consistent with the interdisciplinary (theological and psychological) character of the programme. Hence, the very high grades of many theses are inconsistent with this important deficiency.*
4. *The focus of the programme is on Christian religion and spirituality. Taking into account the growing presence of non-Christian religions in Lithuania, the programme should pay more attention to non-Christian spirituality.*

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

(1) Factual situation

Through the project *Human Spiritual Welfare in Christian Context* the teaching staff and the students of the Centre participate in one of the research programmes of KU. Its aim is to reveal peculiarities of spiritual counselling in today's society. Results of this project are published in the KU scientific journal "Tiltai", in the Christian supplement *Dialogues between Science and Faith*. Individual researchers participate in various other projects, like *Pedagogy and Educational Sciences in the Post-Soviet Baltic States 1990 – 2004: Changes and Challenges; Promotion of Christian Youth Pilgrimages on the way of St. James in Lithuania*. Some of these projects received national and even international recognition and funding. In 2018-2020, various other educational projects have been prepared and executed. Furthermore, the teaching staff of the Department of Psychology of the Centre, was also working in one of the research programmes; it published 1 monograph, 9 scientific articles, 1 textbook, and 1 manual of a psychological assessment instrument. Therefore, the teaching staff contributes to the research of the Faculty, and at the same time to the scientific substantiation and optimization of the taught course units of the Master's study programme (SER, no. 30-33). A list of the three most important publications of the teaching staff in the last five years is provided in SER, 81.

(2) Expert judgement/indicator analysis

The evaluation of the research activities of the teaching staff of this programme first of all has to take into account its small size (3,4 fulltime equivalent, according to the MOSTA-report of scientific research of 2018). Against this background it is a sensible policy of the Centre to bring together the research activities of the individual staff members in the project *Human Spiritual Welfare in Christian Context*, and to integrate them into a larger research programme of the FSSH, *Socio-educational Research on Human Well-being*. According to the SER, no. 33 the teachers of the Department of Psychology of the FSSH do not participate in the research project of the Centre. This is a pity, because turning the research project of the Centre into an interdisciplinary one would not only increase its size, but also enhance the quality of the research in spiritual counselling, which is by definition interdisciplinary, and thus strengthen the link between the research activities of the teaching staff and the study programme. Therefore, the expert panel recommends investigating the possibilities for more interdisciplinary cooperation in the research of this field of study.

Upon request of the expert panel, the Department of Humanities of KU provided the results of the research evaluation, executed by MOSTA (2018), but it only comprises an evaluation of the theology teaching staff, not of the psychologists. According to this report, the researchers

in theology are exploring topics that are unique to the region and thus are uniquely positioned to contribute to an important part of Lithuanian culture, which explains why almost all its publications are in Lithuanian and therefore have a very limited international impact (see SER, no. 81). Over a five-year period, staff has attended only 5 international conferences abroad. Finally, one member of the team has received an award for religious studies. All this led the expert panel of MOSTA to grade the academic research in theology with 2 (sufficient).

According to the SER, no. 34-41 and the interviews with the programme management, however, the number of publications has increased in the years after the MOSTA-evaluation, resulting in a very positive evaluation of the research activities of the Centre by the Research Council of Lithuania. Moreover, the Centre has organized a number of conferences, mainly together with ecclesiastical partners in Lithuania and abroad, collaborates with the Klaipeda section of the Lithuanian Catholic Academy of Sciences, and participates in various expert groups and science promotion activities. As a recognition for the relevance of their research researchers of the Centre have received (partial) funding from Catholic charities. The teaching staff of the Department of Psychology also participates in various research activities on a national level (SER, no. 39). According to the information received during the interview with the teaching staff, most of the psychologists are practitioners, so that their research probably has an applied character. Yet, as the interview with the teaching staff and the titles of the most important publications of the psychologists show (SER, no. 81), they also participate in various (inter)national research projects.

Hence, it can be concluded that the research activities of the Centre are good examples of applied research. Beyond doubt, these activities are very relevant to Lithuanian society and the Klaipeda region in particular, as well as to the Catholic Church in Lithuania, so that their overall level is certainly sufficient for the study field, even though they have only a very limited dissemination among the international academic community.

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

(1) Factual situation

During the analysed period, the staff of the Centre has published on average 8-9 research articles per year. Students are also involved in research activities and publish works together with their master's thesis supervisors in the journal *Dialogues between Science and Faith* curated by the Centre. The Centre regularly organizes international conferences and seminar, mainly together with the Telšiai Seminary and the Pontifical Lateran University, as part of a broader research cooperation. Furthermore, the Centre cooperates with the Klaipėda Section of the Lithuanian Catholic Academy of Science (LCAS), which unites about 10 scientists from other KU fields of science. There are close international relations with other European Universities (Rome, Florence, Helsinki), participation in joint conferences, teacher exchange between universities.

The lecturers of the Department of Psychology participate in the Lithuanian Congress of Psychologists as members of the scientific and organizational committee. They also participate in conferences, seminars, trainings, in which competencies, knowledge and skills of psychotherapy, counselling (suicide, trauma, etc.), emotional support are acquired and deepened. The staff of the Centre also participated in various expert activities at a national level.

Finally, the staff of the Centre carries out up to 20 science promotion activities per year: presentations at schools, (press, television, radio shows) interviews, giving public lectures, seminars, moderation of book presentations etc. (SER, no. 34-41).

(2) Expert judgement/indicator analysis

Comparing the titles of the publications of the teaching staff and the topics of the conferences they organize or attend with the focus of the study programme (SER, no. 35-38, 81), in most cases they correspond with the subjects taught, although some other ones do not. Therefore, the programme would benefit from more attention of the teaching staff to (interdisciplinary) research in spiritual counselling and from the development of a broader conception of spiritual counselling to include non-Catholic, non-Christian and non-religious aspects of spiritual counselling, so that the link between the contents of the study and the latest developments in this discipline would be strengthened.

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

(1) Factual situation

The policy of KU is to involve students in research or artistic activities primarily during the study process by preparing Bachelor's, Master's and Doctoral theses. Besides the efforts of KU, students take initiatives too to get involved into research activities, depending on their academic achievements. An example of students' involvement in the research of the Centre is that the best Master's theses are published in *Dialogues between Science and Faith*. Students are also involved in international research activities, for example the international conference *The Challenges of Creating a Welfare Society in Lithuania and in the World* (SER, no. 43-46).

