SKVC

CENTRE FOR QUALITY ASSESSMENT IN HIGHER EDUCATION

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EVALUATION REPORT

STUDY FIELD of Management

at SMK Aukštoji mokykla

Expert panel:

1. **Prof. Dr. Douglas Gilbert (panel chairperson),** *academic member;*

2. **Prof. Dr. Joanna Paliszkiewicz,** *academic member;*

3. **Prof. Dr. Inga Lapiņa,** *academic member;*

4. **Ms Lina Jankauskienė,** *representative of social partners;*

5. **Mr Eren Çanga,** *students' representative.*

Evaluation coordinator – *Ms Austėja Pliupelytė*

Report language – English

Vilnius
2023

Study Field Data

Title of the study programme	*Catering and Hotel Business Management*	*Fashion and Style Management*
State code	6531LX054	6531LX053
Type of studies	Professional Bachelor College Studies	Professional Bachelor College Studies
Cycle of studies	First	First
Mode of study and duration (in years)	Full-time (3 years) Part-time (4 years)	Full-time (3 years) Part-time (4 years)
Credit volume	180	180
Qualification degree and (or) professional qualification	Professional Bachelor in Business Management	Professional Bachelor in Business Management
Language of instruction	Lithuanian	Lithuanian
Minimum education required	Secondary education	Secondary education
Registration date of the study programme	2015 07 30	2015 07 02

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I. INTRODUCTION

1.1. BACKGROUND OF THE EVALUATION PROCESS

The evaluations of study fields in Lithuanian Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) are based on the Procedure for the External Evaluation and Accreditation of Studies, Evaluation Areas and Indicators, approved by the Minister of Education, Science and Sport on 17 July 2019, Order No. V-835, and are carried out according to the procedure outlined in the Methodology of External Evaluation of Study Fields approved by the Director of the Centre for Quality Assessment in Higher Education (hereafter – SKVC) on 31 December 2019, Order No. V-149.

The evaluation is intended to help higher education institutions 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 (SER) prepared by HEI; 2) site visit of the expert panel to the HEI; 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 the 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 is evaluated as satisfactory (2 points).

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

1.2. EXPERT PANEL

The expert panel was assigned according to the Experts Selection Procedure as approved by the Director of SKVC on 31 December 2019, Order No. V-149. The site visit to the HEI was conducted by the expert panel on 22 May 2023

1. Prof. Dr. Douglas Gilbert (USA), panel chair - academic member, CEO at Lone Tree Academics LLC, Visiting (Fulbright) Professor in Entrepreneurship at Vilnius University.
2. Prof. Dr. Joanna Paliszkiewicz, (Poland), panel member - academic member, Professor at the Warsaw University of Life Sciences, Visiting professor at ISM University of Management and Economics.
3. Prof. Dr. Inga Lapiņa (Latvia), panel member - academic member, Professor and Vice Dean for Academic Affairs at Riga Technical University, Faculty of Engineering Economics and Management.
4. Ms Lina Jankauskienė (Lithuania), panel member - representative of social partners, President of Lithuanian Quality Management and Innovation Association, management lecturer and consultant LinaLEAN Ltd.
5. Mr Eren Çanga (Türkiye), panel member - students' representative, fourth-year student of study programme Business Administration at Hacettepe University, member of ESU Quality Assurance Student Experts Pool.

1.3. GENERAL INFORMATION

The documentation submitted by the HEI follows the outline recommended by SKVC. Along with the SER and annexes, the HEI provided the following additional documents before, during and/or after the site visit:

No.	Name of document
1.	Examples of final theses
2.	Presentations and videos of learning facilities at Kaunas and Klaipėda premises

1.4. BACKGROUND OF MANAGEMENT FIELD STUDIES AT SMK AUKŠTOJI MOKYKLA

SMK University of Applied Social Sciences (SMK) is a non-governmental higher education institution in operation since 1994. The SMK administrative location is located in Klaipėda. The insittution also has locations in Vilnius and in Kaunas. Two study programmes were submitted for review within the field of Management Studies: Catering and Hotel Business Management (CHBM) - professional bachelor's - (initially accredited by SKVC in 2014) and Fashion and Style Management (FSM) - professional bachelor's - (initially accredited by SKVC in 2015).

The submitted programmes in the Management Studies area comprise two of a total of 18 degree programmes offered by the institution. Eight programmes are offered in English and 10 in Lithuanian. Study programmes in the Business field, including International Finances and Investment Management (English), Marketing and Advertising (both English and Lithuanian), International Business (English), Transport and Logistics Business (Lithuanian), and International Trade and Customs Logistics (Lithuanian), were evaluated in the years 2021-2022 and received full 7-year accreditation.

The institution has a total enrolment of 4,099 full-time students with 3,944 from Lithuania and 155 foreign students. Students are served by 241 faculty, of whom 54 are doctorally qualified. and 61 administrative personnel.

The expert review team visited the facilities in Vilnius. In addition, it received a virtual tour of the facilities in Kaunas and Klaipėda.

II. GENERAL ASSESSMENT

The *first cycle* of *Management* study field at SMK Aukštoji mokykla is given a **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	3
2.	Links between science (art) and studies	3
3.	Student admission and support	4
4.	Teaching and learning, student performance and graduate employment	4
5.	Teaching staff	4
6.	Learning facilities and resources	5
7.	Study quality management and public information	3
	Total:	26

*1 (unsatisfactory) - the area does not meet the minimum requirements, there are fundamental shortcomings that prevent the implementation of the field studies.

2 (satisfactory) - the area meets the minimum requirements, and there are fundamental shortcomings that need to be eliminated.

3 (good) - the area is being developed systematically, without any fundamental shortcomings.

4 (very good) - the area is evaluated very well in the national context and internationally, without any shortcomings;

5 (excellent) - the area is evaluated exceptionally well in the national context and internationally.

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
Two study programmes in the field of Management studies were submitted for review: Catering and Hotel Business Management (CHBM) (first time accredited in 2014) and Fashion and Style Management (FSM) (first time accredited in 2015). Both are carried out in Vilnius and in Kaunas SMK branches.

The objectives and outcomes of the FSM and the CHBM study programmes are based on the State Progress Strategy Lithuania 2030, National Progress Plan 2021–2030, Description of the Inclusive Labour Market Development Programme of the Ministry of Social Security and Labour 2021–2030 and European Commission Communication New Industrial Strategy for Europe and EU Strategy for Sustainable and Circular Textiles, market analysis, discussions and surveys with social partners, research of other local and international high education institutions and their programmes and by other means and documents.

The programmes in the Management study field are well-aligned with the contemporary needs of the growing markets (in Lithuania and Europe) (as stated by the employers and social partners) and also with the needs of future employees from the perspective of student employability.

The Management field studies reflect and align with Lithuania's economy and societal needs in the following aspects:
- Niche programmes (in Lithuania) and respectively niche programmes in Europe are both representative of relevant economic sectors;
- Engagement and support from social partners demonstrate strong support from the labour market;
- Learning outcomes are based on industry competencies reflecting the needs of key stakeholders including social partners, current students and alumni.
- Outcome measures including employability rates--80% of CHBM SP students and 60% of FSM SP graduates--and alumni satisfaction rates demonstrate alignment with labour market needs.

