SKVC

STUDIJŲ KOKYBĖS VERTINIMO CENTRAS
CENTRE FOR QUALITY ASSESSMENT IN HIGHER EDUCATION

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COMMUNICATION FIELD OF STUDY

Kazimieras Simonavicius University (KSU)

EXTERNAL EVALUATION REPORT

Expert panel:

1. Panel chair: Assoc. Prof. dr. Bradley Wiggins
2. Academic member: Prof. dr. Anastassia Zabrodskaja
3. Academic member: Asst. Prof. dr. Lars de Wildt
4. Student representative: Viktorija Lankauskaitė

SKVC coordinator: Aleksandras Kačanauskas

SKVC

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I. INTRODUCTION

1.1. OUTLINE OF THE EVALUATION PROCESS

The study field evaluations in Lithuanian higher education institutions (HEIs) are based on the following:

- Procedure for the External Evaluation and Accreditation of Studies, Evaluation Areas and Indicators, approved by the Minister of Education, Science, and Sport;
- Methodology of External Evaluation of Study Fields approved by the Director of the Centre for Quality Assessment in Higher Education (SKVC);
- Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area (ESG).

The evaluation is intended to support HEIs in continuous enhancement of their study process and to inform the public about the quality of programmes within the study field.

The object of the evaluation is all programmes within a specific field of study. A separate assessment is given for each study cycle.

The evaluation process consists of the following main steps: 1) self-evaluation and production of a self-evaluation report (SER) prepared by a HEI; 2) a site visit of the review panel to the HEI; 3) the external evaluation report (EER) prepared by the review panel 4) accreditation decision taken by SKVC and its publication; 4) follow-up activities.

The main outcome of the evaluation process is the EER prepared by the review panel. The HEI is forwarded the draft EER to report on any factual mistakes. The draft report is then subject to approval by the external Study Evaluation Committee operating under SKVC. Once approved the EER serves as the basis for an accreditation decision. If a HEI is not happy with the outcome of the evaluation, HEI can file an appeal.

On the basis of the approved EER, SKVC takes one of the following accreditation decisions:

- **Accreditation granted for 7 years** if all evaluation areas are evaluated as exceptional (5 points), very good (4 points), or good (3 points).
- **Accreditation granted for 3 years** if at least one evaluation area is evaluated as satisfactory (2 points).
- **Not accredited** if at least one evaluation area is evaluated as unsatisfactory (1 point).

1.2. REVIEW PANEL

The review panel was appointed in accordance with the Reviewer Selection Procedure as approved by the Director of SKVC.

The composition of the review panel was as follows:

1. Panel chair: Assoc. Prof. dr. Bradley Wiggins
2. Academic member: Prof. dr. Anastassia Zabrodskaja
3. Academic member: Asst. Prof. dr. Lars de Wildt
4. Student representative: Viktorija Lankauskaitė

1.3. SITE VISIT

The site visit was organised on 22 April 2024 onsite.

Meetings with the following members of the staff and stakeholders took place during the site visit:

- Senior management and administrative staff of the faculty(ies)
- Team responsible for preparation of the SER
- Teaching staff
- Students
- Alumni and social stakeholders including employers.

There was no need for translation and the meetings were conducted in English.

1.4. BACKGROUND OF THE REVIEW

Overview of the HEI

Kazimieras Simonavičius University (hereinafter KSU) is a non-state university established in 2003 which has undergone two structural developments since its inception. From 2003-2011, its focus was on legal studies, and then in 2012 it began a process of restructuring and broadening its focus. In 2021, KSU University became a member of a larger educational group uniting KSU and two colleges (universities of applied sciences). further expanding the scope for study programmes and various research and practical activities. Vilnius serves as the location of studies at KSU, with its main academic structural units being the faculties and departments. KSU has two units with the faculty status, namely the Law and Technology Institute and the Business Innovations and Communication School, which resulted from the merging the Business Innovations School and the Creative Economy Institute, which operated as separate units until 2023. The Business Innovations and Communication School runs the two programs that were submitted for accreditation review: the Bachelor's in Fashion Industry and the Master's in Integrated Communication.

Overview of the study field

Motivated by a desire to strengthen the competitiveness of Lithuanian society, to create new knowledge and innovations, and to prepare future professionals to compete internationally, the Business Innovations and Communication School view Communication study programmes as integral to these goals. Accordingly, the two programmes that were reviewed, namely the Bachelor of Social Sciences in Fashion Industry and the Master of Social Sciences in Integrated Communication, represent how KSU understands its place in the Vilnius and larger Lithuanian region, but also how best to serve current and potential students. KSU places great emphasis on practical knowledge, while not eschewing theory. Evidence of this emphasis is present throughout the structure of the degree programmes as well as the various examples of applied research projects carried out by faculty and students and also how KSU interacts with social partners and employers.

Previous external evaluations

As noted in the KSU prepared SER, or self-evaluation report, "The self-evaluation report of Communication study field studies is submitted for the evaluation for the first time under the plan for the external evaluation of study fields drawn up for the year 2020-2025 by the Centre for Quality Assessment in Higher Education" (KSU SER,2023, p. 6). Accordingly, this evaluation takes into consideration the degree of preparedness of KSU to offer both programmes and their genuine interest in improving procedures and/or structure of their programmes to serve the interests of students, social partners and employers.

Documents and information used in the review

The following documents and/or information have been requested / provided by the HEI before or during the site visit:

- *Self-evaluation report and its annexes*
- *Final theses*

Additional sources of information used by the review panel:

The review panel used no additional sources of information.

II. STUDY PROGRAMMES IN THE FIELD

First cycle/LTQF 6

Title of the study programme	**Fashion Industry**
State code	6121JX04
Type of study (college/university)	University studies
Mode of study (full time/part time) and nominal duration (in years)	Full-time, 3,5 years
Workload in ECTS	210
Award (degree and/or professional qualification)	Bachelor of Social Sciences
Language of instruction	Lithuanian/ English
Admission requirements	Secondary education
First registration date	2013-02-04

Second cycle/LTQF 7

Title of the study programme	**Integrated Communication**
State code	6211JX06
Type of study (college/university)	University studies
Mode of study (full time/part time) and nominal duration (in years)	Full-time, 1,5 years
Workload in ECTS	90
Award (degree and/or professional qualification)	Master of Social Sciences
Language of instruction	Lithuanian/ English
Admission requirements	Bachelor's degree
First registration date	2013-02-12

III. ASSESSMENT IN POINTS BY CYCLE AND EVALUATION AREAS

The first cycle of Fashion Industry study field at KSU is given a **positive** evaluation.

No.	Evaluation Area	Evaluation points[1*]
1.	Study aims, learning outcomes and curriculum	4
2.	Links between scientific (or artistic) research and higher education	3
3.	Student admission and support	4
4.	Teaching and learning, student assessment and graduate employment	4
5.	Teaching staff	4
6.	Learning facilities and resources	3
7.	Quality assurance and public information	4
	Total:	26

The second cycle of Integrated Communication study field at KSU is given a **positive** evaluation.

No.	Evaluation Area	Evaluation points[2*]
1.	Study aims, learning outcomes and curriculum	4
2.	Links between scientific (or artistic) research and higher education	3
3.	Student admission and support	4
4.	Teaching and learning, student assessment and graduate employment	4
5.	Teaching staff	4
6.	Learning facilities and resources	3
7.	Quality assurance and public information	4
	Total:	26

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1 (unsatisfactory) - the area does not meet the minimum requirements, there are substantial shortcomings that hinder the implementation of the programmes in the field.
2 (satisfactory) - the area meets the minimum requirements, but there are substantial shortcomings that need to be eliminated.
3 (good) - the area is being developed systematically, without any substantial shortcomings.
4 (very good) - the area is evaluated very well in the national context and internationally, without any shortcomings.
5 (exceptional) - the area is evaluated exceptionally well in the national context and internationally.

III. STUDY FIELD ANALYSIS

AREA 1: STUDY AIMS, LEARNING OUTCOMES AND CURRICULUM

1.1.	Programmes are aligned with the country's economic and societal needs and the strategy of the HEI

FACTUAL SITUATION

1.1.1. Programme aims and learning outcomes are aligned with the needs of the society and/or the labour market

In general, KSU has designed both study programmes to fulfil the main objective of communication studies, which is to explore the diversity, complexity, and interdisciplinary nature of communication in various contexts and at different levels. Both programmes prepare students to become communication specialists with a broad theoretical knowledge and a variety of perspectives. The programmes ensure that students will understand emerging communication issues and challenges in contemporary society, and also recognize their connection to political, social, and economic processes.

Regarding the first cycle Bachelor of Social Sciences in Fashion Industry, the learning outcomes and programme aims are closely aligned with the needs of potential and current students, social partners, and employers. There is considerable evidence for this point. Within the Bachelor of Social Sciences programme, Fashion Industry, students receive practical preparation in order to adjust smoothly to the needs of professional partners and potential employers. The required internship (with 15 ECTS) provides students with a realistic opportunity to interact and engage with working professionals within the realm of their growing knowledge and skills related to the field of Fashion Industry. Social partners and employers also participate in the evaluation of students' work and/or ongoing projects. KSU endeavours to include social partners in the supervision of the BA and MA theses. With regard to the organisation of study subjects, KSU receives solicited advice from social partners and employers to ensure a truly practical learning experience for the students.

