STUDIJŲ KOKYBĖS VERTINIMO CENTRAS
CENTRE FOR QUALITY ASSESSMENT IN HIGHER EDUCATION

INFORMATION SYSTEMS FIELD OF STUDY

VILNIAUS KOLEGIJA

EXTERNAL EVALUATION REPORT

Expert panel:

1. Panel chair: **Dr. Izidor Golob**
2. Academic member: **Assoc. Prof Dr. Andrejs Romanovs**
3. Academic member: **Assoc. Prof. Dr. Roman Danel**
4. Academic member: **Assoc. Prof. Dr. Dalia Krikščiūnienė**
5. Social partner representative: **Mrs. Gunda Tarakanovienė**
6. Student representative: **Ms. Karolina Jonuškaitė**

SKVC coordinator: **Mr. Gustas Straukas**

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I. INTRODUCTION

1.1. OUTLINE OF THE EVALUATION PROCESS

The field of study 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 field of study.

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 an HEI; 2) A site visit by the review panel to the HEI; 3) The external evaluation report (EER) production by the review panel; 4) EER review by the HEI; 5) EER review by the Study Evaluation Committee; 6) Accreditation decision taken by SKVC; 7) Appeal procedure (if initiated by the HEI); 8) Follow-up activities, which include the production of a Progress Report on Recommendations Implementation by the HEI.

The main outcome of the evaluation process is the EER prepared by the review panel. The HEI is forwarded the draft EER for feedback 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 an HEI disagrees with the outcome of the evaluation, it 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).

If the field of study and cycle were **previously accredited for 3 years**, the re-evaluation of the field of study and cycle is initiated no earlier than after 2 years. After the re-evaluation of the field of study and cycle, SKVC takes one of the following decisions regarding the accreditation of the field of study and cycle:

- To be accredited for the remaining term until the next evaluation of the field of study and cycle, but no longer than 4 years, if all evaluation areas are evaluated as exceptional (5 points), very good (4 points) or good (3 points).
- To not be accredited, if at least one evaluation area is evaluated as satisfactory (2 points) or 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: **Dr. Izidor Golob,** University of Maribor;
2. Academic member: **Assoc. Prof. Dr. Andrejs Romanovs,** Riga Technical University;
3. Academic member: **Assoc. Prof. Dr. Roman Danel,** Technical University of Ostrava;
4. Academic member: **Assoc. Prof. Dr. Dalia Krikščiūnienė,** Kauno kolegija;
5. Social partner representative: **Gunda Tarakanovienė,** UAB "Pixinn";
6. Student representative: **Karolina Jonuškaitė,** Vilnius University.

1.3. SITE VISIT

The site visit was organised on 29 May 2024 onsite. One meeting was a hybrid one.

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

- Senior management and administrative staff of the faculty;
- Team responsible for preparation of the SER;
- Teaching staff;
- Students;
- Alumni and social partners including employers.

There was a need for translation during the meetings, the translator was on the site.

1.4. BACKGROUND OF THE REVIEW

Overview of the HEI

Vilniaus Kolegija, also known as Vilnius Higher Education Institution, is an accredited state higher education institution in the Republic of Lithuania. It was established in the year 2000 following the implementation of the Higher Education Law of the Republic of Lithuania, which introduced a binary system of higher education in the country. The college has seven faculties, including the Faculty of Electronics and Informatics, Faculty of Economics, Faculty of Business Management, Faculty of Health Care, Faculty of Pedagogy, Faculty of Agrotechnologies, and Faculty of Arts and Creative Technologies. These faculties encompass a wide range of study fields, with a total of 40 study programs across 12 study field groups and 27 study fields as of October 2023. The college boasts a significant student body with 5,333 students, including 266 international students, and has produced over 40,000 graduates since its inception. The faculty structure is designed to ensure the organisation and execution of studies, applied research, and art activities within the respective research groups of the fields of study. The college prides itself on a graduate employability rate of 97% and a strong emphasis on internationalisation, with numerous partnerships and agreements with institutions across.

Overview of the study field

The Information Systems study field at Vilniaus Kolegija is positioned as a vital component of the college's wider context of studies and research/artistic activities. It is the sole program in its field, reflecting contemporary market needs and technological advancements. The program offers three specializations: Information Security, Financial Technologies, and IT Service Management, each designed to address specific industry demands and trends.

Partnerships and projects related to the Information Systems study field are robust and varied. The program has initiated cooperation with the ISACA Association, providing lecturers and students with access to IT activity resources and opportunities for certification. A CyberSecurity Laboratory supports the program, equipped for research and experiments in cybersecurity, further emphasizing the college's commitment to hands-on, applied learning. The Information Systems study field's integration with industry practices is also evident in its involvement with commissioned research and development projects, ensuring that the curriculum remains relevant and graduates are well-prepared for the workforce

Previous external evaluations

There is no previous external evaluation. This is the first external study field evaluation after accreditation in 2017.