(2) Expert judgement
    Based on the SER, site visit and consultations it has been demonstrated that the aims and most outcomes of CHBM SP (SER, p. 9) and FSM SP (SER, p. 10) are aligned with needs from the market and society, except for the following areas:
    ● CHBM SP outcome No. 3 provides the outcome of, "Is able to do independent research, using qualitative and quantitative research methods, to collect, structure, analyse and use information relevant to professional activity, predicting the changes in catering and hotel business". FSM SP outcome No. 3 provides the outcome of, "Is able to carry out independent applied empirical research, the apply quantitative and qualitative research methods aiming to assess and predict changes in fashion and style business, taking into account a constantly changing business environment". For example, consultations with students revealed their limited knowledge of databases available for their research activities. Also, this was recognised by the analysis of final works and their research level.
    ● CHBM SP outcome No. 9 provides the outcome of, "Is able to work individually and in a team, to communicate and cooperate in Lithuanian and <u>foreign languages</u> with the specialists of the same and other areas, with customers, business partners <u>in a multicultural environment</u>, taking responsibility for the quality and results of activity". FSM SP outcome No. 9, provides the outcome of, "Is able to work individually and in a team, to communicate and cooperate in the Lithuanian <u>and foreign languages</u> with specialists in the same and other areas, customers, business partners <u>in a multicultural environment,</u> taking responsibility for activity quality and results". This criterion was confirmed and recognised as an improvement priority during the consultations with students. Also, indicators for international activities demonstrate the level of the current state (for example, the number of students who participated in Erasmus+).

The Expert Panel finds that, in general, the aims and outcomes of the field and cycle study programmes conform to the requirements to meet the needs of society and the labour market. Two areas have been identified as opportunities for improvement: 1) strengthening the applied research activities by the institution, students, and faculty and 2) enhancing and increasing participation in multicultural environments through student exchange programmes.

Currently, study programmes in the study field are based on the benchmark and analysis of local (Lithuanian) competitors from other HEIs and market needs. However, having in mind SMK's international ambitions, it is highly recommended to investigate and benchmark more European and global study programmes for further excellence.

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 SMK strategy 2030, SMK mission contains the following aims:

1) "to reveal and empower human potential for a consistent personality development as well as a meaningful and value-creating professional activity;
2) "to develop activities <u>based on scientific knowledge</u> and innovation in order to contribute to public welfare and sustainable economic growth;
3) "Create an open and inclusive environment that promotes positive change, collective meaning making and holistic co-evolution".[1]

(2) Expert judgement
The aims and outcomes of the SPs in the management study field align with and support mission statements 1 and 3 (and their fulfilment areas as described per SMK strategy 2030), while the 2nd mission statement represents an area for improvement.

> "The second stage of the mission is the *creation of scientific knowledge and its transformation innovations to promote economic and social progress.* By implementing this part of the mission, SMK takes an active role in creating a knowledge network, promoting academic entrepreneurship, creating new ones based on scientific knowledge products and constructing a harmonious ecosystem of business and science".

Evidence is lacking both in the SER and from the site visit that the creation of scientific knowledge is already ensured enough in the Management study field and through the study process or aims and outcomes of the study process. Research competencies and activities could be improved both for the students' final works and the teacher's research activity. Also, analysis of the final works and review of the project list the HEI has recently participated in did not prove that significant scientific knowledge and/or innovations have been created. Meanwhile, the experts would also like to note that the novelty of students' final works and amount of projects HEI has participated in show strong efforts towards this mission.

Through the exceptional diversity of social partners and the ways they are engaged in the study process, there is strong evidence to suggest that programmes in the study field have an impact on the respective CHBM and FSM markets in Lithuania (which are still rather new - mostly up to 35 years old, unstandardised and created and expanded to large extent by the current social partners), covering mission statement 3 (and its fulfilment area as described per SMK strategy2030).

The processes of strategic planning (and study quality management in general) are consistent with and support areas of improvements identified in the SMK Strategic Plan 2021-2025[2]. Its SWOT analysis identifies "Limited research results and international networking experience", "insufficient commercialisation of research results" and alike as the weaknesses (and

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[1] SMK long term strategy 2030, published on www.smk.lt
https://smk.lt/file/manual/Dokumentai/SMK%20Dokumetai/SMK%20Ilgalaik%C4%97%20strategija%202020
30.pdf
[2] SMK Strategic plan 2021-2025, page 13
https://smk.lt/file/manual/Dokumentai/SMK%20Dokumetai/SMK%20Strateginis%20veiklos%20planas%2
02021-2025.pdf

respectively as the opportunities), and also 2 out of 6 strategic priorities (and respective activities) for the period are "To strengthen research activities" and "Expand international activities".

In summary, SMK's strategic activities are aligned with the field of study aims and outcomes and areas of improvement are recognised and acknowledged. The expert panel recommends additional focus on increasing and enhancing research and scientific activities and international mobility. SMK's strategy could also be improved from strategic action plans aligning with the main KPIs, such as student admission rates, dropout rates, student satisfaction rates, alumni employment rates etc.

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

(1) Factual situation
The duration of CHBM SP and FSM SP is 3 years in full-time study mode and 4 years in part-time studies. At least 120 ECTS credits are required for the achievement of the learning outcomes of the field, the total volume of foreseen internships is at least 30 credits and at least 9 credits are given for the final thesis, and there are up to 180 credits for the overall volume of the programmes (SER, p. 11-12).

Table No. 1. The compliance of study programmes to general requirements for first cycle study programmes of College level (professional bachelor).

Criteria	General legal requirements	In the Programmes of the Field
Scope of the programme in ECTS	180, 210 or 240 ECTS	180 ECTS
ECTS for the study field	No less than 120 ECTS	152 ECTS
ECTS for studies specified by College or optional studies	No more than 120 ECTS	152 ECTS
ECTS for internship	No less than 30 ECTS	33 ECTS
ECTS for final thesis (project)	No less than 9 ECTS	9 ECTS
Practical training and other practice placements	No less than one-third of the programme	33 ECTS
Contact hours	No less than 20 % of learning	More than 20%

(2) Expert judgement
The programmes are in compliance with the relevant Lithuanian legislation and relevant international requirements for education policy.

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

In the SER and during the interviews of faculty,, several teaching/learning methods were identified as actively used in the programmes: discussions, debates, project activity, case study, proof-based learning, reasoning, self-assessment, assessment of team members, role plays, modelling, situation analysis, problem-solving, experiential experimental teaching and applied learning (for example, working with industry software, forms etc.), Chat GPT etc. There was a noted consistency of approach to teaching and learning among the various faculty members. Instances of sharing know-how and best-practice were evident.

Diverse assessment methods are in use, such as tests (including computer testing), exams (including open books), surveys, interim written texts, presentation of projects (verbal, written), solving of practical situations and filling in real-world documents (for hygiene permissions, for accountancy etc.). As with the methods of teaching and learning, there was consistency of approach and use by various faculty members.

During the site visit, it was observed that student use of research resources such as online databases was not consistent. It appeared that there are gaps in the familiarisation of students with the use of these resources and the development of complementary learning activities and assessments.

The digitalisation of aspects of the teaching and learning tools, also in the assessment, is used thoroughly and in an advanced manner within the organisation (hybrid learning, broadcasting live events, ensuring cooperation between different sites etc.). These methods are compatible with the aims and learning outcomes of the study programmes.

(2) Expert judgement

The coherence of the field study programmes' aims and intended learning outcomes with the learning outcomes of the programme subjects and/or modules is ensured (the institution provides Anex no. 4 to the SER, where those interfaces are covered). Based on these, experts have reason to state that study programmes and teaching, learning and assessment methods are compatible and relevant to the requirements of the cycle and the study field and the needs of the students.

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

(1) Factual situation

The evaluated study programmes have a clear and consistent structure. In the first year, students are introduced to the general theories and principles and, to current knowledge of economics, management, marketing and other social sciences. In the following years, students are directed to apply the knowledge and solve complex business tasks, followed with

practices on the sites of social partners and internships, including interdisciplinary projects. Learning outcomes are differentiated based on Bloom's Taxonomy of cognitive learning. The student workload is consistent. Students are offered elective courses.

(2) Expert judgement
The field of study evaluated programmes enable SMK graduates to achieve the planned learning outcomes, competencies and knowledge, and consistency of field study programmes content and outcomes are ensured. It may be helpful, given the social interaction dimensions of the submitted programmes, to consider broadening assessment to include both cognitive and affective learning outcomes. Bloom's cognitive as well affective taxonomies may be of assistance in framing these learning outcomes.