Regarding the second cycle Master of Social Sciences in Integrated Communication, the learning outcomes and programme aims are closely aligned with the needs of potential and current students, social partners, and employers. The programme is clearly designed for students who invariably are already working in the industry but seek an upgraded education to complement their professional activities. The Master of Social Sciences in Integrated Communication has a total of 90 ECTS and has a flexible format to suit students studying full-time or part-time, but typically lasts for 1.5 years or three semesters. Social partners and employers are involved in the process of Bachelor and Master theses, as well as opportunities to share students' insights with working professionals but also as a way to receive feedback from the same professionals. Social partners invite students for open lectures to make sure students are familiar with the companies working in the field of communication, marketing, and related career/professional opportunities. KSU has begun signing partnership agreements with social partners and employers. These agreements allow their students to analyse the special needs of employers and social partners as well as to incorporate their insights and tasks in their theses.

1.1.2. Programme aims and learning outcomes are aligned with the HEI's mission, goals, and strategy

KSU's programmes in Fashion Industry and Integrated Communication represent clear and evident ways to fulfil its mission, goals, and strategy. Accordingly, KSU aims to increase the competitiveness of Lithuanian society, create new knowledge and innovations, and prepare future professionals capable of competing internationally with their knowledge and skills. KSU's practical focus on preparing students to enter the workforce as professionals stems from its strategy in research and education to analyse and respond to global environments, the latest technological, scientific, and innovative trends, as well as market changes. KSU also focuses on ensuring accessibility to education and lifelong learning trends while developing innovative teaching methods based on design thinking methodology. KSU's programmes in Fashion Industry and Integrated Communication align with these aims as they are oriented towards the analysis of modern communication and societal needs and the preparation of professionals who can creatively address the challenges posed by the evolving communication strategies and tools in contemporary communication environments based on the latest scientific knowledge.

One particularly relevant aspect that addresses the above points is the recent addition to KSU, namely the Fashion Academy, started toward the end of 2023. Students enrolled at these programmes at KSU benefit from the focus on the development of fashion business and fashion communication knowledge among young people and through the conduct of scientific and expert activities in the field of fashion communication and business.

ANALYSIS AND CONCLUSION (regarding 1.1.)

Overall, the Bachelor of Social Sciences in Fashion Industry and the Master of Social Sciences in Integrated Communication both serve the needs of current and potential students as well as the larger region, with most emphasis here placed on social partners and employers. Specific to the Bachelor's programme in Fashion Industry, its uniqueness as a programme so clearly focused on the niche area of fashion communication is a major highlight of KSU's offered programmes. Furthermore, the fact that KSU also engages in synergies with other related programmes in Europe underscores the willingness of KSU faculty, staff and administration to maintain the programmes' current structure and make changes as needed depending on input from students, alumni, social partners and employers.

1.2.	Programmes comply with legal requirements, while curriculum design, curriculum, teaching/learning and assessment methods enable students to achieve study aims and learning outcomes

FACTUAL SITUATION

1.2.1. Programmes comply with legal requirements

Tables 1 and 2 (below) illustrate the compliance with the legal requirements. Both programmes are viewed as in full compliance with the requirements.

Table 1. Compliance of the programme **Fashion Industry** with general requirements for *first cycle study programmes (bachelor)*

Criteria	General legal requirements	Fashion Industry

Scope of the programme in ECTS	180, 210 or 240 ECTS	210 ECTS
ECTS for the study field	No less than 120 ECTS	Is above 120 ECTS
ECTS for studies specified by University or optional studies	No more than 120 ECTS	Does not exceed 120 ECTS
ECTS for internship	No less than 15 ECTS	15 ECTS
ECTS for final thesis (project)	No less than 15 ECTS	15 ECTS
Contact hours	No less than 20 % of learning	Minimum of 20% contact work
Individual learning	No less than 30 % of learning	Minimum of 30%

Table 2. Compliance of the study programme **Integrated Communication** with general requirements for *second cycle study programmes (master)*

Criteria	General legal requirements	Integrated Communication
Scope of the programme in ECTS	90 or 120 ECTS	90 ECTS
ECTS for the study field Communication	No less than 60 ECTS	More than 60 ECTS allocated
ECTS for studies specified by University or optional studies	No more than 30 ECTS	Does not exceed 30 ECTS
ECTS for final thesis (project)	No less than 30 ECTS	30 ECTS
Contact hours	No less than 10 % of learning	Minimum of 10% contact work
Individual learning	No less than 50 % of learning	More than 50%

1.2.2. Programme aims, learning outcomes, teaching/learning and assessment methods are aligned

The SER prepared by KSU provides a summary of the study programme objectives (p. 12-17) and how these are aligned with learning outcomes, teaching and learning, and assessment methods. The overall aim is to provide students with subject-matter understanding, but also general capabilities on critical thinking, problem-solving and research skills. The Fashion Industry study programme includes practical applications as well, such as the internship and an applied thesis research project. Teaching modules use a variety of teaching approaches and assessments, from traditional lecturing to interactive teaching methods. As noted on p. 15 of the SER, like other study programmes at KSU, both Fashion Industry and Integrated Communication are programmes that "are focused on future trends, innovative technologies, digitization, and meeting market needs by creating and applying the latest scientific knowledge. The School of Business Innovations and Communication aims to ensure the implementation of exceptional, unique, and contemporary study programmes in the field of communication". This assessment concurs with the perspective as described in the SER and also on the basis of input during the site visit at KSU.

Regarding assessment, approximately 45% of the student's final subject grade usually consists of assessments for his/her mid-term examinations, work, and presentation of completed assignments, written assignments, research, individual and team projects during lectures and seminars. The remaining part of at least 55% of the final student's subject grade is obtained during the final assessment-exam or project.

1.2.3. Curriculum ensures consistent development of student competences

KSU has developed the Bachelor's programme for Fashion Industries and the Master's programme in Integrated Communication to consider and ensure the core competencies, providing a foundation for future professional activities of communication, fashion communication, and business professionals.
From the site visit, there was clear demand from employment agencies and social partners for both programmes. Discussions mentioned the need for specific skills and competencies of communication. With respect to the Integrated Communication programme, competencies also included the demand on developing leadership and communicating this clearly in the programme and when interacting with social partners and employers.

1.2.4. Opportunities for students to personalise curriculum according to their personal learning goals and intended learning outcomes are ensured

The SER prepared by KSU clearly demonstrates the range of opportunities for students to personalise the curriculum and their overall learning experience alongside meeting the intended learning outcomes of the respective programme. Students may select the topic of both their final thesis and internship, often in communication with faculty and/or relevant social partners and employers. Students also consult directly with teaching faculty, and they have opportunities to express their opinions about the programme, the assessments, course content, delivery of teaching, and more in student evaluations of teaching and surveys. In addition, KSU provides opportunities to students to engage with digital fashion and creative workshop projects.

1.2.5. Final theses (applied projects) comply with the requirements for the field and cycle

Students at KSU complete their studies by engaging in an independent research project at the Bachelor and Master level, and finally submit their prepared thesis and defend it in front of teaching faculty and social

partners and/or employers. First cycle students prepare their thesis over two semesters for a total of 21 ECTS, and second cycle students prepare theirs also over two semesters for a total of 30 ECTS. Students defend both theses at the Bachelor and Master levels first at the Interim Defence Committee and then publicly.

ANALYSIS AND CONCLUSION (regarding 1.2.)

Overall, the aims and learning outcomes of the two field study programmes are in line with the needs of society and the regional labour market. The following strengths and weaknesses as well as recommendations were noted.

AREA 1: CONCLUSIONS

AREA 1	Negative - 1 Does not meet the requirements	Satisfactory - 2 Meets the requirements, but there are substantial shortcomings to be eliminated	Good - 3 Meets the requirements, but there are shortcomings to be eliminated	Very good - 4 Very well nationally and internationally without any shortcomings	Exceptional - 5 Exceptionally well nationally and internationally without any shortcomings
First cycle				4	
Second cycle				4	

COMMENDATIONS

1. Uniqueness of the Fashion Industry programme alongside synergies with the other few similar/related programmes in Europe is a true highlight and advantage of study at KSU.
2. Reputation and branding appear consistent though the general public may not be as aware of KSU as the employers/social partners are seemingly well aware.
3. The Integrated Communication programme's lack of an internship speaks to a strength: its design and structure addresses the needs of already employed individuals who are seeking educational advancement to enhance their careers.

RECOMMENDATIONS

For further improvement

1. Internationalisation: there is desire to have international, non-Lithuanian speaking students even though the programme is taught in Lithuanian and also that the theses are largely in Lithuanian. We understand that students often elect to write their theses in Lithuanian. Perhaps more encouragement can be directed at students to write their theses in English.