(2) Expert judgement/indicator analysis

It is to be commended that the students of this programme get the possibility to publish (a summary of) their MA-theses in the scientific journal *Tiltai* and that they are involved in various other research activities. However, as the MOSTA evaluation states, there have been no PhD students in this research field during the past period. Furthermore, students do not participate in Erasmus exchange programmes, which could have been beneficial to their research interests and skills (SER, no. 57). This can be explained by the fact that the primary interest of the students is a practical one: as the interview with the students and alumni showed, most of them want to work as spiritual counsellors in health care institutions, nursing homes for elderly, psychological support centres, caritative organizations, diocesan family centres, general education institutions, academic pastoral care, youth organizations, addiction treatment facilities, etc.

Strengths and weaknesses of this evaluation area:

(1) Strengths:

- 1. The embedding of the Centre in one of the research programmes of the FSSH.*
- 2. Because the programme is interdisciplinary, good cooperation between the researchers in the Centre is an important asset.*
- 3. The publications in applied research correspond quite well with the professional focus of the programme.*
- 4. Best MA-theses are published in a scientific journal.*

(2) Weaknesses:

- 1. No structural cooperation between the researchers of the Centre and those of the Department of Psychology.*
- 2. Very little interdisciplinary research in spiritual counselling.*

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

(1) Factual situation

The student selection and admission criteria are publicly available at the university's webpage. According to SER, no. 47 "The Master's study programme in Spiritual Counselling and Assistance admits persons, who have a University Bachelor's qualification degree or a professional Bachelor's qualification degree and during one's studies additionally study in the respective additional study programme." Competitive score consists of two main elements: weighted average of the evaluations of the course units of the first cycle diploma supplement, the final work(s) and/or final exam(s). One can also get additional points for published scientific articles.

The numbers of applicants in 2019 was 27 (14 of them as the first priority) for 5 state-funded places allocated for the study programme; in 2018 16 applicants (10 of them as the first priority) for 8 state funded places, and in 2017 16 applicants (10 as the first priority) for 6 state-funded places. In addition, agreements for 2 non-state funded places were signed in 2017 and 2018; and 3 in 2019. Although the numbers of students are not big, all the state funded places are filled with students whose average score is high (average 8,14-8,65 from 10, the lowest 6,91 and the highest 9,55) (SER, no. 49).

(2) Expert judgement/indicator analysis

The programme does not have formal admission criteria apart from an academic BA-degree (SER, no. 12). Yet, the interviews with the programme management, the people responsible for the writing the SER and the teaching staff gave inconsistent answers to this question. The expert panel found the absence of requiring the students to have completed introductory courses in psychology and theology quite strange, taken into account that this programme is at an MA-level and prepares students for a specific expertise and competence. Moreover, although most courses have no prerequisites, four courses ("Christian Anthropology", "Psychological Spiritual Counselling", "The Process of Counselling" and "Phenomenology of Religious Experiences") require that students have completed a course on "Introduction to Psychology" and/or "Introduction to Theology". Yet, the programme does not offer these two courses, thus showing that the admission criteria are inconsistent. When raising this issue during the interviews with the programme management, the teaching staff and the students, the answer was that deficiencies are dealt with in an informal way and that it has not been a problem so far. If students have deficiencies in psychology or theology, the teaching staff advises them how to supplement these deficiencies. Moreover, most students enter the programme after some years of professional experience in the field. The expert panel recognizes that it makes sense to credit incoming students for their professional experience, but deems nevertheless that this cannot compensate deficiencies in academic knowledge of psychology and theology (or religious studies). Therefore, the programme needs to update and formalize its admission policy.

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

(1) Factual situation

The procedure for crediting learning outcomes acquired in other higher education institutions is approved by the Senate (SER, no. 50) and described in detail in several documents. “Before leaving for partial studies, the student signs an Erasmus+ learning agreement, which confirms that at the end of the mobility period one’s successfully obtained credits will be recognized” (SER, no. 52). It is also possible to get credited for studies not agreed upon with KU in advance, after evaluating whether the learning outcomes meet formal requirements and the desired competences fostered by the study programme. According to the meeting with staff responsible for the preparation of the SER, the total volume of credited non-university course units may not exceed half of the volume of the study programme.

(2) Expert judgement/indicator analysis

According to the interview with staff responsible for the preparation of the SER, KU conducts the assessment and recognition of non-formal and informal learning achievements, for example in catechesis and in internship.

The procedure of recognition of foreign qualifications, partial studies and prior non-formal and informal learning is available and clear. It is used in some cases, especially for prior learning.

3.3.3. Evaluation of conditions for ensuring academic mobility of students

(1) Factual situation

KU students have the possibility to take part in mobility and study or carry out practical training in foreign higher education institutions under the international Erasmus+ Exchange Programme in about 250 universities in Europe. The new Erasmus Charter provides more possibilities (SER, no. 57). The Centre organizes yearly international conferences, and the participants from Catholic organisations all over Europe give lectures to the students and contribute to the academic programme what is also participated by students as confirmed during meeting with senior management and faculty administration staff. There were no students coming for full-time field studies from abroad nor students who have left for part-time (at least 15 credits) field studies or practice during their studies.

(2) Expert judgement/indicator analysis

Although academic mobility of students is encouraged and made fully available, students do not use the possibility to take part in exchange programs for longer periods as almost all students work and have families. The lack of academic mobility is partly compensated by visits of guest lecturers from other universities. The students should be encouraged to take part in exchange programs and online international seminars.

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

(1) Factual situation

Students have access to electronic scientific databases, journals and books at the Library (SER, no. 58). There is also a virtual library with great number of subscribed databases (<https://vb.ku.lt/primo-explore/search?vid=KU> (LT), https://vb.ku.lt/primo-explore/search?vid=KU&lang=en_US (ENG)).

Most of the students study free of charge. For those who have no state funded places, the tuition fee may be reduced up to 70%. Several scholarships are available, especially for students with high learning performance. Students can also apply to Catholic Relief Fund in USA, Chicago organizations for support. A scholarship of 500 USD was received last period. In addition, social scholarships for students from socially disadvantaged backgrounds and scholarships for participation in research are available.

KU offers 24/7 online psychological counselling and spiritual pastoral services to both students and other members of the University community, and career consultancy is available too. Career possibilities are discussed also during internships, which are according to alumni and students are highly valued. Variety of artistic, sports or social activities are available for students studying at KU (SER, no. 59-62).

(2) Expert judgement/indicator analysis

In the interview, the students emphasised the support they get from teaching staff as to the above issues. Course materials are well prepared and made available in case of distance learning. They can use not only the university library but also the library at the Centre, which has materials more directly related to the programme. Students get sufficient academic, financial, social, psychological and personal support. The meeting with students revealed that they feel strongly being a part of university's community and attached to the programme.