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 following additional sources of information have been used by the review panel:

- Institution’s Web page

II. STUDY PROGRAMMES IN THE FIELD

First cycle/LTQF 6

Title of the study programme	Information Systems
State code	6531BX027
Type of study (college/university)	College
Mode of study (full time/part time) and nominal duration (in years)	Full-time studies – 3,5 years
Workload in ECTS	210
Award (degree and/or professional qualification)	Professional Bachelor of Computing
Language of instruction	Lithuanian
Admission requirements	Secondary Education
First registration date	7/07/2017
Comments (including remarks on joint or interdisciplinary nature of the programme, mode of provision)	

III. ASSESSMENT IN POINTS BY CYCLE AND EVALUATION AREAS

The first cycle of the information system field of study is given a positive evaluation.

No.	Evaluation Area	Evaluation points[1*]
1.	Study aims, learning outcomes and curriculum	3
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	3
5.	Teaching staff	3
6.	Learning facilities and resources	4
7.	Quality assurance and public information	4
	Total:	**24**

[1*]Evaluation points:

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.

IV. 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

The programme aims and learning outcomes are well aligned with the needs of the society/labour market.

The analysis of the ICT sector's results and trends in recent years (SER, pp. 10), indicates that "Lithuanian market is short of at least 14-15 thousand ICT professionals. By 2030, at least 40,000 specialists … will be needed." Analysis of the State Data Agency "reveals a steady increase over the last 5 years in the number of companies with IT job vacancies that have been difficult to fill. The number of companies recruiting or searching for IT professionals is also increasing or remaining fairly stable."

The general part of the study programme is developed in accordance with the qualification requirements for an information systems analyst, tester, system administrator and database administrator, while the uniqueness of the programme results is that in addition to these typical results, students achieve specific study results related to information security, financial technologies or IT service management skills, which allow graduates to make a purposeful choice of a career path, with strong theoretical knowledge and practical skills in the field of Information Systems and their selected specialisation. Interviewed experts have highlighted the critical necessity of soft skills in modern days and pointed out the low level of it among graduates from Vilnius college.

Number of enrolled students was more or less stable last years and in Lithuania Vilnius Higher Education Institution remains the leader in terms of the number of students in the field of Information Systems study.

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

The study programme complies with HEI's mission, goals, and strategy.

The aim of the programme and the learning outcomes contribute to the achievement of the main objectives and mission of the College "to provide modern higher education studies in line with European standards, to ensure the development of nationally and internationally recognized applied research and professional art…", to the goals of the strategic activities of the College "carry out professional higher education studies and lifelong learning/teaching that meet the needs of the Lithuanian and international labour market" and "develop applied research, experimental development and influential professional art that is relevant to the world of work". However, both students and social partners highlight the not sufficient involvement of students and teachers in R&D activities.

ANALYSIS AND CONCLUSION (regarding 1.1.)

The analysis herein is based on the information provided in the self-evaluation report (SER, pp. 7-11) with the annexes to it, as well as in the interviews conducted during the visit. All above mentioned criteria are

satisfied. No major shortcomings have been identified. However, some minor weaknesses have been pointed out.

The aim and learning outcomes of the study programme are correctly formulated and correspond to the strategy and goals of the College. The study programme meets the needs of the industry and the labour market in terms of technical/scientific knowledge. Demand for the field specialists in the labour market indicates good job prospects for graduates of the study programme. However, the special attention needs to be focused on development of a students' soft skills and involvement of students to the research and scientific activities.

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

Self-evaluation report confirms that the study programme complies with legal requirements.

The study programme is the first-cycle college study programme of the field of Information Systems, awarding the professional bachelor's degree. After completing the study programme, students acquire competences corresponding to the 6th cycle of the qualifications according to the requirements of the European Qualifications Structure and National Qualifications Structure (SER, pp.13). The study programme complies with the General Requirements for the Implementation for Study Conduct (2023). The study outcomes of the programme and learning outcomes of the modules and study plans are constantly resumed and necessary changes are made, taking into account the requirements of the legal acts (SER, pp.12).

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

The results of the study programme (learning outcomes) are adequate for the bachelor's degree and comply with the aim and objectives of the study program. Learning outcomes include both theoretical and practical aspects of Information Systems. The study methods of the modules are relevant to professional training of information systems specialists, while soft skills development (both students and social partners highlight the lack of soft skills in graduates) should be improved. Study learning outcomes, study methods and assessment methods of the programme are presented clearly in the SER (annex 3), showing the narrow link between aim of the study subject, the expected outcomes of the study subject, their relation to the programme outcomes, the required preparation, the scope of contact and individual work of students, the main topics of the study subject, the methods of the study subject, the methods of assessing the students' achievements, and the structure and criteria for assessment.