AREA 2: LINKS BETWEEN SCIENTIFIC (OR ARTISTIC) RESEARCH AND HIGHER EDUCATION

2.1.	Higher education integrates the latest developments in scientific (or artistic) research and technology and enables students to develop skills for scientific (or artistic) research

FACTUAL SITUATION

2.1.1. Research within the field of study is at a sufficient level

Research activities at KSU have significantly improved, particularly in Communication and Information, and related fields such as management, sociology, education, and philology. The faculty, active researchers themselves, have explored themes like mass communication, digital transformation, AI, and knowledge management, along with trends and management in the fashion industry. KSU teaching staff have contributed to these advancements, with two professors receiving the 2020 "Emerald Literati Award" for Highly Recommended Papers. High-quality publications in journals indexed in Clarivate Analytics and Scopus, along with significant monographs on diverse topics, reflect KSU's strong research outputs.

KSU integrates its research findings directly into its academic programmes, enriching student learning with the latest scientific insights. Key publications on the Fashion Industry and Integrated Communication are used in teaching, with notable works from researchers. These publications provide a contemporary perspective on the dynamic interplay between fashion, digital innovation, and communication. The university also ensures public dissemination of research, engaging the broader community through events like the Vilnius Book Fair and collaborative conferences on systems theory, thereby extending the impact of its scholarly work.

Collaborative projects and international initiatives further underscore KSU's robust research environment. These endeavours span various domains, from digital fashion and gamification in education to AI and big data applications in business. Projects like "Digital Fashion: Lithuanian Fashion Experiments" offer students practical experience, enhancing their skills and bridging academic research with real-world applications. Such collaborations reinforce KSU's reputation as a capable international partner and contribute to its standing as a leading institution in Communication and Information studies.

2.1.2. Curriculum is linked to the latest developments in science, art, and technology

The university places a strong emphasis on aligning its scientific and commercial research with the fields of communication and management, specifically within the Communication Studies in the Fashion Industry and Integrated Communication study programmes. These programmes incorporate the latest advancements in science, art, and technology to enhance educational quality. Students are actively involved in scientific projects, gaining hands-on experience with modern technologies and professional tools. The Next Society Institute plays a crucial role in ensuring that the most recent scientific knowledge is integrated into the teaching process.

In the Fashion Industry programme, key subjects such as Fashion Research and Data Analytics focus on contemporary scientific trends, while courses like Appearance Culture and Style expose students to recent artistic achievements. Technological advancements are incorporated into subjects like Academic and Digital Writing, Fashion Technologies, and Media Technologies. Since 2019, the ERASMUS+ project "Be-Com" has

further enriched these programmes by integrating digital learning tools and incorporating virtual reality and gamification elements into the curriculum.

Lecturers and researchers also engage in ERASMUS+ projects such as "Cybersecurity," with findings integrated into subjects like New Media Technologies and Ethics, Security, and Legal Aspects in the Digital Space. Students benefit from international training sessions, summer schools, and blended intensive programmes, which broaden their knowledge and skills in the latest scientific and technological developments. These initiatives ensure that students are well-versed in cutting-edge trends and practices.
The "Fashion In The Making" lecture series, launched in 2018, is another significant initiative that connects students with the latest trends in fashion, fashion communication, and technological advancements. This series features prominent Lithuanian fashion industry figures and international scholars who share insights on topics like electro fashion, successful fashion strategies, digital fashion technologies, and luxury goods. To further enhance the integration of international expertise, the university annually secures funding from the Education Exchanges Support Foundation (EESF) to invite foreign lecturers, enriching the curriculum with their global perspectives and fostering intercultural collaboration.

2.1.3. Opportunities for students to engage in research are consistent with the cycle

The university offers numerous opportunities for student engagement in scientific activities. Research and development projects play a crucial role, inviting students to create and implement projects relevant to their studies, use business tools, and develop competencies through experiential tasks. Faculty members encourage research and project work to enhance knowledge and research skills. For instance, first-year Fashion Industry students present creative projects in their final project, fostering skills in analysis and presentation. Additionally, the university promotes entrepreneurship through open lectures from renowned entrepreneurs and workshops on job market analysis and personal branding.

Students are also encouraged to prepare theses on approved scientific topics, publish research, and participate in seminars, conferences, and panel discussions. Events like the "Future Creators" conference provide platforms for presenting research findings. The university's Student Scientific Society further supports Communication students in research and extracurricular activities.

ANALYSIS AND CONCLUSION (regarding 2.1.)

KSU exhibits notable energy in research. The management of research is efficient, and the focus on forming strategic partnerships, both domestically and internationally, is commendable. The societal impact of this research is significant at the national level. Enhancing its administrative support for research, KSU could improve by establishing a monitoring system specifically tailored to European projects. The research activities of KSU teaching staff are disseminated to the wider public through various channels, including book fairs, public libraries, cultural centres, and news portals. This demonstrates a commitment to engaging with broader audiences beyond academic circles. Collaboration with partners from other universities and institutions also enriches the research landscape and fosters knowledge exchange. Mentioning professors hosting radio shows and appearing on television programmes discussing topics related to their research increases the visibility of KSU's academic activities. Such outreach activities help translate academic research into accessible formats for the general public. KSU strives to keep its study programmes up to date with the latest developments. Particular attention is paid to incorporating the results of research, scientific developments and the latest technologies into the curriculum. This approach fits well with the requirements of modern education, in which the relevance of knowledge is crucial for students' relevance in their respective fields. KSU's participation in ERASMUS+ projects, international training and cooperation with

foreign institutions enrich the educational experience, giving students the opportunity to see different perspectives and build global connections. KSU secures funding for hosting foreign lecturers, which is essential for bringing in fresh perspectives and expertise.

AREA 2: CONCLUSIONS

AREA 1	Negative - 1 Does not meet the requirements	Satisfactory - 2 Meets the requirements, but there are substantial shortcomings to be eliminated	Good - 3 Meets the requirements, but there are shortcomings to be eliminated	Very good - 4 Very well nationally and internationally without any shortcomings	Exceptional - 5 Exceptionally well nationally and internationally without any shortcomings
First cycle			3		
Second cycle			3		

COMMENDATIONS

1. Thorough and efficient research direction.
2. Energetic researchers consistently yielding better outcomes.
3. A successful partnership strategy, which should be reinforced to harness all available resources in this research domain within Europe and worldwide.

RECOMMENDATIONS

To address shortcomings

1. Research findings contributed to addressing key challenges or advancing theoretical frameworks within the field of Communication and Information.
2. It would be beneficial for KSU to outline a strategic vision for the development of the Fashion Academy initiative into a separate unit dedicated to further research and innovation.
3. It would be beneficial for foreign lecturers specifically to enhance the study programmes at KSU and what criteria are used for selecting them.

For further improvement

1. Despite mentions of students being involved in projects, information on the sustainability and long-term impact of these projects is limited.
2. Despite the references to subject-specific projects, it is important to integrate scientific activities more closely with the Integrated Communication curriculum. This integration will help students understand how their research and projects align with their academic pathway and future career aspirations.

AREA 3: STUDENT ADMISSION AND SUPPORT

3.1. Student selection and admission is in line with the learning outcomes

FACTUAL SITUATION

3.1.1. Student selection and admission criteria and procedures are adequate and transparent

Kazimieras Simonavičius University carries out the admission procedure according to the national guidelines set by the Ministry of Education, Science and Sport. The prospective students apply to the first-cycle study programme through LAMA BPO (Association of Lithuanian Higher Education Institutions for Centralised Admissions) or directly through the university. The same requirements for state-funded places and non-state funded places were adopted.

According to the information provided in SER, the application score consists of: 1) the score of the maturity exam of Lithuanian language and literature (0,4 of the competitive score); 2) the score of the maturity exam or the annual grade of History, or Mathematics, or Information Technology, or Geography (0,2 of the competitive score); the score of the maturity exam or the annual grade of any subject that does not coincide with the first, second, or fourth subject (0,2 of the competitive score); the score of the Foreign language maturity exam or annual grade (0,2 of the competitive score).

Additional points to first-cycle studies are given based on the rules set out in LAMA BPO. They include awards at national or international competitions, volunteering experience, and/or completed military training. Admission to the second-cycle studies takes place only by direct enrolment to the University. All second-cycle applicants must participate in the motivational interview. The applicants holding a university level bachelor's degree in the field of communication are directly admitted to the second-cycle study programme. Applicants holding bachelor's degree in other study fields can either be admitted directly as well, with a proof of 30 ECTS in fundamental subjects approved by KSU or have to complete additional studies to cover the needed credits. The need for additional studies applies to individuals holding a college level degree as well.

The competitive score to the second-cycle study programme consists of the arithmetic average of the grades of the final exam and/or final thesis (FA); the arithmetic average of the grades of the diploma supplement (without the grades of final exams and/or final thesis) (DA); and evaluation of the motivational interview, from 0 to 2 points (MI). The evaluation visit helped to clarify the mandatory aspect of the motivational interview, and the conditions for point allocation.

The information about the admission procedures and requirements is available on KSU and LAMA BPO websites, annual informational publication by KSU, at www.aikos.lt – career and education guidance website administered by the Ministry of Education, Science and Sport – as well as study related magazines such as "Kur stoti" (Where to Study), "Kuo būti" (Whom to Become), and on social media platforms. The SER also informs about the participation in the study and career fairs in Vilnius, Kaunas, Klaipėda, Šiauliai, and Panevėžys, where the prospective students are informed about the study programmes.