3.3.5 Evaluation of the sufficiency of study information and student counselling

(1) Factual situation

In the beginning of the academic year, students get introductory lectures at the Faculty. During the first lecture, the students are informed about the course unit syllabus, independent work tasks, literature, assessment deadlines and assessment methods, final assessment tasks and assessment methods (SER, no. 67). Teachers are available for consultation during consultation hours each week both at the Centre and the Department of Psychology, and by email. All information about consultancy possibilities is provided to students by e-mail specified by the course representative as well as on the university's webpage in Lithuanian (no information in English) (<https://www.ku.lt/paslaugos/>) (SER, no. 68).

(2) Expert judgement/indicator analysis

The amount of study information and student counselling is sufficient and students are aware of the availability of the information.

Strengths and weaknesses of this evaluation area:

(1) Strengths:

- 1. Psychological and spiritual support is available 24/7.*
- 2. Students' strong commitment to the study programme.*
- 3. Extra support funds from Catholic institutions.*

(2) Weaknesses:

- 1. The absence of formal admission criteria (except a university BA-degree), which has a negative impact on the students without prior knowledge in theology and/or psychology, and is inconsistent with the admission requirements of some courses of the programme.*
- 2. Almost non-existent use of academic mobility.*
- 3. No incoming or outgoing Erasmus exchange 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

(1) Factual situation

As it is indicated in the SER: the mode of the study programme is full-time with a session-based schedule. Academic lectures take place in periodic sessions, four times a year at the time specified in the study calendar. The duration of the session depends on the number of the course units taught, but is no longer than 2 weeks. Studies are carried out using various methods: lectures, discussions, reflections, individual and group work, consultations, practical observation and interview tasks, analysis of scientific sources and data, modelling, independent work, review and analysis of video materials, etc. For the forms of assessment of student achievements, the following techniques and instruments are used: examination or differentiated credit test (assessment of Professional Practice only). The lowest grade for interim and final assessment is 5 (poor). In case a student fails to get the lowest passing score - the lowest grade for the established number of interim assignments - one shall not be allowed to take the final exam. Student knowledge is assessed on a ten-point grading scale, provided and published on the university's web, introducing studies. All semester independent work tasks are graded, the final grade for the course is accumulated during the examination session and is equal to the sum of the products of the interim grades and the coefficient of their scopes. The scope of the final exam is no less than 50% of the final grade for the course. The assessment of learning outcomes is implemented in accordance with the criteria indicated in Articles 167-169 of the *KU Study Regulations*. The programme requires a practical internship or placement, during the 3 semester (10 ECTS credits), three weeks, 270 hours, which is done according to general provisions of the procedure for organization and performance of student internships as well as, organization of students 'practical training is done according to Description of the procedure, provided by the Faculty. The Faculty head of the internship searches for future internship places, together with the heads of the department plans the time of the internship, organizes preparation of necessary documents, and controls the internship process. The content of the internship is advised by a lecturer appointed by the Centre. The practice in the programme is described in Description of Spiritual Counselling and Assistance study programme Professional Practicum. Most students stay in Klaipeda region and do internships in various centres. Three places for internship are available, related to the focus of the programme. Students have a freedom to choose, but teaching staff suggest placements. There are bilateral agreements with the institutions. Other places in different parts of Lithuania, depending where students come from: Vilnius, Kaunas, Marijampolė. The professional background is also taken into account if the student comes to the programme from living in religious or any other community and works there.

(2) Expert judgement/indicator analysis

The expert panel finds the teaching and learning processes very good and without any deficiencies, able to take into account the needs of the students and enabling them to achieve the intended learning outcomes. From the site visit it was clear that students fully participated in the programme and were successful in completing their studies. More practical training would be helpful. Part-time studies would be especially useful for students coming

from other parts of Lithuania, who have to combine study and work. Overall, there is a suitable placement/internship policy which includes students who have input in their choices of placement. The management of the placement/internship shows generally good communication between academic staff, students and placement stakeholders which included consideration of the needs of individual students. Students are enabled to apply their academic knowledge in a practical context. However, from the site visit it seemed that the content and character of the placement required more focused professional training and supervision of the internships. Stakeholders and academic staff are appropriately involved in the assessment processes and in reviewing student feedback.

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

(1) Factual situation

As it is written in SER, no. 71-72: Students may get permission from the Faculty Dean for the free attendance of classes (*KU Study Regulations, 133*). If necessary, the programme provides the possibility of distant learning, which is more the case in the outcoming COVID-19 pandemic. Students who are unable to continue their studies due to illness, pregnancy, parental leave can temporarily suspend their studies (academic leave is granted) for one year or for a longer period of time provided by the State Laws (infant care up to 3 years, etc.). Students have an opportunity to take exams individually (*Procedures of the Examination Session, Ch. VII*). Moreover, due to the legitimate reasons the defence of the final MA thesis may be postponed. In this case the defence fee is not applied (*SR, no. 102*). Students from socially sensitive backgrounds have the opportunity to reduce their tuition fees, get social scholarships and discounts for the dormitory. In 2017-2019, for example, there were 5 social scholarships awarded and 3 reductions of tuition fees up to 70% for socially sensitive students were made. Students can also apply to Catholic Relief Fund in USA for support (500 US dollars grand). Students are integrated into the life of the academic community: Klaipėda University Student Union unites all University students and represents their interests. Its representative is a member of the KU Council. Each Faculty has an autonomously functioning Student Union, which solves the problems of students of a specific Faculty, provides relevant information, organizes and participates in the events of the Faculty. It should be noted that there were students with visual impairments, who have successfully completed their studies, and the same year after finishing the programme won the national competition of Lithuanian Voice 2016.

(2) Expert judgement/indicator analysis

According to the expert panel the conditions of ensuring access to study for socially vulnerable groups and students with special needs are evaluated as good and demonstrate that the importance of supporting these students to ensure equality of learning experience was implemented across the University. The attention to support for students with hearing and sight difficulties was good as was the planning and facilitating of teaching in new classrooms for courses to which appropriate access for disabled students was needed. However, when during the site visit the question was raised about the option for dyslexic and autistic students to have a note-taker, the response was negative, most likely because they never had any students with such disabilities.