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
The SER outlines options for the students to personalise their own study experience. Students can:
- Choose up to 12 credits for optional course units for interdisciplinary studies and for developing general competencies. The list of courses is renewed yearly, including the requests of the students themselves;
- Choose the course units in the field studies from the given alternatives (out of 8 course units, 15 credits);
- Choose the topic of the final thesis which comprises 9 credits;
- Choose to participate in the Erasmus study exchange.

(2) Expert judgement
The possibilities for personalisation of the study experience, in principle, are rather substantial as students have the possibility to choose a specialisation, study foreign languages, choice of electives, etc. Student mobility presents a limitation to the personalisation because only a small number of students participate in the Erasmus exchange.

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

(1) Factual situation
The expert panel received the list of 85 titles of the final theses for the period 2019-2022 (from both of the programmes in the field). Of those, 24 final theses were requested by the social partners. The titles are consistent with the requirements of the study programmes. Also, the final theses topics are especially innovative, covering contemporary topics in Lithuania, as well as reflecting the orientation of the industry and inclusion of social partners of the SMK.

The process used for the preparation of a final thesis is thorough and inclusive, supporting students in the preparation and defence processes. The process also includes social partners to a very high extent who are suggesting final thesis topics, ordering the research, and acting as data sources and research subjects. Social partners comprise 50%+ of the defence committee members. Detailed requirements for final theses and their assessment are defined in the Methodological Instructions that can be accessed by students in the SMK e-learning system.

(2) Expert judgement
The expert panel finds that the final theses are in compliance with the field and cycle requirements.

Strengths and weaknesses of this evaluation area:

(1) Strengths:
1. SMK has demonstrated that its strategy and associated action plans are in alignment. Areas of improvement, recognised by the experts, are identified in the strategy and associated activities. The aims and outcomes of the programmes of the study field are aligned with organisational strategy.

(2) Weaknesses:
1. Level and quality of student research efforts. Students would benefit from a more consistent orientation to and use of online databases and research resources. There are also opportunities to generate additional research activities from events and conferences. Student final theses could be soundly grounded in relevant conceptual and theoretical models to the study areas.
2. Ensuring international mobility for the student exchange programmes. It was observed from both the SER and the site visit that students may identify possibilities to learn foreign languages but lack information about and support for participation in exchange programmes.
3. Pairing strategy with strategic action programmes. The link between the highly developed strategies and action was not evident in all cases. It may be helpful to implement a more formalised strategic action plan formulation and deployment process. Such a process will assist with the measurement of progress towards and achievement of identified KPIs.
4. Broadening the scope of benchmarked institutions. Currently, programmes in the study field are benchmarked and analysed based on local (Lithuanian) competitor HEIs and local market needs. Given SMK's international ambitions and the international nature of the markets served, it may be helpful to investigate and benchmark HEI programmes from a more global perspective.

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[3]

At the strategic level, research-based activities are carefully organised and scheduled for a period of five years, with specific details outlined in yearly SMK plans. Research directions/topics realised by the staff include: digital communication ecosystem; health technologies and management; management of cultural and creative industries; sustainable growth development and technologies; knowledge management and educational technologies.

Research Activity Groups are established based on various fields of applied research. Each field is led by a distinguished scientist who brings together a team of researchers and lecturers interested in engaging in applied research activities. This arrangement ensures a well-defined structure for scientific advancement and fosters a culture of active involvement in such activities. SMK takes the initiative to carry out national and international projects and organise training programmes, business events, and conferences that align with the field of Business and Public Management studies. In the analysed period, a total of 41 projects in the field of Management were defined and executed. Among these projects, there were 4 research and development (R&D) initiatives, 24 projects at the national level, 9 projects on an international scale, and 4 projects with collaborative partnership rights.

Aside from its higher education programmes, SMK actively creates diverse learning opportunities for various target groups, including educators, young individuals, business professionals, public sector representatives, and society as a whole. Each year, SMK organises thematic conferences, training sessions, and seminars, and facilitates the sharing of exemplary practices, along with other forms of professional development initiatives. These efforts aim to cater to the unique needs of different individuals and sectors within society. Throughout the examined period, a total of 41 conferences and forums centred around Management field studies were meticulously arranged, attracting substantial participation of 127,320 individuals. These gatherings covered a diverse range of topics, including but not limited to human resource management, self-branding, digitalisation, artificial intelligence, global fashion trends, educational advancements in Lithuania, and envisioning the creators of the future. Teachers undertake the task of preparing scientific publications as a means to enhance their research skills and professional expertise. The numbers of publications are as follows: 2018 – 30; 2019 – 31; 2020 – 30; 2021 – 51; 2022(half of the year) – 15.

(2) Expert judgement

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[3] Based on the Self Report pages 22-24.

Based on the information available in the SER, it is evident that the key personnel actively participate in projects and different activities. However, the level of involvement of teachers in research activities appears to be inconsistent. It is important to note that the overall rate of paper publication is relatively low, both in terms of the total number of publications and the number of publications per person per year. In order to meet the expectations of this type of institution, it is important to ensure active participation and presentation of research findings at prestigious international scientific events, conferences, and workshops, organised by prominent organisations in the field of management. Additionally, publishing papers in esteemed journals, preferably through collaborations with authors from both local and foreign institutions, is deemed essential. While the research quality has been deemed satisfactory by the panel, there is a concern regarding its long-term sustainability, which necessitates the recruitment of additional staff and expanding the research scope within the field. Given the likely applied nature of the research activities, it may be helpful to structure those efforts based on an appropriate model such as the Boyer Model of Scholarship.

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

(1) Factual situation[4]
The programme content reflects current science, art, and technology achievements throughout. Evidence of this was seen in the actual content of course units, training and seminars organised by social partners; practical tasks; project tasks; doing applied research; final theses; using the subscribed databases and the latest scientific literature; participating in outgoing/incoming lectures; using the latest information resources and computer programmes; participation of the SMK in the national and international associations.

SMK benefits from a significant number of social partners and external stakeholders and enjoys stable and cooperative relationships with them. These partnerships play a vital role in ensuring the high-quality implementation of study programmes by providing internship opportunities in reputable and international companies. These companies offer appropriate environments for students to develop and practice career-relevant skills. Collaboration with social partners and external stakeholders extends beyond internships and includes the joint organisation of events, seminars, and conferences, facilitating outgoing and incoming lectures, as well as the sharing of valuable experiences and innovative practices in the field of management.

(2) Expert judgement
During the site visit, the teaching staff affirmed their commitment to engaging students in the most recent research findings through various assignments, such as case studies, research projects, and collaborative endeavours. This approach provides students with valuable opportunities to acquaint themselves with the latest developments in the field. During the site visit, it was confirmed that a majority of the lecturers at SMK incorporate real cases that

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[4] Based on the Self Report pages 24-26.

reflect current market issues or their own research findings as examples in their teaching. Additionally, collaboration with external partners contributes to further advancements in this area. The expert committee acknowledges and appreciates the efforts made by SMK to integrate research results into teaching activities.

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[5]
SMK actively promotes and encourages scientific activities among its students. Students are engaged in scientific activities through various means, including: incorporating elements of scientific research when studying the course unit "Social Research Methodology" and applying research principles in other course units; conducting independent exploratory works and final theses; participating in scientific conferences to present their research findings; writing and publishing scientific articles; taking part in national and international events and projects that foster entrepreneurship; implementing business commissioned projects; engaging in the study of scientific literature and articles; completing practical tasks. These opportunities empower students to actively contribute to the scientific community and enhance their research skills and knowledge.

(2) Expert judgement
During the site visit, it was confirmed that students have the opportunity to actively participate in different activities, among them also the activities related to cooperation with social partners.