The number of applicants to the first-cycle studies during the evaluated period was as follows: 9 applicants in year 2021/2022, 6 applicants in year 2022/2023, and 10 applicants in year 2023/2024 for the first priority; 26 applicants in year 2021/2022, 43 applicants in year 2022/2023, and 29 applicants in year 2023/2024 for the remaining priorities. The number of signed agreements were 17, 22, and 13 respectively. All of the

students studying in the first-cycle study programme were admitted into non-state funded places, but the students with a competitive score higher than 9 were provided with a 100% tuition fee discount.

For the second-cycle study programme, 24 students were applying in the year 2021/2022, 29 in the year 2022/2023, and 35 in the year 2023/2024, with 8, 11, and 10 agreements signed respectively. Among those 8, 11, and 10 agreements, two types of funding were available: non-state funded study places with State awarded study scholarships (2, 2, and 2 respectively), and non-state funded study places (6, 9, and 8 respectively).

According to the SER, financially sustainable groups were formed in both cycle study programmes. The university attributes this success to the uniqueness of the Fashion Industry study programme, and the convenient study form of the Integrated Communication study programme. The increase in the number of applicants to the first-cycle study programme (all priorities) can be seen in the year 2022/2023, which in turn increased the number of admitted students by 5. Yet, in 2023/2024 the numbers are lower, with only 13 admitted students in total. Although the SER does not provide reasons for lower student numbers, the unavailability of state-funded places might be one of the reasons for prospective students to choose other institutions.

For the second-cycle study programme, the number of students is slightly fluctuating, with previously mentioned 8, 11, and 10 admitted students over the years 2021–2023. The university attributes the decrease in student numbers to the more scrupulous motivational interview process, which results in fewer students passing the bar, but provides more academically prepared students.

In terms of the students that do apply and end up studying at KSU, the trends in competitive scores slightly differ for the first-cycle and second-cycle study programmes. The highest competitive score for the first-cycle study programme has been decreasing over the years 2021–2023, with 9,91 in 2021, 8,76 in 2022, and 8,5 in 2023. The lowest competitive score was fluctuating, with 5,05 in 2021, 4,5 in 2022, and 4,56 in 2023. The SER does not provide possible reasons for such trends, although during the evaluation visit the national trends in prospective students having difficulties with the maturity exam in mathematics, which influences their overall grades and competitive score, were noted. So, the downward trend is indicative of the trends not only in the study field but nationally as well.

For the second-cycle, on the other hand, the highest competitive score has been increasing, with 15,74 in 2021, 16,4 in 2022, and 16,83 in 2023 (for students in both non-state funded and non-state funded with a state scholarship). The lowest competitive score has been fluctuating, with 10,57 in 2021, 12,6 in 2022, and 11,97 in 2023.

3.1.2. Recognition of foreign qualifications, periods of study, and prior learning (established provisions and procedures)

The university follows the procedures of recognising foreign qualifications, periods of study, and prior learning based on orders issued by the Minister of Education, Science, and Sport. KSU also has approved regulations regarding the recognition of qualifications obtained abroad, partial studies, and prior formal and informal learning. Additional documents regarding the assessment and recognition of competencies gained through non-formal learning are also available. All of the documentation can be found on the University's website. The University also recognises partial study results, often related to the international mobility of

students. Additionally, the University offers the possibility to credit the study results obtained in other Lithuanian or foreign higher education institutions, following the legal acts regulating credit transfer.

According to SER, partial study results were credited 20 times for the students in the first-cycle study programme, and once in the second-cycle study programme. The partial studies are formalised, and agreements signed before the students leave, making the crediting process easier. During the analysed period, all partial studies were credited.

ANALYSIS AND CONCLUSION (regarding 3.1.)

The admission process to the study programmes is clear and adequate. The university follows the national regulations for the first-cycle studies, and organises its own admission to the second-cycle studies. One of the main issues in this area is the decreasing number of students in the first-cycle studies and the downward trend in their competitive score. Yet, as it was noted during the visit, it is a national trend, affected by both the demographic situation as well as the results of the mathematics maturity examination. A more theoretical approach to the Fashion industry and the focus on its communication might also prompt some prospective students to choose more practice based study programmes, so an inclusion of some practical skills might make the programme more attractive.

3.2. There is an effective student support system enabling students to maximise their learning progress

FACTUAL SITUATION

3.2.1. Opportunities for student academic mobility are ensured

The University provides opportunities for student academic mobility, with Erasmus being the main programme implemented. The SER also introduces the growing trend of short mobility programmes, where a combination of live and virtual mobility can be organised, referred to as COIL in SER.

During the analysed period, the field had no full-time incoming students. The number of incoming students for partial studies is fluctuating, with 13 students in Autumn 2020, 12 in Spring of 2021, 21 in Autumn 2021, 29 in Spring 2022, 19 in Autumn 2022, 17 in Spring 2023, and 17 in Autumn 2023. A decrease seen through 2020–2021 could be attributed to the aftermath of the COVID-19 pandemic, followed by some increase until Autumn 2022, which the SER attributes to the start of the war in Ukraine.

The numbers of outgoing students, however, are rather low, with 1 student in Autumn 2020, 0 students in Spring 2021, 3 in Autumn 2021, 4 in Spring 2022, 3 in Autumn 2022, 3 in Spring 2023, and 7 in Autumn 2023. The SER notes the low student participation in the mobility, with reasons covering the COVID-19 pandemic, family and work commitments, and financial situation. The effort to inform students about the opportunities is also highlighted, with KSU website, social media platforms, emails, and individual consultations being the main channels for information dissemination. The discussions during the evaluation visit provided the same view.

3.2.2. Academic, financial, social, psychological, and personal support provided to students is relevant, adequate, and effective

The students in the study field have academic, financial, social, psychological, and personal support available. Academic support includes administration and academic staff consulting students on the study process, and academic issues.

Financial support mainly covers the tuition fee discounts for students, with 32 discounts provided over the analysed period for the field students. High achieving students have an opportunity to get up to a 100% discount on their tuition fee, and over the analysed period, 25 students had such a discount, 2 students had a 50% discount, and 3 students had a 33% discount. An Incentive scholarship is also available to students for their study results and involvement in University's activities. 2 students received Incentive scholarships over the analysed period.

Social support includes events organised by the student union, career counselling, open lectures, and other extracurricular activities, based on the comments in SER and discussions during the evaluation visit.
According to SER, the university provides students with psychological consultations regarding personal and mental health issues, as well as help to develop study related skills, such as time management, effective learning, motivation building, and public speaking. From Spring 2022, the psychological consultations are available free of charge. The administration tracks the use and need of such consultations, and during the evaluation visit it was stated that 5% of students use the consultations.

3.2.3. Higher education information and student counselling are sufficient

At the beginning of the study process, the students are introduced to university procedures, important things to be aware of during their studies, student rights and duties. As each subject starts, the lecturers inform about the aims of the subject, requirements and forms of assessment, and available sources. The Head of the Studies Department and study coordinators consult students about the additional issues in study processes.

According to SER, lecturers consult students on individual tasks, literature, and any other issues that arise during their studies. Teaching staff have consulting hours allocated. Communication takes place in live and online meetings, over Teams or zoom platforms.

The effectiveness of these consultations is measured by conducting surveys, organising meetings with students and collecting their feedback. The results of the survey indicate that the majority of students rate the consultations as good or very good. The student opinion in the evaluation visit reflected these results.

ANALYSIS AND CONCLUSION (regarding 3.2.)

While the systems set up to support students in various ways are there, some things are difficult to manage and do not necessarily involve only the study field. The main concern revolves around the low numbers of student mobility, especially when comparing the numbers of outgoing students with the numbers of incoming students, which means that KSU teaches a number of students from other universities, but gets nothing in return, since their own students are staying home. The university is aware of the issue and puts additional effort in encouraging students to participate in study exchanges, but the reasons students give, such as family or work commitments, are difficult to ignore. The increasing trend of short-term mobility programmes seems promising for solving exactly this issue.

Additional attention could be paid to the nature of psychological counselling available. Although the university provides psychological consultations to students, a number of them inform about seeking such

support in teachers instead. This raises the question of whether the teachers have sufficient training to provide adequate psychological support to their students, as well as whether they are able to manage that with their other tasks and how that affects their workload.

AREA 3: CONCLUSIONS

AREA 1	Negative - 1 Does not meet the requirements	Satisfactory - 2 Meets the requirements, but there are substantial shortcomings to be eliminated	Good - 3 Meets the requirements, but there are shortcomings to be eliminated	Very good - 4 Very well nationally and internationally without any shortcomings	Exceptional - 5 Exceptionally well nationally and internationally without any shortcomings
First cycle				4	
Second cycle				4	

COMMENDATIONS

1. Mechanisms are set up to provide tuition discounts.

RECOMMENDATIONS

For further improvement

1. Work towards increasing student numbers. Adding a course related to practical skills could increase the appeal of the study programme.
2. Redirect the psychological counselling responsibilities from teachers to professionals available at the university.