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

(1) Factual situation

The response provided in SER does not fully correspond with the question of the evaluation indicator 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*). However, it does mention the procedures related to the KU-students, surveys of study programmes, teaching course units, organization of the study process, quality assessment of student competence, organization, data analysis, accessibility, use, and publicity, all of which are determined by the *Description of the Procedure for the Organization of Feedback on Studies at the Klaipėda University* (2017) newly approved by the KU Rector (20-11-2019, No. 1-041). Feedback is anonymous and carried out electronically or by submitting a written questionnaire. In order to ensure an effective system for monitoring study progress, student surveys are organized by the Faculty and carried out by staff authorized by the Dean of the Faculty. The analysis of feedback results is performed at least once per study year at the Centre that offers the study programme. Various forms of feedback are introduced: discussion of task performance or exam evaluation (in groups or individually), feedback and comments via electronic means, student self-assessment or peer-assessment, discussion of work in groups. Feedback is given in dialogical form. After assessing part or the whole final thesis, the supervisor provides a student with oral and/or written comments. The performance of practical tasks is individually discussed with the teacher – supervisor of practical training and is being commented upon during the discussion of the practical training.

The fact that the MA theses are exceptionally high may account for the inner attitude of the students in the programme. They are warm, emphatic and eager to learn, highly motivated when entering the programme. Many students think about the topic of their thesis even before they enter the study programme. The MA defence is recorded, so the students can ask to review their grade.

(2) Expert judgement/indicator analysis

When it comes to the assessment methods, in particular their correspondence with the interdisciplinary and mixed study/training character of the programme, no clear answer was given by the interviewees. Hence, no pedagogical or education evaluation methods are in place, and most of them are based on psychological and theological approaches. No examples were given of how this evaluation is achieved. While there are several people involved in assessing the mark through the defence of MA thesis, no mention is made of first and second marking of their course assignments by the staff or an external examiner. It seems that the process of assignment marking does not include moderation of assignments within a course and across courses. This is a reason for concern, because it is an important way to deal with justifying the high marks for nearly all students.

Overall, the systematic nature of the monitoring of student study progress and feedback to students to promote self-assessment and subsequent planning of study progress is good. However, the assignment grading would benefit moderation of assignments within a course and across courses, would contribute to ensuring quality assurance and enhancement of the overall programme.

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

(1) Factual situation

Out of 14 graduates for the period of 2017-2019 (in 2017 – 3; in 2018 – 4; in 2019 – 7), the Centre has data on 13 graduates. 10 graduates work or volunteer in the field of spiritual counselling and assistance: Women Helpline (consultant (1), Klaipėda); St. Francis Oncological Centre (spiritual counsellor (1), Klaipėda); Women Information and Training Centre (consultant (1), Kretinga); Retreat House (Head of the Retreat house – consultant (1), Samogitian Calvary); Family Centre (coordinator of assistance for divorced and families in crisis (1), Klaipėda); Day Care Centre (social worker – consultant (1), Kretinga, Klaipėda); Department of Social Support (spiritual assistant (1), Alytus); Parishes and organizations (catechists – consultants (2), Kretinga, Tauragė); Rehabilitation Community for Addicts (consultant (1), Šilutė distr.). Others work in areas close to spiritual assistance: in general education institutions and other educational institutions (religion teachers (2), educator (1)). It can be seen that the majority of graduates work in Western Lithuania, a minority – in other regions of Lithuania.

(2) Expert judgement/indicator analysis

Very positive feedback from the alumni and their employers. They feel themselves well equipped for the job. Practical knowledge and its implementation are very important. It would be good if the spiritual counselling would get more recognition and understanding as such by society at large. The programme has enriched the alumni personally as well as professionally in the consulting of patients. However, it was observed, that the alumni and current students loosely used and switched between the terms counselling, psychology and psychotherapy. These terms are substantially different not only in terms of method and approach, but also with regard to professional standing and responsibilities. The expert concern that the programme is not providing clear enough understanding of these terms and professional roles, a clarification is needed exactly were a spiritual counsellor is located in the professional structure and ethical systems and responsibilities (see also 3.1.4).

During the meeting with social partners and employers, they expressed their positive evaluation of the graduates of this programme. One employer even noted that he is pleased with the students bringing their own creativity and expertise to the institution their work, for example, based on the MA thesis: at the Family Centre a new programme for divorced people was introduced. It was also noted that students are good at identifying issues and problems of clients, have good listening skills, deep understanding of spiritual issues and provide valuable spiritual insights. However, even after the questioning the expert panel did not receive a clear answer what professional training for the actual job the students are getting. Alumni of the programme noted, that it broadens they competences, which might be employed in many different contexts, personal or professional. Students either help themselves or are directed to resources where they can get some specific help. The teaching staff takes care of other forms of help to people of other religions or none. Yet, the alumni noted that they could still use more help regarding their counselling skills. Graduates of this programme work in very different positions and with variety of groups: abused people, social work projects, schools, parents etc. Excellent feedback about a retreat-programme for women, including high number of participants, and about spiritual counselling to oncology-patients and their family members.

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

(1) Factual situation

According to the SER, the relationship between the university teachers and students is based on the principles of academic cooperation and transparency. They try to avoid non-academic comments which can lead to conflicts of interest. Principles and means of ensuring academic integrity, tolerance and non-discrimination are defined in the *Academic Ethics Codex of the Klaipėda University* (2019). *Klaipėda University Description of General Requirements for Students' Academic Papers* (2020) also stipulates that when writing papers, students are to observe the principle of academic integrity. The following principles during the study process apply: to independently formulate one's research ideas, to know the theories both supporting and opposing one's ideas, to avoid plagiarism, to give references, to follow the requirements for quotation, and not to falsify data. The authenticity of the paper is checked in the information system of the Lithuanian Academic e-Library Oxsico and Plag.lt. During the last 3 years, there were no cases of violation of the principles of academic integrity, tolerance or non-discrimination in the *Spiritual Counselling and Assistance* study programme.

(2) Expert judgement/indicator analysis

The expert panel finds the implementation of policies to ensure academic integrity, tolerance and non-discrimination adequate and in place. Since in the last three years there were no cases of violation of such principles, it has not been an issue to be evaluated for its effectiveness.

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

(1) Factual situation

Chapter XIII of the *KU Study Regulations* provide a procedure of appeal, when students disagree with the grade for the exam (credit test) or the final thesis project, or when the student believes that one was unjustly not permitted to defend the final thesis. In such cases the student can appeal to the *University Committee of Dispute Settling between Students and Administration*. Students can only once retake the exam with a negative grade without repeating the course. After failing the exam for the second time, students can continue their studies at a state-non-funded place and by repeating the course. The latter option can be used by students twice during the entire study period. Students who disagree with the grade for the exam have the right to appeal against it within two working days. The Head of the Centre informs the student about the decision within three days after the receipt of the appeal. However, in the past three years, no such appeals were made.

(2) Expert judgement/indicator analysis

The appeals policy and procedure are appropriate and fair, and easily accessible to students.