Strengths and weaknesses of this evaluation area:

(1) Strengths:
1. Research groups and activities are developed with clear performance indicators as part of the annual activity planning.
2. Faculty members affirmed their commitment to engage students in the most recent research areas through various assignments, such as real case studies, which reflect current market issues.
3. SMK takes an active role in the participation of national and international associations thereby ensuring that the study programmes are influenced by current developments and trends.

(2) Weaknesses:
1. The overall rate of paper publication by faculty is relatively low, both in terms of the total number of publications and the number of publications per person per year.

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[5] Based on the Self Report pages 26-28.

2. The research efforts may benefit from the application and use of a research model and policy suitable for applied research. Approaches such as Boyer's Model of Scholarship may be helpful to bridge the gap between theory and practice.

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 institution adheres to the rules set forth by Lithuania's Ministry of Education, Science and Sports regarding admission standards and procedures. It provides students with both transparency and accuracy by making the details of the admission requirements and a competitive score structure available in advance. SMK uses a variety of evaluation procedures, such as the results of state maturity exams and coursework evaluations mixed with motivational interviews, to find qualified candidates for its managerial degree programmes. Participation in employment fairs or study exhibition events, coupled with educational resources on the institution's website or publications, makes the requirements easily accessible.

(2) Expert judgement
SMK places an emphasis on transparency and equity in the student selection and admissions process. A thorough evaluation of candidates is made possible through the thoughtful application of state maturity exams, course unit assessments, and motivational interviews. SMK also provides comprehensive information on admission requirements and procedures, which helps to raise awareness and makes it easier to access.

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
SMK has devised a protocol to verify international credentials, partial coursework completion, and prior non-formal or informal education in accordance with Lithuanian Ministry standards. However, neither in the SER nor during the site visit, any explicit information was provided on how this strategy is applied.

(2) Expert judgement
Limited information was available regarding the procedure of recognition of foreign qualifications, partial studies, and prior non-formal and informal learning. However, no challenges were identified.

3.3.3. Evaluation of conditions for ensuring academic mobility of students

(1) Factual situation
SMK students have valuable opportunities to explore abroad through the Erasmus programme and activities such as the Strasbourg Youth Festival which provides excursions to the European Parliament. These experiences provide meaningful experiences with diverse cultures and enable learning in different settings. Despite the value of such exchange programmes, only a very small under of students were identified as participating in opportunities such as Erasmus and Erasmus+. The lack of precise numbers by years illustrates a gap in the approach and deployment of study-abroad opportunities for students.

(2) Expert judgement
Erasmus and participation in events like the Strasbourg Youth Festival are only two of SMK's global mobility opportunities. These kinds of events are effective for academic development. The number of events could be increased in the future. A more systematic approach to identifying and matching students with opportunities would be helpful to enhance student mobility.

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
SMK offers a multi-dimensional combination of comprehensive academic, career supporting, socially empathic and individual training-based measures to promote each student's development both within and outside of their academic studies. Activities include industry visits, participation in expos, and fee reductions for low-income groups. These initiatives, which are specified in the SMK's agenda, are effective at minimising issues affecting struggling students (due to social and psychological reasons) by setting up open discussions with study programme directors and carrying out result-oriented interventions.

(2) Expert judgement
A number of support services are provided to address various facets of student life at SMK. Support services and programmes include aid resources such as scholarships and grants, academic support resources such as tutoring or workshops covering study skills, etc., and programming for emotional wellness, which includes access points for psychological counselling sessions or other health-related services. However, the relevant performance measures on the extent of student use of the different resources were lacking. It may be helpful to optimise the types of such resources offered to develop ways to track and trend usage over time.

3.3.5 Evaluation of the sufficiency of study information and student counselling

(1) Factual situation

The institution disseminates crucial learning material through a variety of methods, using its website, social media platforms, events and educational resources in order to help students with their decision-making process. Students claim that the admission standards and procedures were well explained before applications.

(2) Expert judgement

As per available information, the institution has an active presence on numerous mediums including its official website and social media handles whereby they distribute learning material among learners regularly. Student counselling efforts appear to lack measures capturing the level of activity and its effectiveness.

Strengths and weaknesses of this evaluation area:

(1) Strengths:
1. Public information on programmes is complete and transparent.
2. A wide variety of support services are available for students.
3. Academic mobility opportunities are available.

(2) Weaknesses:
1. Support service usage can be better tracked and trended through the use of activity measures and indicators.
2. Academic mobility options can be more systematically communicated to 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

The study programmes have been designed in a way to meet the anticipated needs and expectations of students and to support the achievement of the intended learning outcomes. Programmes are offered full-time and part-time. The institution appears to have well-documented procedures and regulations regarding its teaching and learning processes. SMK's implementation of experiential teaching methods, allowing students to solve real business challenges, is commendable. This active learning process, which includes critical thinking and teamwork elements, provides students with a more immersive and practical education experience. Teachers are seen to undertake thoughtful preparation for each course and ensure that the content aligns with the anticipated learning outcomes.

SMK appears to have a well-defined summative assessment process for the learning results, and the assessment methods used are consistently updated and validated to maintain relevancy and efficacy. It is beneficial that the assessments are not just end-term but occur throughout the semester and cover different aspects of learning outcomes.

The utilisation of an e-learning platform offers a flexible and accessible learning environment and ensures the digital infrastructure is robust, user-friendly and can support the learning needs of all students.

(2) Expert judgement
SMK's teaching and learning process seems comprehensive and well-structured. An area to improve would be helpful to use metrics on factors like student and faculty feedback, the effectiveness of teaching and methods, integration of up-to-date technology, and student support services assessment.

The teaching and learning process equips students with vital skills that are beneficial in the professional world. However, it would be helpful for SMK to understand how the effectiveness of this teaching method is measured and how regularly the process is reviewed for potential improvements. Regular cross-checking for content duplication and overlapping topics is an effective way to maintain course quality. However, more systematic and careful checking of an established process and the results of incorporating feedback from students and lecturers into course content and structure improvements might be implemented. Regularly monitoring and updating the e-learning platform based on student and academic staff feedback would enhance its effectiveness.

SMK seems to ensure a clear pathway for students interested in further studies in Management, both locally and internationally. It would be valuable to evaluate the support provided to students during this transition process, including career guidance and assistance with applications.

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

(1) Factual situation
Students with a disability or a temporary health disorder or special needs can individualise their studies. SMK provides evidence in the SER (p. 37) on the training of its staff on the subject of disabled student integration. During the site visit the means for mobility-disabled students with special needs were visible. Also, SMK claims to have purchased some equipment that improves study conditions for special needs students and increases study accessibility. During the site visit and consultations with students, they could identify community members with special needs and how supportive and assisted the teachers were. SMK has in total 147 students with special needs (in other study fields), which is a significant number.

(2) Expert judgement
Socially vulnerable groups 1) receive support on an individual basis only (for individualising or stopping studies); and 2) are supported by accessible infrastructure on site. As SMK is a private (non-governmental) HEI, the general application process applies. Although there is no specific national legislation concerning socially vulnerable students and SMK only has the general Study reglament[6]), it may be helpful to have a strategy to include these communities more completely.

The experts conclude that SMK ensures the basic needs of admission and inclusion in the study process for both the socially vulnerable and special needs students, although the communication for future and current students about the options available for them once they join the HEI could be improved (on the internet, social media, intranet etc.).

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
SMK's monitoring of student study process is ensured at several levels[7]: Departments of Studies, Heads of Study Programmes, Teachers, Students themselves. The monitoring includes the following areas but is not limited to: attendance and participation; average marks; interim tests and assessments; consultations with students and groups; counselling. During the year students receive feedback from their teachers (during lectures and consultations, oral, written and via the e-learning platform) and heads of study programmes (student achievements or academic debts).

(2) Expert judgement
From the site visit and consultations, the experts have a reason to believe that all the monitoring practices are working. Moreover, the institution is operating in an open and cooperative manner, ensuring dialogue, inclusion and feedback about the implemented changes. SMK implements consistent, timely and systematic monitoring of student progress that enables students to get constant systematic feedback and reflection, which encourages self-assessment of the achieved learning outcomes and further planning of study progress.