AREA 4: TEACHING AND LEARNING, STUDENT ASSESSMENT, AND GRADUATE EMPLOYMENT

4.1. Students are prepared for independent professional activity

FACTUAL SITUATION

4.1.1. Teaching and learning address the needs of students and enable them to achieve intended learning outcomes

KSU's study programmes are structured into semesters with 16 weeks of lectures and a 4-week exam period, facilitating effective learning management. In the Fashion Industry programme, 20.29% of time is spent in classrooms and 79.71% on independent work, while the Integrated Communication programme allocates 11.83% to classroom activities and 88.17% to independent work. This structure emphasises the importance of independent learning for developing self-regulation and critical thinking. A variety of teaching methods, including lectures, seminars, projects, and mid-term assessments, cater to diverse learning styles, promoting better engagement and understanding.

Students are actively involved in selecting teaching methods, planning lectures, and providing feedback, ensuring alignment with their needs. Continuous evaluation through a cumulative score assessment system (45% mid-term and 55% final exams) helps identify and address learning gaps promptly. Significant emphasis on independent learning, supported by proper planning and lecturer guidance, fosters autonomous learning vital for lifelong education.

Experiential learning is facilitated through internships, study visits, guest lectures, and collaboration with social partners, helping students apply theoretical knowledge in real-world contexts. All activities align with the intended learning outcomes, ensuring relevant and high-standard education. Individualised study plans accommodate diverse needs and learning styles. Graduates can pursue further academic and professional development through advanced study opportunities in related fields.

4.1.2. Access to higher education for socially vulnerable groups and students with individual needs is ensured.

KSU offers 50% tuition fee discounts to students who lack both parents or guardians, come from orphanages, or have severe/moderate disabilities or a working capacity of 45% or less, significantly reducing financial barriers for these groups. Additionally, eligible students do not have to pay entrance fees, further alleviating financial burdens. KSU is located in a modern, disability-friendly building equipped with elevators, wide doorways without steps, adapted toilets, and adjustable chairs, ensuring full physical accessibility. Free parking close to the campus is also available for students with disabilities.

KSU staff are trained to support socially vulnerable students and those with special needs, offering guidance on additional financial aid from various foundations and government sources. Since 2017, staff have participated in the State Studies Foundation project "Increasing the Accessibility of Studies," enhancing their ability to support students with special needs and advise lecturers on effective teaching and communication methods. The KSU website provides dedicated sections with information and updates relevant to socially disadvantaged groups and students with special needs, ensuring they have access to necessary resources and news.

ANALYSIS AND CONCLUSION (regarding 4.1.)

KSU ensures that teaching and learning are tailored to meet the needs of students, enabling them to achieve their intended learning outcomes through structured organisation, diverse teaching methods, active student involvement, continuous assessment, and extensive support for independent and experiential learning. This comprehensive strategy fosters a conducive learning environment that prepares students effectively for their academic and professional futures.

KSU also effectively ensures access to higher education for socially vulnerable groups and students with special needs through comprehensive financial, environmental, consulting, and administrative measures. These efforts include significant tuition discounts, modern accessible facilities, trained and supportive staff, and dedicated information dissemination, all of which collectively reduce barriers and enhance educational opportunities for these students.

4.2.	There is an effective and transparent system for student assessment, progress monitoring, and assuring academic integrity

FACTUAL SITUATION

4.2.1. Monitoring of learning progress and feedback to students to promote self-assessment and learning progress planning is systematic

In the study programmes, significant emphasis is placed on maintaining effective communication with students, monitoring their progress, and providing opportunities for self-evaluation. Lecturers use a cumulative scoring system to evaluate tasks, providing detailed feedback on mistakes, correct criteria, and areas for improvement. Students benefit from personalised attention due to a favourable student-to-teacher ratio, ensuring high-quality feedback and accessibility to lecturers for consultations during lectures and via various communication channels like email, phone, and Zoom.

Additionally, the Studies Department actively monitors examination results to identify students who may be struggling. Those with academic debts or deteriorating performance receive individual consultations coordinated with the Head of the Business Innovations and Communication School. These consultations involve discussing issues, determining causes, and creating personalised action plans. This system acts as both a preventive measure against dropouts and a reflective tool, aiding students in planning future progress and enhancing their self-assessment skills.

4.2.2. Graduate employability and career are monitored

During the analysed period, the KSU systematically monitored the careers of graduates from the Fashion Industry and Integrated Communication programs, which had 20 and 6 graduates respectively. The process involved three surveys conducted immediately after graduation, one year later, and three years post-graduation. Initial surveys indicated that all graduates were employed at the time of graduation, with most working in fields related to their studies. For Fashion Industry graduates, 50% (2021), 66.67% (2022), and 60% (2023) were employed in their specialty. In 2023, 66.67% of Integrated Communication graduates were employed in their field. Graduates were optimistic about their career prospects, citing the value of their education and KSU diploma.

One year post-graduation, Fashion Industry graduates showed job mobility while remaining within their field. For those graduating in 2020, 2021, and 2022, 50%, 50%, and 75% respectively had changed jobs but stayed

within their specialty. The second survey for Integrated Communication graduates is planned for January 2024. Three years after graduation, all responding Fashion Industry graduates were employed in roles matching their qualifications, with some establishing their own businesses. Graduates rated their education and its relevance to the labour market highly. KSU plans to continue this monitoring to evaluate long-term career success and job field integration.

4.2.3. Policies to ensure academic integrity, tolerance, and non-discrimination are implemented

KSU upholds academic integrity and fosters an inclusive environment guided by its Code of Ethics, ensuring respect, impartiality, and non-discrimination among faculty, staff, and students. Throughout the analysed period, no violations of academic ethics were reported within Communication field programmes, indicating a strong commitment to ethical standards. KSU implements a multifaceted approach to promote academic integrity, including integrating academic writing courses, employing technology for plagiarism detection, and collaborating with the Academic Ethics and Procedures Ombudsman's Office for events and lectures. Special emphasis is placed on integrity in thesis preparation, with intermediate examinations facilitating ongoing monitoring and verification of authorship. Through these measures, KSU cultivates a culture of honesty, responsibility, and respect, fostering ethical conduct and academic excellence among its community.

4.2.4. Procedures for submitting and processing appeals and complaints are effective

KSU has established clear procedures for submitting and processing appeals and complaints related to the study process. These procedures are outlined in the regulations of the KSU Appeal Commission. Students are informed of their right to lodge appeals and complaints before each semester and examination session, with the Study Department responsible for disseminating information and advising students on these procedures. During the period analysed, there were no appeals or complaints from Communication field students regarding the study process.

ANALYSIS AND CONCLUSION (regarding 4.2.)

The effective and transparent system for student assessment, progress monitoring, and assuring academic integrity at KSU is evident through various initiatives and policies outlined in the factual situation.

Firstly, the systematic monitoring of learning progress and feedback provision to students is notable. Lecturers employ a cumulative scoring system, offering detailed feedback to students, thereby promoting self-assessment and learning progress planning. The favourable student-to-teacher ratio ensures personalised attention, facilitating accessibility for consultations and feedback, both during lectures and through various communication channels. This approach not only aids in academic improvement but also enhances students' self-assessment skills, contributing to their overall development.

Furthermore, KSU demonstrates a proactive approach to graduate employability and career monitoring. Through systematic surveys conducted immediately after graduation, one year later, and three years post-graduation, KSU monitors the careers of graduates from various programmes. The high employment rates and job field integration among graduates reflect the effectiveness of the educational programmes in preparing students for the workforce. Continuous monitoring allows KSU to evaluate long-term career success, providing valuable insights for programme enhancement and ensuring alignment with industry needs.

Moreover, KSU's commitment to academic integrity, tolerance, and non-discrimination is evident through the implementation of policies and initiatives. KSU upholds ethical standards guided by its Code of Ethics, fostering an inclusive environment free from academic violations and discrimination. Integration of academic writing courses, plagiarism detection technology, and collaboration with the Academic Ethics and Procedures Ombudsman's Office further reinforce the culture of honesty and responsibility among faculty, staff, and students. By prioritising integrity in thesis preparation and facilitating ongoing monitoring, KSU ensures adherence to ethical standards, promoting academic excellence and integrity within its community.

Lastly, the effectiveness of procedures for submitting and processing appeals and complaints underscores KSU's commitment to transparency and accountability. Clear guidelines outlined in the regulations of the KSU Appeal Commission provide students with avenues to address grievances related to the study process. The absence of appeals or complaints from Communication field students during the analysed period reflects the effectiveness of these procedures and the KSU's proactive approach to addressing student concerns.

In conclusion, KSU's effective and transparent system for student assessment, progress monitoring, and academic integrity assurance reflects its commitment to providing high-quality education, fostering student success, and maintaining ethical standards within its academic community. Through personalised feedback, career monitoring, integrity initiatives, and transparent procedures, KSU creates a supportive learning environment conducive to academic excellence and professional development.