Strengths and weaknesses of this evaluation area:

(1) Strengths:

- 1. Positive attitude of the students, the alumni and the employers. The programme succeeds in making students feel at home.*
- 2. Positive about internships and the possibility to practically experience the positiveness of their involvement in different care institutions or programmes.*

3. *Teaching and learning processes are well developed and enable students to be successful in their academic achievement.*
4. *Informed awareness and strong practical application of supporting students with special needs.*

(2) Weaknesses:

1. *Need to develop professional expertise in spiritual counselling and provide for more focused professional training and supervision of the internships in that area.*
2. *Use of moderation of samples of assignments within a course and between courses within the programme that are delivered within the same semester.*

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

(1) Factual situation

There are one professor and three associate professors and one lecturer at the John Paul II Centre for Christian Studies, most of them work in the study programme only part time. All teachers have a research degree, and their qualifications and competencies correspond to the nature of the study programme; several of them have international experience in studies and research, and also practical experience related to the study programme. In addition, there are 6 teachers from the Department of Psychology: a professor, two associate professors, one lecturer, and two assistants. The programme teachers have professional experience in either theology or psychology. No less than 80% of all study subjects teachers have a scientific degree. Two assistants with no degree supervise and teach practice orientated subjects under the supervision of associate professors. No less than 20% of major study field subjects' volume are taught by teachers occupying the position of a professor.

(2) Expert judgement/indicator analysis

Scientific activities of the teachers correspond at least to some extent, but in most cases directly to the taught course units and to the profile of the programme. For example, the associate professor who teaches courses „Personal Religious Development”, “The Phenomenon of Death in Religions” and “Professional Practice” researches issues related to spiritual health and Christian spirituality; another associate professor who teaches “Guilt and Forgiveness in the Bible”, “Christian Palliative Care”, “Christian Sexual Ethics”, “Pastoral Care of Sick”, “Psychological Spiritual Counselling” and “Prayer and Meditation in Spiritual Counselling” has published articles that deal with issues of theology of forgiveness, theological and psychological aspects of disease inflicted crisis, building interpersonal relationships; the research of the lecturer who teaches courses “Marital Life Crisis Management”, “Formation of a Person in a Family: Solutions to Spiritual Problems” relates to the changing expectations of the father’s role. In the case of the professor who teaches a course on “Counselling process”, his research and teaching field do not match, since his research focuses on the dogmatic theology of the Catholic Church (Christian Eschatology, Bulgakov’s theology).

The ratio and qualification of university teachers to students is sufficient to achieve the expected learning outcomes and enables accommodating teaching to the students' needs. The number of teaching staff exceeds the number of students, which explains why most of the lecturers work for the programme only part time. This allows the programme to employ

people with different expertise and cater students' varied needs. In some cases, scientific competencies do not relate directly to the subjects taught. The programme would benefit from more involvement of lay theologians and religious studies, which enables it to develop a broader conception of spiritual counselling and include non-Catholic, non-Christian and non-religious aspects of spiritual counselling. Furthermore, the programme would benefit from (more) specialized research into spiritual counselling.

3.5.2. Evaluation of conditions for ensuring teaching staffs' academic mobility (not applicable to studies carried out by HEIs operating under the conditions of exile)

(1) Factual situation

The Senate Resolution regulates the process of university teacher mobility (SER, no. 83). The long-term and short-term possibilities are provided for academic mobility (e.g. Erasmus+ Exchange Programme). These possibilities are used by two teachers who have taken part in academic mobility programs (an internship by a professor at Sophia University Institute in Florence and the EU CONEXUS International Staff training Week Developing Innovative Study Programmes and Courses by an assoc. professor at the Catholic University of Valencia). The SER does not provide data about incoming field subject teaching staff.

(2) Expert judgement/indicator analysis

The programme would benefit from more regular and systematic use of academic mobility by the staff; especially the universities with study fields in spiritual counselling should be looked for.

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

(1) Factual situation

Professional development of the KU staff is encouraged by the attestation of pedagogical and research staff (SER, no. 84). There are several opportunities to improve both research skills, as well as teaching skills. KU offers centrally in-service courses to improve teaching skills.

(2) Expert judgement/indicator analysis

According to the meeting with the teaching staff, they actively participated in these courses and appreciated them, especially since the rapid changes during extensive on-line learning due to pandemics. Students value the teaching staff's teaching competences. There is no special programme for the novice teachers. Informal mentoring by senior members supports the new teaching staff members.

The conditions to improve the competences of the teaching staff are sufficient but not used systematically by faculty members. The programme would benefit from more formalised procedures to ensure smooth integration of the new teaching staff.

Strengths and weaknesses of this evaluation area:

(1) Strengths:

- 1. Competent teaching staff with practical experience related to the programme.*
- 2. Ratio of teaching staff per student gives possibilities for individualised approach in teaching.*
- 3. The centralised system of in-service training to improve teaching skills.*

(2) Weaknesses:

- 1. Little use of academic mobility.*
- 2. Especially when it comes to spiritual counselling, which is a core discipline of the programme, the relations between research and teaching are weak.*

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

(1) Factual situation

The programme of Spiritual Counselling is conducted at the KU Faculty for Social Sciences and Humanities (hereinafter: FSSH, Faculty). At the moment, FSSH has 28 classrooms with 780 workspaces. It has a library, 2 sports clubs, and premises for the Student Union. All classes of the Faculty have an Internet connection, are well equipped with stationary multimedia equipment. There are 22 workplaces with computers, Wi-Fi access throughout the faculty, interactive table, document printing services, and different types of software (Dolphin-EasyConverter, EasyReader, Dolphin-Super Nova Magnifier, TOPAZ XL HD V 246 HL, etc.). A good range of internet facilities and IT equipment are provided on campus, and during COVID internet facilities and IT equipment were increased. Concerning teaching materials and reading rooms at the KU library, there are 319854 copies of documents (2019 data), 99 reading places, 19 places are equipped with computers. Also, there is a reading room with 31 places (3-computerized). From the SER 93-9 one can conclude that the Centre has its own substantial library which can be easily accessed. This is supplemented by the University central library where books are available as printed copies; moreover an increasing number of e-books is available. The resources intended for the study programme can be found in the KU Virtual Library (<https://vb.ku.lt>). Scientific e-articles and e-books (around 45 thousand e-documents) are accessible via the subscribed databases: eBooks on EBSCO, SpringerLink, Taylor & Francis, etc. There is an interlibrary loan service provided in partnership with other Lithuanian universities. Online resources can be accessed remotely either through the university campus or from students' home residencies. During the COVID pandemic the library staff was innovative with ways to accommodate students: library hours were extended, borrowing times for printed copies were extended, and a new service was introduced of scanning material which students could collect from the library or it was emailed to them. There is a clear policy of purchasing online access to books (where available) and journals to improve accessibility. Moreover, studies are implemented outside the HEI, since practical training is carried out in various institutions: Christian Community centres, Panevėžys St. Joseph Elderly Care Home, and more. KU has implemented a plan to improve access to its premises and study support for students with disabilities and special needs (SER, p. 64). During the admissions procedure the needs of students as regards disabilities and special learning needs are asked prior to the students starting their programme. Students with special needs are taken well care of by the individual faculties/departments based on the University's overall strategy. Support for students with hearing and sight difficulties is provided. Psychological help available to all students 24/7 through the Lab for psychological counselling. Information (only in Lithuanian) about these services is easily available through the university website (<https://www.ku.lt/paslaugos/> (LT) ENG, but no information in English) and through information provided to students by their tutors.