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

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[6] SMK Study reglament
https://smk.lt/file/manual/Dokumentai/SMK%20Dokumetai/Studijas%20reglamentuojantys%20dokumentai/SMK_Studij%C5%B3%20reglamentas.pdf
[7] as per SER, in Lithuanian, pages 36-39.

(1) Factual situation

Data analysis on the employability of the graduates is implemented in accordance with the Programme of Graduate Career Monitoring, which foresees SMK contacting the graduates 6 and 36 months after graduation. By means of a questionnaire, information is collected about the evaluation of their competencies in the context of the labour market, employability and other areas. Other important sources of data on graduate employability are the Career Management Information System (hereinafter – CMIS) of the Lithuanian Consortium of Higher Education Institutions, accessible through the website www.karjera.lt and Education Management Information System (EMIS). Objective data of the State Social Insurance Fund Board under the Ministry of Social Security and Labour as well as the Student Register are used for the monitoring graduate career. During the analysed period (2019-2022), 95 graduates finished studies in the Management study field (87 in Vilnius Branch and 8 in Kaunas Branch). Based on EMIS data, approximately 80% of CHBM SP students and 60% of FSM SP graduates, who finished their studies, have been successfully employed. As per SER[8], surveys of graduates and their employers for the respective period show high satisfaction rates (above 4 out of 5 for knowledge, competencies etc. of the graduates).

All systematised information on graduate employability is prepared and presented in Graduate employability analyses prepared by SP Heads. The SMK provides opportunities for students and graduates to improve their career management skills via HeyReady (SMK career centre, which organises career days, provides talent education programmes, works with the Alumni community etc.).

(2) Expert judgement

SMK not only systematically analyses the employability of its graduates and makes respective changes in the study process, but also does that in a quality management sufficient manner and proactively supports its postgraduates.

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

(1) Factual situation

SMK has clear and well-defined policies and procedures, as evident in documents such as the SMK Code of Academic Ethics, SMK Regulation of Academic Ethics Commission, and Descriptor of the Order of Equal Opportunities Policy and its Implementation, among others. These documents establish a solid academic integrity, tolerance, and non-discrimination framework. The establishment of the Academic Ethics Commission indicates that the SMK takes academic integrity seriously. It also gives students and staff a platform to raise concerns about violations of the policy. The Descriptor of Equal Opportunities Policy and its Implementation shows the university's commitment to providing equal opportunities for all, regardless of personal attributes. This ensures a more inclusive learning environment.

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[8] as per SER, in Lithuanian, pages 39-41.

The regular orientation and training sessions, both for students and staff, appear to be effective in communicating the importance of academic integrity and tolerance. Collaboration with external organisations like the Office of the Ombudsperson for Academic Ethics and Procedure enhances these efforts.

SMK's use of tools like EPAS (ESAS) and OXSICO to check academic integrity in student submissions is commendable. This proactive approach can discourage violations and help maintain the university's reputation.

Using surveys to gauge the effectiveness of the implemented policies provides valuable insights into areas that may need improvement. Regular reporting indicates an ongoing commitment to upholding these standards.

(2) Expert judgement
SMK employs a robust and proactive effort to uphold academic integrity while ensuring, tolerance and non-discrimination. Although measures are in place, some instances of violations continue to occur. While completely eradicating such behaviour is almost impossible, these instances highlight the need for ongoing vigilance and continual improvements in preventive measures. It would be beneficial for the institution to continue providing regular training, utilising advanced technologies, and constantly updating its policy based on feedback and regular evaluation.

Student and staff surveys are conducted, but it's unclear how this feedback is utilised to make improvements, therefore there is room for further improvement. The process of integrating this feedback into policy updates and adjustments should be transparent and accessible to all stakeholders.

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
SMK appears to have a well-defined and formalised approach for submitting appeals and complaints about the study process, outlined in multiple documents like the Regulations of the Appeals Commission and the Provisions of Dispute Solving Commission. These regulations detail the necessary procedures, including the formation of commissions and the filing and analysing of appeals.

The availability of support for students from the Department of Studies, who provide impartial information about the procedure of filing and analysing appeals, is commendable. The introduction to the appeals and complaint procedures during introductory lectures and their accessibility online and in the e-learning environment ensure students are aware of their rights and the process for addressing grievances. There were instances of appeals and disputes reported during the period under evaluation. The noteworthy point is that some of

these appeals resulted in changes favouring the students, indicating that the Appeals Commission and the Dispute Solving Commission take these matters seriously and work effectively to resolve them.

The participation of SMK staff in the Appeals Commissions of other institutions shows a commitment to broadening their perspective and understanding of appeal resolution, which can potentially enhance their internal procedures.

 (2) Expert judgement
While the implementation of the appeals and complaints procedures seems effective, there are a few potential areas for improvement. While a low rate of appeals and complaints can suggest that most students are satisfied with the academic process, it might also mean that students are unaware of their rights, or they may be reluctant to file an appeal due to the perceived complexity of the process or fear of repercussions. A detailed analysis of why the rate of appeals is low could provide more insights.

The information provided does not clarify if a post-resolution follow-up mechanism is in place to ensure that the issues addressed do not recur. Establishing such a mechanism can be beneficial in continuously improving the study process.

While the documents are accessible online, the institution could consider creating more student-friendly summaries or FAQs that explain the process in simple terms. More proactive communication about the availability and effectiveness of these procedures might encourage more students to use them if needed.

Overall, the appeals and complaints process at SMK appears to be well-structured, responsive, and effective in resolving the issues raised by students. However, continuous monitoring, feedback, and improvements can further enhance these procedures.

Strengths and weaknesses of this evaluation area:

(1) Strengths:
1. It appears the SMK has been proactive in addressing the specific needs of its students and implementing policies for academic integrity, tolerance, and non-discrimination.
2. SMK implements a consistent, timely and systematic monitoring of student progress that enables students to receive constant feedback and reflection, which encourages self-assessment of the achieved learning outcomes and further planning of study progress.
3. SMK ensures the basic needs of admission and inclusion in the study process for both the socially vulnerable and special needs students.
4. SMK not only analyses systematically the employability of its graduates and makes respective changes in the study process but also does that in a quality management sufficient manner and proactively supports its postgraduates.

(2) Weaknesses:

5. While SMK's teaching and learning approach appears well-structured, it may be helpful to develop a self-evaluation approach, that could delve deeper into aspects of student and faculty feedback including overall course quality, assessment methods efficacy, the use of technology, and progression of students to further studies.

6. SMK ensures the needs of special needs students, though, the communication for future and current students about the options available for them once they join the HEI could be improved (on the internet, social media, intranet etc.).

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[9]

In Vilnius, there are 38 teachers specialising in the field of Management, with several of them holding scientific degrees. The workload of teachers with scientific degrees constitutes around 30% of the subjects covered in the Management field studies.

In Kaunas, there are 34 teachers, with some of them also holding scientific degrees. The workload of teachers with scientific degrees accounts for approximately 23% of the subjects offered in the Management field studies.

At Klaipėda SMK, there is a competent team of teachers capable of conducting studies in the field of Management. However, the formation of cost-effective student groups would be necessary to facilitate the implementation of these studies.

It is worth noting that over 90 percent of the teachers specialising in Management studies possess not only practical expertise but also substantial experience in didactic work. Between 2019 and 2021, these teachers actively participated in 36 training courses focused on enhancing their didactic competencies.

The data provided validate that the teacher-to-student ratio was optimal throughout the year of programme implementation. The distribution of pedagogical workload among teachers is based on ensuring the quality assurance of programme implementation and the expertise of teachers in their respective subject areas.

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[9] Based on the Self Report pages 47-49.