AREA 4: CONCLUSIONS

AREA 1	Negative - 1 Does not meet the requirements	Satisfactory - 2 Meets the requirements, but there are substantial shortcomings to be eliminated	Good - 3 Meets the requirements, but there are shortcomings to be eliminated	Very good - 4 Very well nationally and internationally without any shortcomings	Exceptional - 5 Exceptionally well nationally and internationally without any shortcomings
First cycle				4	
Second cycle				4	

COMMENDATIONS

1. KSU's multifaceted approach to promoting academic integrity is commendable. Integration of academic writing courses, use of plagiarism detection technology, and collaboration with relevant offices highlight the KSU's dedication to upholding ethical standards. By fostering a culture of honesty, responsibility, and respect, KSU ensures the integrity of its academic programmes and the credibility of its graduates.
2. The establishment of clear procedures for submitting and processing appeals and complaints reflects KSU's commitment to transparency and accountability. By informing students of their rights and providing guidance on the appeals process, the KSU ensures that student concerns are addressed effectively and fairly, contributing to a positive learning environment.

RECOMMENDATIONS

For further improvement

1. KSU can further promote diversity and inclusion within its academic community. Implementing initiatives such as diversity training for faculty and staff, creating support networks for

underrepresented students, and incorporating diverse perspectives into the curriculum can foster a more inclusive learning environment.

2. There may be opportunities to expand career services and alumni engagement initiatives. Providing resources such as career counselling, networking events, and alumni mentorship programmes can further support students' transition into the workforce and enhance their long-term career success.

3. KSU can strengthen its academic support services by offering additional resources such as tutoring, academic workshops, and study groups. This can help students who may be struggling academically to improve their performance and achieve their full potential.

4. There may be opportunities to improve transparency in decision-making processes. Providing students with more information about the criteria used to evaluate appeals and complaints, as well as ensuring that decisions are communicated in a timely manner, can enhance trust and confidence in the university's administration.

5. Offering professional development opportunities for faculty to enhance their teaching and assessment skills, as well as providing training on intercultural competence and inclusive teaching practices, can further improve the quality of education provided at KSU.

AREA 5: TEACHING STAFF

5.1. Teaching staff is adequate to achieve learning outcomes

FACTUAL SITUATION

5.1.1. The number, qualification, and competence (scientific, didactic, professional) of teaching staff is sufficient to achieve learning outcomes

The teaching staff for the Communication field programmes comprises experts from various disciplines including communication, marketing, sociology, and management, with extensive experience and expertise in their respective fields. Currently, there are 29 members in the teaching team, with 20 holding doctoral degrees — 9 as professors, 11 as associate professors, and 9 as lecturers without doctoral degrees (of which 4 are currently pursuing doctoral studies). This composition reflects a high level of qualification and competence, surpassing the standards mandated by legislation.

The teaching staff composition for the programmes in the Communication field is highly favourable, ensuring stable programme implementation and minimal future challenges in maintaining adequate academic and occupational qualifications. With nearly 69% of teaching staff holding doctoral degrees and almost half of the lecturers without doctorates currently pursuing doctoral studies, there's considerable flexibility for staff substitution or workload redistribution if needed. The age distribution of the teaching staff is balanced, fostering a blend of experienced professors and associate professors alongside young lecturers and professionals, facilitating knowledge transfer and ensuring programme stability.

Moreover, the teaching team exhibits a strong potential to leverage international experience and expertise, with proficiency in English and engagement in international internships and teaching visits. Some staff members have worked for foreign companies or collaborated with international partners, enriching the curriculum with the latest scientific knowledge and industry practices. KSU enables the recruitment of top specialists, albeit initially leading to a slight turnover, eventually resulting in a core team of competent faculty members.

While the establishment of a permanent full-time academic staff faced challenges initially due to student numbers, KSU successfully retained lecturers, with minimal turnover. Approximately half of the faculty teaching study field subjects have been with KSU for at least three years, indicating stability and commitment. The KSU's HR management policy ensures the attraction and retention of lecturers and researchers, fostering motivation and professional development opportunities. Detailed information about the teaching staff, including qualifications, research interests, and workload, is provided for transparency and reference.

The faculty involved in the implementation of the programmes actively contributes to decision-making processes and quality assurance through participation in the Study Programmes Committee, with four members representing 14.29% of the faculty teaching study field subjects. The professor-led committee brings together experienced academics who contribute unique expertise and insights.

One professor, who has extensive teaching and research experience, does research and manages research teams in national agencies and Ministry projects, alongside his commitment to joint doctoral studies and dissertation defence committees. Another professor, a media culture researcher and artist, enriches the programmes with the latest theoretical and practical knowledge, integrating topics such as communication,

media, and creativity into the curriculum, while also engaging in experimental photography and delivering lectures both locally and internationally.

Another professor, with over 30 years of professional experience spanning teaching, translation, and involvement in international projects, ensures the relevance of the programmes by sharing his expertise and insights garnered from diverse roles. Additionally, the contribution of digital marketing expert, with her extensive experience and research in digital communication and marketing, further enhances the programmes, particularly in areas like electronic marketing and social media marketing.

The favourable lecturer-to-student ratio allows for personalised attention, individualised assignments, and effective monitoring of learning outcomes, ensuring high-quality study organisation and comprehensive knowledge transfer.

ANALYSIS AND CONCLUSION (regarding 5.1.)

It is evident that the Communication field programmes have a robust and highly qualified teaching staff, encompassing a diverse range of expertise and experience. The teaching staff boasts a significant number of members holding doctoral degrees. This indicates a high level of qualification and competence among the faculty. The composition of the teaching team ensures stability for further implementation of the programme and offers flexibility for potential staff substitutions or workload redistributions. The balanced age distribution facilitates knowledge transfer between experienced and younger faculty members. The teaching staff demonstrates a strong potential to leverage international experience, contributing to the enrichment of the curriculum with the latest scientific knowledge and industry practices. Despite initial challenges in forming a full-time academic staff due to student numbers, KSU has successfully retained lecturers, with a significant proportion having remained for at least three years. This indicates stability and commitment among the faculty. Teaching staff actively participate in decision-making processes and quality assurance through their involvement in committees, ensuring continuous improvement and adherence to standards.

Key members of the teaching staff bring diverse expertise and insights, enriching the programmes with the latest theoretical knowledge and practical experience. The lecturer-to-student ratio is conducive to personalised attention, individualised assignments, and effective monitoring of learning outcomes, ensuring high-quality study organisation and comprehensive knowledge transfer. In conclusion, the Communication field programmes benefit from a highly qualified and committed teaching staff, equipped to deliver quality education and prepare students for the dynamic field of communication. The faculty's diverse expertise, international experience, and involvement in decision-making processes contribute to the programmes' continuous improvement and adherence to high standards.

5.2.	Teaching staff is ensured opportunities to develop competences, and they are periodically evaluated

FACTUAL SITUATION

5.2.1. Opportunities for academic mobility of teaching staff are ensured

KSU has been actively engaging in international cooperation through programmes like Erasmus+, facilitating academic staff mobility for lecturing and professional development. However, the COVID-19 pandemic severely disrupted international mobility during the 2020/2021 period, leading to rescheduling of visits.

Despite this setback, mobility resumed with vigour in subsequent periods, returning to pre-pandemic levels by 2022/2023. KSU acknowledges the potential future challenges, including decreased funding from Erasmus+, prompting a strategy to diversify international mobility opportunities beyond Erasmus+. Considering the uncertainty posed by COVID-19 and geopolitical factors, KSU explores alternatives like virtual mobility and joint projects to ensure continued internationalisation and knowledge exchange.

5.2.2. Opportunities for the development of the teaching staff are ensured

During the analysed period, KSU focused on enhancing teaching staff competence and professional development as a strategic priority. Efforts included assembling a permanent lecturer team, improving evaluation and motivation systems, and providing ongoing training opportunities. Selection and assessment criteria for teaching staff were comprehensive, including education, experience, publications, and personal initiative. KSU emphasised innovative, student-centred teaching methods through various training events, including pedagogic workshops, study assessment methodologies, and international mobility programmes like Erasmus+. Guest lecturers and internal workshops enriched the learning environment. Training sessions addressed challenges posed by the COVID-19 pandemic, enhancing remote teaching skills and digital competencies. Continuous feedback loops ensured alignment with quality teaching standards and addressed evolving needs. KSU prioritised lecturers' professional growth through open lectures, international exchanges, and involvement in research activities, fostering a dynamic learning ecosystem.

ANALYSIS AND CONCLUSION (regarding 5.2.)