(2) Expert judgement/indicator analysis

University IT facilities and equipment are good and appropriate to the needs of students. KU has addressed the special needs of students and implemented various measures for ensuring that all its students have equality of learning experience. There is a clear (University-wide) process of ensuring resources that are suitable for courses regarding the development of

thinking and ideas from academics and practitioners within the subject areas of their courses. The provision could be enhanced by more explicit support for students with various forms of dyslexia and those with autism. Also, access to international journals in English and other European languages seems limited and there is an awareness of this amongst academics and library staff, but this is mainly due to students not being proficient in a second language.

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

(1) Factual situation

Klaipėda University funds are continuously used to repair premises, renew classrooms, purchase new furniture, computer hardware, etc. Various architectural changes have been carried out where possible to older buildings, and teaching students with physical disabilities is normally offered in new buildings. In 2020, Ministry of Education, Science and Sport of the Republic of Lithuania together with the EU Structural and Investment Funds allocated 1.000.000 EUR for the renewal of the entire infrastructure of the new Faculty (FSSH). When it comes to the learning and teaching resources, is a clear policy of purchasing online access to books (where available) and journals to improve accessibility. This updating of library resources is organized through an annual review of resources by academics in collaboration with the team management and the library staff. In addition, new or additional resources can be requested throughout the year. Aiming to sustain the quality and appropriateness of resources the University provides appropriate levels of funding. For example, in 2021-2022, it is planned to buy new books for 3000 USD from the Lithuanian Catholic Religious Aid fund (New York, USA). Lastly, Information about library and IT services are easily accessible (library: <https://www.ku.lt/kub/> (LT), <https://www.ku.lt/kub/en/> (ENG)).

(2) Expert judgement/indicator analysis

Overall, KU keeps successfully repairing and modernizing the infrastructure. Also, the University and the library operate a comprehensive and diverse system of ways to access resources and its staff demonstrates flexibility and innovation in responding to the needs of students, especially during the COVID pandemic. The library resources for religion are predominantly traditional and classical theological sources (e.g., Augustine). The dominance of traditional/ classical theological sources without being supplemented by more recent sources is a concern with regard to the contribution these can make to the knowledge and understanding of students when dealing with the real-life contemporary social contexts in which people live.

Strengths and weaknesses of this evaluation area:

(1) Strengths:

- 1. The University's substantial financial investment in library resources, IT facilities and equipment, and in adapting university buildings and providing services for students with disabilities and special needs.*
- 2. The innovation and flexibility of library and IT staff to adapt their provision and services regarding student needs.*

(2) Weaknesses:

- 1. The dominance of traditional/ classical theological sources.*
- 2. Lack of access to international journals particularly in religious studies*

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

(1) Factual situation

As evidenced in the SER (no. 102-105) KU is certified according to the standard of Quality Management System (QMS) ISO 9001:2015. Its system of internal quality assurance operates in accordance with QMS regulations on processes as found in: *Study Programme Development, Evaluation and Improvement Process* (2018), *Study Implementation Process* (2018), *International Degree Study Implementation Process* (2018), *Students' Scientific, Artistic Activity Management Process* (2018), *Stakeholders' Feedback Management Process* (2018). At KU internal quality evaluation (hereinafter: IQE) of programmes occurs on an annual basis and the principles of this internal evaluation are based on the HEI policies of the European Union (EU) such as the Bologna and Copenhagen Declarations and Berlin and Bergen Communications. KU's IQE complies with the higher education quality assurance regulations and guidelines of the EU and legal acts of the Republic of Lithuania regulating higher education in Lithuania. In KU's *Strategic Action Plan for 2020–2022* ongoing improvement to ensure that quality standards of programmes are maintained, sustained and enhanced is identified as one of KU's priorities. The *Study Field Committee* (hereinafter: SFC), consisting of academic representatives from the various study fields and student representatives, works with KU's *Study Quality Commission* (hereinafter: SQC) and with the Vice-Rector of Studies and Office of Studies, also with other university administration sections and with the Students Union. As evidenced in the SER (no. 104-105) and during the site visit, the IQE for each study field occurs every three years and considers the recommendations of external evaluations. Student representatives and stakeholders are members of the self-evaluation group. IQE includes the use of students' surveys and the data received are analysed both at Faculty and University levels. In between the IQE of study fields monitoring of quality assurance takes place across three levels. At the University level, KU Senate and the Rector's Office monitor the content and mode of study programmes, study procedures, admission requirements and processes, and student numbers. At the Faculty level the *Faculty Council* (hereinafter: FC) with the Dean's Office is responsible for approving amendments to existing study programmes, consideration of new study programmes, renewal of existing study programmes and other issues related to quality assurance of studies. Students and stakeholders are able to participate on this level of quality assurance. The third level of IQA for the *Spiritual Counselling and Assistance* programme is carried out by the Centre through a programme management process, which is the responsibility of the Centre's Head and is conducted in collaboration with the academic staff. The process deals with course planning, organization, monitoring, including data gathering from its students and stakeholders, and improvement. The Centre's study management process is assessed by the SFC, which reports on the quality assurance of the programme to the Faculty Council and relevant University central committees.

(2) Expert judgement/indicator analysis

The daily internal quality assurance of the *Spiritual Counselling and Assistance* programme carried out within the Centre appears to be well managed and implemented, with input from academic staff teaching on the programme, students and stakeholders. The Centre's programme management process of its quality assurance reflects the comprehensive character of the faculty and central University systems and processes. However, the Panel did

not find evidence either in the SER or the site visit about how quality assurance took place in marking of assignments through samples of assignments being moderated within a course and between courses within a subject area. Also, the Programme would benefit from clarifying its marking grade descriptors and use of them, as well as ensuring that students are fully informed of these and how these are used in marking assignments.