(2) Expert judgement

The staff members involved in the Management programmes meet the overall requirements of first-cycle collegiate study programmes, including didactic, and professional experience. The number of teachers is deemed appropriate, affirming that the institution has a sufficient number of qualified and competent teachers in the study field to achieve the desired study outcomes. However, the panel judges that the scientific publishing activity of a considerable part of lecturers is not high.

3.5.2. Evaluation of conditions for ensuring teaching staff academic mobility

(1) Factual situation[10]

Enhancing internationalisation is one of the key strategic objectives pursued by SMK. Participation in the Erasmus+ programme enables SMK lecturers to engage in valuable opportunities, such as visiting foreign higher education institutions. Through these experiences, lecturers enhance their subject and didactic qualifications, gain insights into the content of their course units, explore innovative teaching methods, foster the development of scientific activities, and exchange knowledge and experiences related to the management of higher education institutions, study processes, and organisation of scientific activities.

Throughout the evaluation period, SMK established interinstitutional cooperation agreements with 87 foreign higher education institutions spanning 31 countries worldwide. Notably, six of these agreements were forged with non-European higher education institutions. These collaborations serve as the foundation for mobility projects, specifically KA171 projects, which involve third unassociated countries within the Erasmus+ programme. Over 10 partners actively contribute to the implementation of management studies within this framework.

During the academic years 2019-2022, lecturers involved in teaching Management studies conducted a total of 16 teaching and learning visits, consisting of 6 teaching visits and 10 learning visits. These visits took place in 10 different countries and involved collaborations with 13 partner institutions. Despite the challenges posed by the pandemic, 8 virtual teaching and 5 virtual learning mobilities were successfully carried out during the period from 2020 to 2022. Additionally, in 2021, an international virtual teaching week was organised.

(2) Expert judgement

The academic staff actively engages in various mobility activities, and the institution provides support for increasing staff mobility. Additionally, mechanisms for promotion and recognition have been established to encourage and acknowledge the efforts of staff members involved in mobility initiatives. SMK has also signed international cooperation agreements with higher education institutions in 24 European countries, further facilitating academic collaboration. Furthermore, the academic staff actively participates in the Erasmus+ programme, contributing to the overall objectives of international mobility and cooperation.

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[10] Based on the Self Report pages 49-51.

The evaluation panel identified significant potential for mobility and exchange opportunities. Although some colleagues had already availed themselves of such opportunities, the panel believed that there is room for expansion to make it more inclusive for a broader range of staff members.

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

(1) Factual situation[11]

SMK lecturers are afforded systematic opportunities for the development of various competencies. The enhancement of lecturer qualifications at SMK encompasses active engagement in competitions, seminars, conferences, internships, and the exchange of best practices with both domestic and international higher education institutions. Additionally, opportunities for pursuing doctoral studies further contribute to the continuous professional growth of lecturers. At the start of each academic year, the SMK Head of Academic Activity conducts an analysis of the required competencies of lecturers by requesting them to present their individual competence demands. Subsequently, the activities for the development of lecturer competencies are organised and coordinated in alignment with the identified competence demands. This proactive approach ensures that the competence development initiatives of lecturers are responsive to the principles of lifelong learning.

The development of lecturer competencies at SMK is approached in a timely and systematic manner. It encompasses various activities such as participation in trainings, seminars, and conferences organised within the institution, engagement in national and international projects, attendance of trainings offered by external institutions, involvement in mobility programmes, the pursuit of doctoral studies, and active participation in decision-making processes within SMK. The Heads of Study Programmes and the Head of Academic Activity are responsible for gathering and analysing data related to the development of lecturer competencies, ensuring comprehensive oversight of the process.

(2) Expert judgement

The continuous development of teaching staff competencies is vital to ensure the quality of education and meet the evolving needs of students and the educational landscape. The panel were persuaded that the teachers are taking part in the different trainings, the opportunities exist.

Strengths and weaknesses of this evaluation area:

(1) Strengths:
1. SMK promotes academic mobility among lecturers.
2. Faculty are offered a variety of training and development opportunities.
3. The institution has a dedicated and enthusiastic faculty who are valued by current students and alumni.

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[11] Based on the Self Report pages 51-53.

(2) Weaknesses:
1. The scientific publishing activity of a great part of lecturers is relatively low and could be increased to be more typical of HEIs in the area.
2. In the future guest lecturers from foreign higher education and research institutions would be helpful to improve and enrich the the study process.

3.6. LEARNING FACILITIES AND RESOURSES

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 facilities are designed to provide an effective method for promoting an all-encompassing learning experience. Physical infrastructure (classrooms & labs) as well as specialised facilities all exhibit a well-thought-out design and upkeep while additionally contributing towards a seamless classroom dynamic with engaged student participation. The facilities contain modern resources such as interactive whiteboards and audiovisual systems, which are used in productive teaching pedagogies for students.

The library facilities contain an abundant supply of valuable informational resources. The library contains a comprehensive selection of scholarly material including books, journals as well as electronic database. Based on interviews during the site visit it appears that the institution has an active approach to library collection management. The school also integrates virtual learning tools in the appropriate platforms.

(2) Expert judgement
SMK conducts classes and other learning activities in state-of-the-art facilities which support a robust learning environment. The facilities are recently designed and fit to the teaching and learning methods used by the institution.

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

(1) Factual situation
To maintain and enhance the quality of education, SMK invests in facilities and equipment regularly, considering the increasing student population and input from teachers, students and SPCs, as well as changes in art and technology trends. Management of these resources aligns with SMK's rules and strategic plans. Over the last three years, SMK has invested in various equipment, primarily funded through tuition fees (SER, p. 55).

(2) Expert judgement
The existing planning mechanisms are thoughtful and student-centred. The facilities reflect creative and purpose-driven design for effective teaching and learning.

Strengths and weaknesses of this evaluation area:

(1) Strengths:
1. The facilities are state-of-the-art and provide a supportive learning environment.
2. Facilities have been designed using creative techniques.

(2) Weaknesses:
 N/A

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
The SER describes that SMK has instituted a comprehensive system for internal quality assurance of studies. The system aligns with key European and Lithuanian regulations and standards such as "The Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area (ESG)" and the Law on Science and Studies of the Republic of Lithuania, ensuring legal compliance and adherence to recognised quality guidelines.

The SMK has established well-defined quality assurance procedures involving managerial, main, and supportive activities. This structure helps to follow that quality assurance occurs at multiple levels and includes a variety of stakeholders. The process involves key stakeholders such as students, lecturers, academic heads, and social partners. This inclusive approach could ensure a well-rounded understanding of quality and help address the concerns of all stakeholders, but to achieve that, the set of indicators should be set up and adjusted.

The Head of Projects works closely with the Heads of Study Programmes to adapt international project results to the study process. This shows an effort to incorporate global learning and experiences into the SMK academic process.

Both students and academic staff are involved in quality assurance processes. This indicates a community culture interested in improving and maintaining the quality of education at SMK. The system includes feedback mechanisms and considers them as core quality assurance

aspects. However, it is only one part of a systematic process which helps ensure continuous improvement, the system should be viewed from a wider perspective.

(2) Expert judgement
Overall, while the SMK's internal quality assurance system has strong points, including stakeholder involvement and regular feedback collection, there are potential areas for improvement. Specifically, the deployment of the system is not consistent across the organisation. More concrete evidence, such as specific instances where feedback led to changes, could provide more assurance that the system is working as intended. Although a robust set of procedures is in place, continuous re-evaluation and updating of the quality assurance process will ensure it remains effective and relevant over time. This includes keeping abreast of quality indicators and critical self-evaluation, not just reporting. While the self-evaluation report mentioned long-term monitoring of the study quality system, more details on how this is done and the changes made based on the monitoring could provide greater transparency into the process.

Enhancing the linkage between SMK's strategic and quality system indicators and improving the monitoring and evaluation of responsibilities, better articulating how feedback is utilised, and ensuring adaptability to rapidly changing conditions could further strengthen the system. This inclusive approach ensures a multi-dimensional perspective on quality assurance.