KSU has strategically prioritised the development of teaching staff competence as a key area of focus. This is evident from its initiatives to assemble a permanent lecturer team, enhance motivation systems, and provide ongoing professional development opportunities. The criteria for selecting and assessing teaching staff are comprehensive, encompassing qualifications, experience, publications, and personal qualities like initiative and leadership. This ensures that the teaching staff is well-equipped to deliver quality education. KSU offers a diverse range of training programmes aimed at enhancing teaching methods, study assessment techniques, and digital competencies. This includes pedagogic workshops, international mobility programmes, and sessions focused on innovative teaching methodologies. KSU has effectively responded to the challenges posed by the COVID-19 pandemic by providing active support and training to teaching staff for remote teaching and digital learning tools. This proactive approach has helped maintain teaching quality despite the disruptions. KSU maintains a culture of continuous improvement through feedback mechanisms such as surveys and discussions with lecturers. This ensures that the training programmes remain relevant and meet the evolving needs of both students and staff. KSU emphasises the integration of research and teaching by encouraging staff participation in research activities, international exchanges, and student involvement in scientific conferences. This enriches the learning experience and fosters a culture of inquiry. KSU's efforts in enhancing teaching staff competence and professional development appear to be effective, as evidenced by the active participation of staff in training programmes, positive feedback mechanisms, and the integration of innovative teaching methodologies. In conclusion, KSU has demonstrated a strong commitment to the development of teaching staff competence and professional growth. Through strategic initiatives, comprehensive training programmes, and a culture of continuous improvement, KSU has created an environment conducive to delivering high-quality education and fostering a dynamic learning community.

AREA 5: CONCLUSIONS

AREA 1	Negative - 1 Does not meet the requirements	Satisfactory - 2 Meets the requirements, but there are substantial shortcomings to be eliminated	Good - 3 Meets the requirements, but there are shortcomings to be eliminated	Very good - 4 Very well nationally and internationally without any shortcomings	Exceptional - 5 Exceptionally well nationally and internationally without any shortcomings
First cycle				4	
Second cycle				4	

COMMENDATIONS

1. The significant number of teaching staff holding doctoral degrees reflects a commendable level of qualification and competence, surpassing legislative standards.
2. The composition of the teaching staff ensures stability in programme implementation and offers flexibility for potential staff substitutions or workload redistributions.
3. Despite initial challenges, KSU has successfully retained lecturers, with a significant proportion remaining for at least three years. KSU's HR management policy ensures the attraction and retention of lecturers and researchers, fostering motivation and providing professional development opportunities.
4. Teaching staff actively contribute to decision-making processes and quality assurance through their involvement in committees.
5. KSU prioritises the development of teaching staff competence through ongoing training opportunities and international mobility programmes as well as remote teaching and digital competencies.
6. KSU emphasises the integration of research and teaching by encouraging staff participation in research activities, international exchanges, and student involvement in scientific conferences.
7. KSU's commitment to maintaining a highly qualified and motivated teaching staff, combined with its efforts to provide continuous professional development opportunities, contributes significantly to the quality of education and the overall success of the Communication field programmes.

RECOMMENDATIONS

For further improvement

1. While KSU recognises potential future challenges such as possible funding cuts to programmes such as Erasmus+, uncertainties related to geopolitical issues etc., it does not have a detailed action plan in case these challenges materialise. A clear strategy to manage uncertainty and mitigate potential impacts on faculty development could improve preparedness.
2. KSU does not clearly describe efforts to promote diversity and inclusion in the faculty. Diversity initiatives, such as recruitment strategies to ensure representation of underrepresented groups or efforts to create an inclusive teaching environment, would provide a more complete picture of KSU's commitment to diversity and equity in education.
3. While the teaching staff is highly qualified, thought should be given to increasing diversity. Bringing in teaching staff from different cultural and academic backgrounds can enrich the learning process and give students a broader understanding of the Communication field.

4. KSU should consider further expanding collaboration with institutions abroad. Encourage more exchange programmes, joint research projects, and partnerships to expose teaching staff to a wider range of perspectives and practices in communication.

5. Although specialists from different disciplines are involved, deliberate efforts to foster interdisciplinary collaboration can be beneficial. Encourage joint research projects or interdisciplinary training initiatives to address complex Communication issues that require multifaceted perspectives.

6. KSU should consider implementing a more structured and ongoing approach. Regular masterclasses, seminars, and mentoring programmes will help teaching staff keep abreast of the latest teaching methods, technological advances, and research trends.

7. Despite a favourable faculty-to-student ratio, focus on strategies to further increase student engagement. KSU should encourage opportunities for students to collaborate with faculty on research projects or internships.

AREA 6: LEARNING FACILITIES AND RESOURCES

6.1.	Facilities, informational and financial resources are sufficient and enable achieving learning outcomes

FACTUAL SITUATION

6.1.1. Facilities, informational and financial resources are adequate and sufficient for an effective learning process

Lectures for the Communication study programmes take place in a 1700m2 university building, with access to a library and 17 auditoriums, including 6 auditoriums ranging from 32 to 90 seats, and smaller auditorium with 8 to 24 workplaces, and a 24 workplace computer rooms (which can be divided in two).

For laptop users, the campus provides an appropriate amount of wall sockets and 500mbps wifi coverage. Teaching is supported by the virtual study environment *Moodle*. The software for teaching and learning includes Office 365 services (covering Microsoft Office package and online tools). The SER states that Adobe Photoshop, Adobe Illustrator and Adobe InDesign software are available, as well as SPSS statistics software. The students are also given access to Canva, Proto.io, Miro, Prezi, Infogram, Xmind, Mentimeter, and other tools, as SER indicates. For teaching needs, a mobile video camera, and dual wireless microphone system has been purchased as well. The students at the site visit, however, were not aware of Adobe software available.

The University provides adequate modern premises for students with physical disabilities, including wide doors, elevator access, accessible toilets for wheelchair users and related special needs. There is free parking provided on-site for students with disabilities. The campus is accessible by public transport from the surrounding area. The university also has a dormitory available for student accommodation.

The library has electronic access to all the common scientific databases for international (EBSCO (17 databases), Taylor & Francis, DOAJ, etc.) and Lithuanian sources (eLABa, ETD).

6.1.2. There is continuous planning for and upgrading of resources.

Library resources are renewed and re-assessed yearly based on metrics of use, and on staff requests.

Prompted by the sudden necessity of distance learning resulting from the COVID-19 pandemic, courses are organised digitally on the virtual study environment *Moodle*, and remote attendance is enabled when needed through *Zoom*. To support this, academic writing and digital literacy resources are offered in the first semester of all study programmes. Future needs are further supported through a project funded by the Lithuanian Council for Culture, based on which user and learning experiences are aimed to be further improved. The University plans to start providing lecture recordings when and where necessary.

To support the University's ambition of increasing internationalisation, resources in foreign languages are expanded. Furthermore, the *DreamApply* system is used to attract foreign students and make it easier for them to apply.

ANALYSIS AND CONCLUSION (regarding 6.1.)

Despite the ample physical space available for educational needs, the majority of staff does not have private, permanent offices, instead occupying variable hot desks. This includes the necessity of holding office hours with students in shared spaces, which may diminish staff's ability to provide the kind of private and safe environment needed to offer appropriate assistance to students in need of study-related and psychological support. This becomes especially relevant when the visitation makes it clear that many students seek advice from teaching staff rather than (or in addition to) professional psychological counselling resources available at the University.

This is a missed opportunity for a programme on Fashion Industry Communication and Marketing, especially considering their necessity and cost for individual students. On an additional but related note, there are no sewing machines available, despite students, alumni, and social partners indicating a desire to understand applied skills.

With regard to the software resources offered, there is currently no qualitative analysis software available (such as MAXQDA, NVivo or Atlas.ti), despite its relevance to the educational programme and the expertise of some members of staff. Instead, they currently depend on free trial versions, which means any data analysis is limited to a short period; and the relevant work becomes irretrievable after said period. Additionally, while software resources from the Adobe suite are technically available, including Photoshop and Illustrator, their actual use is limited and their access is often unknown to students. While it makes sense that only a limited amount of 50 licences are available due to licensing costs, students do not seem to know about the availability of such resources. This is easily fixed by properly informing students, especially in the courses that include the need for such software. However, as a consequence it is likely that current licensing needs are not correctly assessed, and the current number of licences might consequently be insufficient for or in excess of actual needs.

The use of the open-source learning management system *Moodle* introduces some risk, including a recent cyberattack suffered by the university as well as other Lithuanian institutions using the system. Three people are currently permanently employed on the university-level who can provide maintenance, and grades are backed up nightly.

Students indicate scholarships are adequately available and easy to apply for. However, the combination of motivational interviews to select candidates, and the offer of scholarships mainly based on achievement rather than need, presents a risk of excluding marginalised groups, such as working-class, neurodivergent, disabled and racialized students, who may struggle to perform well in interviews and otherwise. On a related note, the necessity to attend lectures on weekends (which can be mitigated by offering lecture recordings by default) may exclude students who need to or are expected to observe Saturdays or Sundays as religious days.

AREA 1	Negative - 1 Does not meet the requirements	Satisfactory - 2 Meets the requirements, but there are substantial shortcomings to be eliminated	Good - 3 Meets the requirements, but there are shortcomings to be eliminated	Very good - 4 Very well nationally and internationally without any shortcomings	Exceptional - 5 Exceptionally well nationally and internationally without any shortcomings
First cycle			3		
Second cycle			3		

COMMENDATIONS

1. More than adequate space and electronic resources on offer.
2. Impressive support for physical disabilities and psychological counselling.

RECOMMENDATIONS

To address shortcomings

1. KSU should integrate software suites in education, make clearer to students that these resources are available but remain under-used and unknown.
2. KSU should subscribe to fashion industry periodicals is pertinent in light of the programmes on offer, the department's ambitions, as well as their cost and necessity for students.