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

(1) Factual situation

As evidenced in the SER (p. 106-107) a strategy and processes are in place to enable involvement of students and stakeholders in the internal quality assurance of the *Spiritual Counselling and Assistance* study programme. Within the Centre students provide end of course evaluation feedback which are fed into the Centre's quality assurance management process. Student representatives are involved in Faculty level quality assurance responsibilities through involvement with the work of the Faculty Council and Dean's Office. Stakeholders are also involved in the same way at Faculty level. Stakeholders are involved in organising and assessing student practice during and after internships with academic staff and the Faculty practice supervisor. As a result of student and stakeholder input adjustments are made to ensure quality of the professional practice aspect of the programme. In accordance with KU's *Description of the KU Study Feedback Organization Procedures* (2019), a standardized assessment of the programme takes place at the end of each semester using a questionnaire and individual student interviews with students. After each study practice and at the end of the internship students have the opportunity to discuss their experience. Representatives of the KU Student Union, also independently monitor the study experience and assessments during each semester.

(2) Expert judgement/indicator

From the site visit it was clear that stakeholders and students consider that their feedback on internships and other related aspects of the programme were considered by the Programme Management Team.

There is evidence that students and stakeholders have formal mechanisms available to feed into IQA and that Programme Management Teams, the FC and the SFU do consider their comments and suggestions.

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

(1) Factual situation

As evidenced in the SER (p. 108) and from the site visit there are various tools and mechanisms used providing information to staff, students, stakeholders and the public about the programme. The KU website provides information on programme content and aims of the programme, where it takes place, admission requirements and procedure, the qualification awarded, scientific and artistic activities, self-evaluation results, evaluation from students, graduates and stakeholders, possible career progression of graduates and career indicators, and general regulations for study at MA level. Further information about the programme is provided on the Centre's Facebook page. In addition, staff, students and stakeholders are kept up-to-date about improvements, changes and development of the programme through internal electronic means and through their representation on groups and committees for the ongoing monitoring of the programme at Faculty level and within the Centre as evidenced in

SER (p. 104-105). As evidenced in the SER (p. 107) the collection and use of student and stakeholder evaluations of courses and the programme takes place on a systematic basis at the end of each semester and are considered at Faculty and Centre level to assess the programme's quality and, where necessary, make changes to improve and enhance studies. For students this requires completing a questionnaire and having individual interviews with a member of the academic staff. Stakeholders providing internships have ongoing and end of semester evaluation discussions with the academic staff.

(2) Expert judgement/indicator analysis

During the site visit students expressed a good level of satisfaction about the information provided about the various aspects of the programme and studies and their participation in the internal evaluation process each semester.

All information required is provided through the KU website and the Centre's Facebook page, in addition to the internal University mechanisms available to staff and students, that provide information about ongoing changes and development to courses and the programme. In general, the information provided on the KU website could be made more effective by distinguishing between information for the public and that for students. Having more information about what spiritual counselling is, the role of the spiritual counsellor would further contribute to the understanding of potential incoming students and widen public understanding.

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

(1) Factual situation

From the SER (p. 109) evaluation of students' opinion about the quality of their studies is managed and analysed internally, on an annual basis by the Study Field Committee (hereinafter: SFC). The Panel did not find evidence either in the SER or during the site visit that, besides the results of the student evaluation survey done by KU's Student Union, other formal evaluation data are used in the annual SFC evaluation. SER (p. 107) refers to students having to complete end of semester questionnaires about the quality of courses and have individual interviews with academic staff to discuss their evaluation, but this is not referred to as forming part of the data analysed by the SFC in the annual evaluation. The app National Student Survey (NSA) managed by SKVC survey is not currently used as part of this annual evaluation. According to SER (p. 109) the Centre has annual interviews with academic staff in religion and psychology to gather feedback on issues mentioned by students.

(2) Expert judgement/indicator analysis

The Panel did not find evidence either in the SER or the site visit how student evaluation collected by the faculty and The John Paul II Centre for Christian Studies is fed through to the SFC.

Strengths and weaknesses of this evaluation area:

(1) Strengths:

- 1. IQA and ongoing QA monitoring of the programme is robust.*
- 2. Information about the programme available is clear, accessible and appropriate for purpose.*

3. *Students and Stakeholders are provided with formal and informal means to be provided feedback evaluating courses at the end of each semester, and a structure and process exists through which their evaluation is considered at Faculty and Centre levels.*

(2) Weaknesses:

1. *As regards ongoing quality assurance the Panel did not find evidence either in the SER or during the site visit that moderation of assignment marks takes place within a course or between courses running in the same semester within a subject area.*
2. *The use of marking grade descriptors in assignment marking and how students are informed and understand how these are used is not clear.*
3. *The lack of information about what spiritual counselling and its importance in society and the role of the spiritual counsellor may result in reduced numbers of applicants applying for the programme.*
4. *Other than the end of academic year KU Students Union Evaluation of Studies Survey there is no formal survey carried out by Faculty or Central University. The omission of an institutional end of year survey does not provide the opportunity for students to evaluate the quality of their studies across the year in terms of the overall programme.*
5. *Short mid-semester evaluation on courses with students seems not to happen. This is an important tool to use because some issues raised by students may be able to be addressed before the end of the course (e.g. insufficient access to sources; inappropriate teaching space).*
6. *Short mid-semester evaluation on courses with students seems not to happen. This is an important tool to use because some issues raised by students may be able to be addressed before the end of the course (e.g. insufficient access to sources; inappropriate teaching space).*

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. The expert panel deems that the <i>spiritual</i> aspect of the programme needs to be clarified and further developed. 2. The expert panel recommends that the research questions and grading of the theses be brought in line with the interdisciplinary character of the study programme and graded accordingly 3. The expert panel recommends that the study programme pays more attention to non-Christian spirituality.
Links between science (art) and studies	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. The expert panel recommends strengthening a structural cooperation between the researchers of the Centre and those of the Department of Psychology. 2. The expert panel strongly recommends strengthening interdisciplinary research in spiritual counselling.
Student admission and support	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. The expert panel recommends stimulating students to participate in Erasmus exchange programmes. 2. The expert panel deems that the admission criteria need to be formalized and upgraded.
Teaching and learning, student performance and graduate employment	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. The expert panel deems it necessary to develop professional expertise in spiritual counselling needs and to provide more focused professional training and supervision of the internships in that area. 2. The expert panel recommends the use of moderation for samples of assignments within a course and between courses within the same semester.
Teaching staff	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. The expert panel recommends using academic mobility more often. 2. The expert panel recommends a stronger relation between the research field and teaching matter, i.e. spiritual counselling.
Learning facilities and resources	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. The expert panel deems it necessary to supplement the existing dominance of traditional / classical theological sources with more recent publications. 2. The expert panel recommends addressing the lack of access to international journals particularly in religious studies.
Study quality management and public information	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. The expert panel recommends clarifying how marking grade descriptors in assignment marking and how students are informed and understand how these are used. 2. The expert panel deems that lack of information about what spiritual counselling is, its importance in society and the role of the spiritual counsellor urgently needs to be addressed. 3. The expert panel recommends introducing, besides the end of