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

(1) Factual situation
SMK's engagement with various stakeholders, such as lecturers, graduates, social partners, and other HEIs, provides a well-rounded feedback system.

Including student feedback in multiple aspects of the quality assurance process, such as course content and implementation, shows a commendable commitment to incorporating student perspectives. Regular surveys with academic staff and students allow consistent feedback and identify areas for improvement in real time. Student representatives are involved in the SMK decision-making process.

The involvement of social partners in multiple stages, from surveys to round table discussions, reflects a proactive approach to stakeholder inclusion. It is beneficial that SMK engages stakeholders in forums, focus groups, or one-on-one interviews to gather more detailed and in-depth feedback.

There is no clear connection between quality assurance processes and teacher training or professional development opportunities provided.

Collaboration with other universities and schools allows for sharing knowledge, good practices, and resources.

(2) Expert judgement
Overall, the SMK appears to have robust engagement with the stakeholders. However, the effectiveness of this engagement could be further improved by addressing the identified areas.

While there are surveys and opportunities for stakeholder involvement, the response rate or active participation isn't mentioned for all stakeholder groups. This could be an area of improvement, especially for graduate surveys where it's mentioned that participation is low.

In the self-evaluation report, specific examples of changes implemented based on stakeholder feedback are provided, which shows that SMK takes these matters seriously and continuously introduces improvements. However, improving the quality loop and assessing the direct impact of these stakeholder involvements would be suggested. In addition, regularly re-evaluating and soliciting feedback on the survey process itself can help ensure it remains an effective tool for collecting necessary information.

Although the text mentions alumni involvement, it does not provide details about their role in the quality assurance process. Greater alumni involvement could bring valuable insights based on their real-world experiences post-graduation. Tracking graduates' employability and performance in the job market is a practical way to gauge the effectiveness of the institution's programmes and to make necessary adjustments.

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

(1) Factual situation
The self-evaluation report describes that SMK has implemented a structured, anonymous feedback system, such as an online survey, that supplements regular meetings with students and ensures that more students' voices are heard. The described process of regular meetings with students and obtaining feedback seems effective and was noted by students as a positive example of involvement.

Students, faculty, social partners, and potential employers are a part of the evaluation and improvement processes. Employers expressed satisfaction with their engagement in the study process and programmes` development and noted that they are consulted about the curriculum and the skills it needs to build. Other important stakeholders, such as alumni and non-teaching staff, may also provide valuable feedback. Including these groups could give a more rounded picture of the study programmes' efficacy and relevance.

There seems to be an active effort to incorporate feedback into improving study programmes, and the provided examples show changes based on both - student and faculty - input. However, it would be useful to consider implementing a system for tracking the impact of these changes over time to ensure they're achieving their intended effect.

The response to external factors, such as the COVID-19 pandemic, shows a level of adaptability. However, it's essential to ensure that ongoing monitoring of broader societal, technological, and industry trends continues to ensure that study programmes remain relevant and practical.

(2) Expert judgement
Overall, while the current system has many strengths, further improvements could be made to the methods of collecting feedback, the dissemination of changes, the evaluation of the impacts of these changes, and the diversity of stakeholders consulted.

While the information seems to be collected and used diligently, the current system lacks a clear evaluation mechanism to assess the efficacy of the changes made. For example, has shifting the morning lecture time resulted in better student attendance or performance? Has introducing studies in English improved language proficiency? Clear evaluation metrics should be developed for each implemented change to assess its impact.

The information is disseminated in meetings with stakeholders and via an E-learning environment. However, the frequency and structure of these updates are not clear. Regular, structured updates (e.g., a semi-annual report) on changes implemented and their impacts could improve the transparency and effectiveness of communication.

It would also be beneficial to understand how the institution adapts to emerging trends in higher education and continuously strives for improvement.

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
Using qualitative and quantitative methods, SMK's approach to consistently collecting feedback from stakeholders, particularly students, ensures a comprehensive understanding of study quality. Students, academic staff, and social partners are all involved in the internal evaluation of study quality and improvement processes. This diversity of perspectives enriches the feedback collected and ultimately leads to more balanced improvements.

The student satisfaction scores over multiple years indicate that the quality of the education provided is generally high and meets students' expectations regarding their future specialities. This is a strong indicator of effective teaching methods and relevant course content.

The evaluation shows that course material is practical and includes ways for students to apply theoretical knowledge. This shows an effective integration of academic learning and real-world application. However, during the site visit, both students and the labour market

representatives mentioned that even more real-life and practical training would be appreciated.

The SMK's collaboration with public sector institutions, private sector entities, and educational institutions enriches the learning experience, offering students a more comprehensive range of perspectives and experiences.

(2) Expert judgement
Despite having a solid internal system for feedback and improvement, the process of publicising information about studies, their evaluation, and progress can be improved to be more purposeful and detailed. This suggests that the current communication methods may not be effectively reaching all intended audiences or providing the level of detail necessary for full transparency.

The satisfaction scores show a slight variance between the Vilnius and Kaunas branches. This could suggest the need for more uniformity in quality across different campuses to ensure all students have an equally satisfying study experience.

While feedback is consistently collected and used for improvement, there is no explicit mention of measuring the impact of the changes made based on this feedback. A more structured approach to impact assessment can help ensure effective and meaningful improvements.

Though students, faculty, industry employers and social partners are included, other potentially valuable stakeholders like alumni and non-teaching staff seem underutilised. Engaging more with these groups could offer additional insights for improvement.

Strengths and weaknesses of this evaluation area:

(1) Strengths:
1. SMK involves diverse stakeholders in its internal quality assurance process, including students, faculty, industry employers, and social partners. This ensures that various perspectives are included, providing a comprehensive review of study programmes.
2. The quality management system is designed to incorporate the input of relevant stakeholders such as management, faculty,, students and social partners.
3. SMK actively collects feedback from different stakeholders at various intervals throughout the academic year. This ongoing data collection allows for real-time adjustments and improvements. It is beneficial, and stakeholders' feedback contributes to decision-making processes and influences curriculum changes.
4. SMK's cooperation with universities on both national and international levels, as well as general education schools, gymnasiums, and vocational schools, allows for an external perspective that can help refine their internal processes and provide additional resources.

5. Information regarding evaluation results, changes, and quality development processes are publicly available and discussed with stakeholders. This enhances the transparency of the process and ensures that all parties are informed.

(2) Weaknesses:
1. While responsibilities at each level of the quality assurance process are clearly defined, the system for monitoring the execution of these responsibilities could be better articulated. This aspect is crucial in ensuring that all stakeholders fulfil their roles effectively. Clear indicators and communication of these processes are essential for transparency and adherence.
2. There is a robust system for feedback collection. However, how these changes or improvements made in response to feedback are systematically analysed, evaluated and specifically used to improve the quality of studies could be further clarified.
3. The surveys intended for graduates regarding their employability after graduation seem to receive low engagement. Better strategies might need to be developed to increase their participation, as their input is valuable for understanding how well the education received prepares students for the job market.
4. The frequency and effectiveness of updating and improving the quality assurance system to keep up with these changes have to be clear to ensure its sustainability and relevance. This includes keeping abreast of quality indicators and critical self-evaluation, not just reporting.
5. Alumni could be more formally engaged, instead of relying primarily upon social and personal contacts between graduates and academic staff or SMK management.

IV. EXAMPLES OF EXCELLENCE

Core definition: *Excellence means exhibiting exceptional characteristics that are, implicitly, not achievable by all.*

1. **Social Partner Engagement.** SMK has demonstrated a strong and sustained commitment to engagement with social partners and other external stakeholders. The involvement and engagement of these stakeholders extend extensively into all aspects of the teaching and learning processes.
2. **State-of-the-art Facilities.** SMK conducts its studies in modern, inclusive, and creative facilities that enable the institution to employ the desired teaching and learning methods.