For further improvement

1. KSU should monitor the ability for talented students to enter the programme who might not perform well in interviews or without financial support.
2. KSU should ensure reliable access to private or even permanent offices for staff, especially in light of students' reliance on them for support outside of class.
3. KSU should expand the current possibilities for remote learning by offering them by default, especially for classes taught on weekends.

AREA 7: QUALITY ASSURANCE AND PUBLIC INFORMATION

7.1.	The development of the field of study is based on an internal quality assurance system involving all stakeholders and continuous monitoring, transparency and public information

FACTUAL SITUATION

7.1.1. Internal quality assurance system for the programmes is effective

KSU has established an internal quality assurance system for its study programmes, adhering to international standards and guidelines. This system focuses on continuously improving study quality and involves various stakeholders, including students and social partners. Key aspects of the system include monitoring learning outcomes, gathering student feedback, and updating programmes to meet evolving demands and standards. The Study Programmes Committee plays a central role in ensuring programme quality, overseeing resources, evaluating innovations, and fostering connections between academia and industry. The involvement of social partners, including students and representatives from relevant organisations, ensures the system's effectiveness and responsiveness to diverse needs.

7.1.2. Involvement of stakeholders (students and others) in internal quality assurance is effective

The involvement of stakeholders, including students, social partners, and graduates, in internal quality assurance processes is considered highly effective. This engagement extends beyond mere communication to active participation in various aspects. Firstly, students are consistently engaged through regular meetings, focus groups, surveys, and direct communication channels. Their opinions on programme quality, content, and KSU are gathered, analysed, and acted upon each semester. Notable efforts include discussions on topics such as the ideal module to students ("Super Module"), as well as the impact of Artificial Intelligence on academic integrity.

Importantly, students are kept informed about how their feedback influences programme improvements. Second, social partners are invited to contribute to programme development by teaching subjects, sharing practical knowledge, and shaping assignments. They actively participate in project work, thesis assessments, and offer internship opportunities. Collaborations with organisations such as 'Women Go Tech' and 'SuperYou' enable students to tackle real-world challenges, ensuring programme relevance to the job market.

Additionally, social partners play a role in aligning programme content with labour market needs through participation in the Study Programmes Committee. Third, the feedback and skills of graduates are systematically collected and analysed to enhance the programme's quality and relevance to job market demands. Their insights contribute to the ongoing improvements in curriculum design and implementation. This multi-faceted involvement of stakeholders ensures that internal quality assurance processes are robust and responsive to the evolving needs of students, social partners, and the job market.

7.1.3. Information on the programmes, their external evaluation, improvement processes, and outcomes is collected, used and made publicly available

KSU stresses the importance of evaluating the collection, use, and dissemination of information about study programmes and their improvement processes. The management of study programmes and decision-making relies heavily on data collected during programme implementation. The gathered data include general

programme information, admission requirements, enrolment statistics, analysis reports, and evaluation results. KSU prioritises openness and accessibility, collaborating with stakeholders and ensuring information is easily available through various channels such as the university website and a government-run platform. Feedback from students, graduates, lecturers, and programme partners is also incorporated, contributing to a comprehensive understanding and continuous improvement of study programmes. Constant communication through online channels facilitates updates and feedback, promoting qualitative enhancement of programmes.

7.1.4. Student feedback is collected and analysed

KSU organises the collection and analysis of student feedback on the quality of study programmes, with a particular focus on management, the fashion industry, and integrated communication fields. While the Centre for Quality Assessment in Higher Education did not conduct a student opinion survey, KSU implemented a systematic approach to gather feedback. This included live or online meetings, end-of-semester surveys, internship assessments, and graduate surveys. Despite efforts to collect data through various channels, there were challenges in obtaining sufficient responses consistently.

Overall, students expressed satisfaction with their studies, particularly highlighting the accessibility of academic department heads for consultation. However, there were concerns about the speed of communication and support from the Studies Department, though improvements were noted over time. Students also rated individual subjects and lecturer quality positively, indicating successful integration of quality assurance elements into programme implementation.

ANALYSIS AND CONCLUSION (regarding 7.1.)

An internal quality assurance system at KSU is aligned with international standards and guidelines. This system emphasises continuous improvement and involves stakeholders such as students, social partners, and graduates. Stakeholders, including students, social partners, and graduates, are actively engaged in various aspects of the quality assurance processes. This involvement ranges from gathering feedback to participating in programme development and ensuring alignment with industry needs. KSU prioritises transparency by collecting, using, and making information about study programmes, external evaluations, improvement processes, and outcomes publicly available. This includes data on programme implementation, admission, enrolment, evaluation results, and feedback from stakeholders. Student feedback on study programme quality is systematically collected and analysed through various channels such as meetings, surveys, and assessments. While there are challenges in obtaining sufficient responses consistently, overall student satisfaction is noted, with particular praise for accessibility to academic department heads and positive ratings for individual subjects and lecturer quality. The analysis indicates a comprehensive quality assurance framework at KSU that involves stakeholders, prioritises transparency, and uses feedback mechanisms for continuous improvement. While there are areas for improvement, such as enhancing communication speed and support, the overall satisfaction suggests successful integration of quality assurance elements into programme implementation.

AREA 7: CONCLUSIONS

AREA 1	Negative - 1 Does not meet the requirements	Satisfactory - 2 Meets the requirements, but	Good - 3 Meets the requirements, but	Very good - 4 Very well nationally and	Exceptional - 5 Exceptionally well nationally and

		there are substantial shortcomings to be eliminated	there are shortcomings to be eliminated	internationally without any shortcomings	internationally without any shortcomings
First cycle				4	
Second cycle				4	

COMMENDATIONS

1. The establishment of an internal quality assurance system aligned with international standards and guidelines is commendable. This demonstrates a commitment to continuously improving study quality and involving various stakeholders in the process.
2. The active involvement of stakeholders, including students, social partners, and graduates, in the internal quality assurance processes is highly commendable. This engagement extends beyond communication to active participation, ensuring diverse perspectives are considered in programme development and improvement.
3. KSU's emphasis on collecting, using, and disseminating information about study programmes, external evaluations, improvement processes, and outcomes is commendable. Prioritising openness and accessibility through various channels promotes transparency and facilitates continuous improvement.
4. Implementing systematic approaches to collect and analyse student feedback on the quality of study programmes is commendable. This allows for the identification of areas for improvement and demonstrates responsiveness to student concerns and suggestions.

RECOMMENDATIONS

For further improvement

1. KSU should address the challenges in obtaining sufficient responses consistently by exploring additional methods to gather student feedback. Consider incentivizing participation or implementing more targeted approaches to reach a broader range of students.
2. KSU should expand the channels for collecting student feedback to ensure comprehensive coverage. In addition to live or online meetings and surveys, consider conducting focus group interviews, suggestion boxes, or dedicated feedback sessions to capture diverse perspectives effectively.
3. KSU should address concerns about the speed of communication and support from the Studies Department. Implement measures to streamline communication channels and enhance support services to ensure timely responses to student inquiries and needs.
4. KSU should consider conducting external evaluations, such as surveys by the Centre for Quality Assessment in Higher Education, to complement internal feedback mechanisms and gain a broader perspective on programme effectiveness and areas for improvement. This can provide valuable insights for enhancing programme quality and relevance.
5. Targeted implementation should address identified areas for improvement and transparently communicate progress to stakeholders.

IV. SUMMARY

In general, KSU has designed first and second cycle study programmes that allows its students to explore the diversity, complexity, and interdisciplinary nature of communication in various contexts and at different levels. Both programmes prepare students to become communication specialists with a broad theoretical knowledge and a variety of perspectives. The programmes ensure that students will understand emerging communication issues and challenges in contemporary society, and also recognize their connection to political, social, and economic processes. The learning outcomes are aligned with the modules and overall curriculum. Students have several options to individualise their learning experience, and they also benefit from practical experiences especially in the first cycle with the required internships, but also the second cycle as many if not most of the students in that programme are employed.

In terms of facilities and support, KSU has demonstrated its commitment to provide necessary resources and infrastructure to create a meaningful and effective learning experience in the field of Fashion Industry and Integrated Communication. KSU has a sufficient learning space at its location to accommodate students in both programmes, and it also has adequate digital resources as well. KSU has an impressive array of support options for students with physical disabilities as well as students who may need psychological counselling. While KSU has certain software suites, these resources are not well known to the students and also appear to be under-used or possibly unknown to some students. However, while KSU has subscriptions to research databases, it does not currently have subscriptions to fashion industry periodicals, and with respect to the programmes on offer and the institution's ambitions, it is advisable to adjust this in the interest of the students.

In terms of social partners and employers, support for KSU appears strong and linkages between the university and the professional world are well developed and have a strong foundation. KSU's reputation therefore appears strong. With regard to the teaching staff, they actively contribute to decision-making processes and quality assurance through their involvement in committees. This ensures continuous improvement and adherence to high standards, promoting excellence in education delivery.

It was obvious to the panel that KSU takes higher education very seriously and is passionate about learning processes and ensuring a meaningful learning experience for their students as well as for their teaching staff.