	<p>academic year KU Students Union Evaluation of Studies Survey, a formal survey carried out by Faculty or Central University.</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none">4. The expert panel recommends introducing short mid-semester evaluation on courses with students.5. The expert panel recommends introducing short mid-semester evaluations.
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*If the study field is going to be given negative evaluation (non-accreditation) instead of RECOMMENDATIONS main **arguments for negative evaluation** (non-accreditation) must be provided together with a **list of “must do” actions** in order to assure that students admitted before study field’s non-accreditation will gain knowledge and skills at least on minimum level.

V. SUMMARY

The following is a summary of the findings of the expert panel based on the Self-Evaluation Reports (SER) and the interviews with the Klaipeda University administration (senior management and faculty administration staff), staff responsible for the preparation of the SER, teaching staff and stakeholders (students, alumni, employers, social partners). The expert panel gives a positive evaluation to the implementation of the study field Religious Studies (Second Cycle) at Klaipeda University with all areas of evaluation assessed as satisfactory or good.

The expert panel found that the study programme *Spiritual Counselling and Assistance* (state code - 6211NX054) (hereinafter – study programme) is unique and relevant in Lithuanian society. It responds to a need expressed by the Lithuanian civil authorities and the Catholic church. The study programme prepares students to work in various institutional settings (hospitals and health care institutions, nursing homes for elderly, psychological support centres, caritative organizations, diocesan family centres, general education institutions, academic pastoral care, youth organizations, addiction treatment facilities, etc.) through its interdisciplinary approach, integrating psychology and religious studies, as well as through its combination of theoretical knowledge and practical skills. The teaching staff is competent and the students are very motivated. The fact that this study programme really fulfils a need in Lithuanian society is substantiated by the fact that almost all graduates work in the field of their study, and that the employers are very satisfied with the quality of their work.

There is a good cooperation among the researchers of the John Paul Centre for Christian Studies, which operates this study programme. This is facilitated by the decision to integrate this Centre into the Faculty of Social Sciences and Humanities. The link of the study programme with ongoing research is ensured by the fact that the teaching staff publishes regularly about matters that is related to key questions of the study programme, and that the best Master's theses of the students are published in a scientific journal, edited by the Centre.

The students are very committed to this programme and the alumni are very happy with the education it gave them. The study programme succeeds in making the students feel at home. Particular strengths of this study programme as far as the students and the alumni are concerned are the internships, the quality of the teaching and learning processes, which enable students to be successful in their academic achievement, the support of students with special needs, the 24/7 availability of psychological and spiritual support, and the possibility for (financially) vulnerable students to apply for financial support from Catholic institutions. The teaching staff appreciates that the staff/student ratio makes an individualised teaching approach possible, and that there is a centralised system of in-service training to improve teaching skills.

As to the learning facilities and resources, students as well as teaching staff appreciates the University's substantial financial investment in library resources, IT facilities and equipment, and the adaptation of university buildings and services to students with disabilities and special needs. Students also appreciate the innovation and flexibility of the library and IT staff to adapt their provision and services regarding their needs.

Regarding the study quality management and the supply of information the students appreciate the robustness of the Internal Quality Assurance and its ongoing monitoring, and the clarity, accessibility and appropriateness of the information about the study programme. Students and stakeholders are also provided with formal and informal means to give feedback on courses at the end of each semester, and their evaluations are taken into account at the level of the Faculty and the Centre.

Despite all these important strengths of the study programme there are also some important weaknesses that urgently need to be addressed by the programme management, as well as a number of less dramatic weaknesses, of which the expert panel recommends the programme management to improve them.

The most important weakness of the study programme is that its *spiritual* aspect is underdeveloped, resulting in unclarity among the graduates regarding their specific competence in comparison with psychological counselling and psychotherapy. A second important weakness that needs to be addressed is the (relative) lack of professional expertise in spiritual counselling. This situation results, among others, in the fact that the professional training and supervision of the internships is too general; it should focus more on acquiring a specific competence in spiritual counselling. Another weakness that needs to be addressed is the fact that the research questions of most theses are not consistent with the interdisciplinary (theological and psychological) character of the programme. A final weakness that needs to be addressed is the absence of formal admission criteria (except a university BA-degree), which has a negative impact on the students without prior knowledge in theology and/or psychology, and is inconsistent with the admission requirements of some courses of the programme.

The expert panel also noted a number of less dramatic weaknesses and recommends the study programme management to consider them carefully. The focus of the programme is rather unilaterally on Christian religion and spirituality. Taking into account the growing presence of non-Christian religions in Lithuania, the study programme is recommended to pay more attention to non-Christian spirituality. The expert panel noted that there is no structural cooperation between the researchers of the Centre and those of the Department of Psychology. This results, among others, in the fact that there is very little interdisciplinary research in spiritual counselling. Because the focus of the study programme is on spiritual counselling, the programme would benefit substantially from an enhanced collaboration between the teachers/researchers in these two study fields. Furthermore, neither the students, nor the teaching staff make use of the opportunities of academic mobility and Erasmus exchange programmes. Making use of these opportunities would substantially enhance the teaching and learning experiences of those involved in this programme. As to the grading of the exams, the study programme could benefit from the use of the moderation of samples of assignments within a course and between courses within the programme that are delivered within the same semester. In the same context, the expert panel recommends that the use of marking grade descriptors in assignment marking and the information of the students about these matters be improved. There is also room for improvement as regards the feedback by the students. Other than the end of academic year KU Students Union Evaluation of Studies Survey there is no formal survey carried out by Faculty or Central University. The omission of an institutional end of year survey does not provide the opportunity for students to evaluate the quality of their studies across the year in terms of the overall programme.

As to the learning facilities and resources, the expert panel recommends an updating of the library resources in spiritual counselling, because, as of now, traditional/classical theological resources are rather dominant. In the same field, the expert panel also noted a lack of access to international journals, particularly in religious studies.

Expert panel signature:

Prof. dr. Peter Jonkers (panel chairperson)