V. RECOMMENDATIONS

Evaluation Area	Recommendations for the Evaluation Area (study cycle)
Intended and achieved learning outcomes and curriculum	1) **Improving research effectiveness**. Strengthening the scientific and research activities and results by the institution, students, and faculty. Some examples are: students could be introduced to the online databases available; more research activities could be generated out of events and conferences; final thesis could be more scientifically based; the overall scientific expertise area (both students and teachers) could be more strategically driven; some of the projects implemented by SMK lack scientific or research basis (and alignment to the study programmes aims and outcomes) etc. 2) **Internationalisation.** Enhancing and increasing participation in multicultural environments and international networking through student exchange programmes. Some ideas could be: providing more consistent information (written, oral, social media etc.) to students about their options; also, supporting and proactively inviting students to participate in the programmes available; using more communication and media tools to spread the possibilities and the attractiveness (from students participated) etc. 3) **Strategic action planning and execution.** Strategy could be improved from action-based (as it currently is) to result-driven by introducing the main KPIs to the planning process and documents (such as student admission rates, dropout rates, student satisfaction rates, alumni employment rates etc.). 4) **Broader benchmarking.** Currently, study programmes in the study Field are based on the benchmark and analysis of local (Lithuanian) competitors from other HEIs and market needs. However, having in mind SMK's international ambitions, it is highly recommended to investigate and benchmark more European and global study programmes for the study programmes.
Links between science (art) and studies	1) **Research group performance and clear indicators.** The establishment of research groups and the definition of clear performance indicators in annual activity planning is a commendable practice. To further enhance this strength, we recommend regularly reviewing and updating these indicators to ensure they align with the evolving goals of the HEI's research initiatives.

2) **Engagement of teaching staff.** The commitment of the teaching staff to involve students in recent research findings through assignments like real case studies is a valuable asset. To build upon this strength, it is advisable to provide continuous professional development opportunities for faculty members to stay updated with the latest research trends and teaching methodologies. Encouraging collaboration between faculty and researchers can also bridge the gap between research and teaching effectively.

3) **Active participation in associations.** The HEI's participation in national and international associations demonstrates a commitment to staying connected with the broader academic community. To leverage this strength further, it would be beneficial to explore opportunities for deeper collaboration with these associations. This could include hosting conferences, workshops, or seminars that bring together experts from various backgrounds to promote interdisciplinary research and networking.

4) L**ow publication rate.** The low rate of scientific paper publication is a significant concern. To address this weakness, the HEI should consider implementing the following improvements:

    a. Research Support: Provide additional support and resources to faculty members to facilitate their research activities, such as access to research grants, laboratories, and research assistants.

    b. Publication Incentives: Develop incentive programmes that reward faculty members for publishing their research in reputable journals or presenting at conferences. This can motivate faculty to actively engage in research and publication.

    c. Research Collaboration: Encourage collaboration between faculty members and research groups within and outside the HEI. Collaborative research projects often lead to increased productivity and higher publication rates.

    d. Mentorship Programmes: Establish mentorship programmes where experienced researchers can guide junior faculty members in the research and publication process. This can help nurture a culture of research within the institution.

Student admission and support	1) **Performance measures for student support.** It may be helpful to develop measures of effective student support that can be tracked and trended.
Teaching and learning, student performance and graduate employment	1) **Alumni community involvement in curriculum.** Expanding the SMK Alumni community is indeed valuable, as maintaining strong connections with alumni can significantly contribute to enhancing the institution's network, reputation, and resources for current and future students. 2) **Special needs students.** SMK ensures the needs of special needs students, though, the communication for future and current students about the options available for them once they join the HEI could be improved (on the internet, social media, intranet etc.). 3) **Additional teaching and learning performance measures.** While SMK's teaching and learning approach appears well-structured, the self-evaluation process could delve deeper into aspects of student and faculty feedback and its incorporation for improving course quality; teaching and assessment method efficacy; technology integration; student support; and assessing the support for students transitioning to further studies and career guidance would be beneficial.
Teaching staff	1) **Promotion of academic mobility.** SMK's promotion of academic mobility among lecturers is a positive aspect that fosters a diverse and enriching learning environment. To further capitalise on this strength, the HEI should consider expanding opportunities for both incoming and outgoing faculty exchanges, promoting cross-cultural experiences and knowledge sharing. 2) **Professional development opportunities.** Providing teachers with the possibility to take part in different training programmes is a valuable practice. To enhance this strength, the HEI can consider tailoring training options to align with the evolving needs of teachers, focusing on pedagogical advancements, technology integration, and teaching methodologies. 3) **Dedicated and enthusiastic teachers.** Having dedicated and enthusiastic teachers who are valued by current students and alumni is a significant asset. To sustain and maximise this strength, the HEI should prioritise recognition and reward mechanisms for outstanding teaching, fostering a culture of continuous improvement. 4) **Low faculty publishing activity.** The low scientific publishing activity among a significant portion of lecturers is

	a concern. To address this weakness, the HEI can consider the following:
	a. **Research support.** Offer increased support and resources for research activities, including dedicated research time, access to funding opportunities, and mentorship for faculty members interested in improving their research output.
	b. **Publication incentives.** Establish incentives, such as financial rewards or recognition, to motivate lecturers to engage in research and increase their publication rates.
	c. **Collaborative research**. Encourage collaborative research projects among lecturers, both within the HEI and with external institutions, to facilitate the publication of joint research findings.
	5) **Involvement of guest lecturers**. To address the need for more guest lecturers from foreign higher education and research institutions, the HEI can consider the following steps:
	a. **International partnerships**. Actively seek and establish partnerships with foreign HEIs and research institutions to facilitate the exchange of guest lecturers.
	b. **Visiting scholar programmes**. Create visiting scholar programmes that invite renowned scholars and experts from abroad to teach and collaborate with the HEI's faculty. These programmes can provide fresh perspectives and enhance the quality of education.
	c. **Language proficiency training.** Offer language proficiency training to both lecturers and students to ensure effective communication and collaboration with guest lecturers from different linguistic backgrounds.
Learning facilities and resources	1) **Enhancement of facilities.** The institution's excellence facilities may benefit from new designs to embrace further digitisation of higher education. Such areas can include the use of tools such as A.I. in use by employers of SMK students.
Study quality management and public information	1) **Performance improvement system.** Improvement of the system for monitoring the execution with clear indicators by enhancing the linkage between SMK`s strategic and quality system indicators and improving the monitoring and evaluation of responsibilities. Communication of quality assurance processes to stakeholders better articulating how feedback is utilised.

	2) **Feedback on the study process.** Systematic analysis and evaluation of changes or improvements made in response to feedback and the survey process itself to ensure that it remains an effective tool for collecting necessary information used to improve the quality of studies. 3) **Enhancing alumni participation.** Development of the strategy and activities to improve Alumni participation in the feedback surveys and track graduates' employability and performance in the job market. Extensive and more formal engagement of Alumni in the quality system to bring valuable insights based on their experience.

VI. SUMMARY

SMK presents an example of programmes grounded in the needs of social partners and external stakeholders. The quality of the programmes is further enhanced by the high quality of facilities, which are well designed to aid engaged learning in the highly specialised areas of the programmes in the field of study.

Faculty and staff exhibited an engaged and dedicated approach to serving students and other stakeholders. The enthusiasm and caring nature of the faculty was evidenced consistently in the comments and reactions of students. Some key opportunities to build on this strength include developing methods to leverage the expertise of international faculty. The institution uses creative methods of instruction and evaluation focused on real-world research-based activities.

SMK has a defined and mostly deployed approach to performance improvement. There are opportunities to further implement the approach through the use of a broader set of performance indicators, particularly in student support.

The expert panel wishes to express its sincere appreciation for the welcoming nature of the staff, faculty and students at SMK and the engagement with the field of study accreditation process.

Expert panel chairperson signature:
Prof. Dr. Douglas Gilbert