1.2.3. Curriculum ensures consistent development of student competences

Curriculum of study programme ensures development of student professional competences. Self-evaluating report provides a comprehensive description.

Involvement of social partners is rather because some social partners emphasised the need for higher soft skills, which they consider more important than mastering specific professional knowledge (these are changing rapidly in IT). There is evidence of social partner participation but there is still need to improve the cooperation and involvement of them.

Students' awareness of the possibility of involvement in research is not high.

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

The rapid development of IT technologies requires more flexibility in the study plan. Students can choose three specialisations in the spring semester of second year. Also there is the possibility to study three elective credit free courses.

Self-evaluation report mentions taking part at Erasmus+ as a further opportunity to study flexibility. From interviews with students, it emerged that awareness of study opportunities in the form of Erasmus studies is rather low.

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

The agreement of the topics of the final theses with the field of study is described in detail in the SER. This area is given a lot of attention in the College and the lists of theses submitted confirm the good level of topics.

A sufficient number of topics created from practice can be evaluated positively, which corresponds to the practical focus of the study programme.

ANALYSIS AND CONCLUSION (regarding 1.2.)

The analysis herein is based on the information provided in the Self-Evaluation Report (SER, pp. 9-14) with the annexes to it, as well as in the interviews conducted during the visit and additionally provided documents. All above mentioned criteria are satisfied. The courses are interconnected and complementary, they correspond to the objectives of the program and they ensure the achievement of learning outcomes. No major shortcomings have been identified. However, some minor weaknesses have been identified.

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			X		

COMMENDATIONS

1. The overall study programme is designed to lead to the achievement of its objectives and of the stated learning outcomes.
2. The content of the study programme is topic oriented and the content of the study programme generally meets the needs of the industry and the labour market in terms of technical knowledge and skills.
3. A sophisticated system of learning outcomes.

RECOMMENDATIONS

To address shortcomings

1. Activities that will enhance the students' soft skills should be included in the content. Consider project-based and group-learning-based activities where it is possible to attain soft skills through learning by doing.
2. Plan activities to increase the popularity of the R&D among students
3. Motivation (ready to grow-up) and student soft skills competencies.

For further improvement

1. Consider the development of wider possibilities for students in selection of elective courses, in order to make a study more personalised and giving flexibility to customise learning content according to the professional interests of students.
2. Strengthen the cooperation with the industry, ensuring students and teachers participation in research and development activities and projects.
3. Greater promotion of trips and the use of the Erasmus+ program among students.
4. Pay attention to developing soft skills (communication, presentation, understanding business). The level of soft skills was repeatedly mentioned during interviews with social partners as very important.

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

The faculty highly values the financing for the scientific production provided by the Lithuanian research board (LMT) and has a strategic vision for its efficient use.

In the administration level the support for scientific research is well defined: the college has rules to incentivise teaching staff for the research output. Those rules are well-communicated and applied for workload evaluation of the teaching staff, as the required number of lecture hours can be replaced by the time used for scientific research. However, the application of the strategic vision, how to increase the research output by motivating teachers to involve students is not yet efficient and might require creating an efficient action plan.

At the level of teaching staff, the SER presented evidence that teachers are actively involved in applied research with the companies, both as projects and related to the final thesis. The number of research publications is increasing over time, the topics of the research works are consistent with the subjects of the information systems field. As the faculty does not have its own annual event for presenting research, the research works are presented in external conferences. It can be noticed that the research works are prepared in teams, which conforms to the strategy of the faculty and the established researchers' group setting.

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

The subjects taught during the study programme are equipped with hardware, software and Internet of things appliances, available for each student during their study process and meeting research interests. The level of technical equipment conforms to industrial level in the area of business systems and networks. The business partners and alumni seem to be interested in the cooperation and intake of students for applied research during their practice and final thesis preparation period. However, the curriculum includes a broad scope of background subjects covering the IT area, whereas the latest development of science and technology, involving advanced programming, analytics and AI is not reflected. The limited access to the advanced subjects might hinder early acquaintance of the students to the latest developments and research, as well as readiness for career. The meeting revealed some traits of separation between the theory and practice within the subject, which is partly confirmed by the majority of applied solutions topics of the final theses.

The links between science and studies are highly affected by the internationalisation aspect of the curriculum. Involvement in international research is related to confidence of lecturers for presenting their research in international events and delivering subjects in a foreign language at the faculty and abroad, as well as the students' willingness for internationalisation of their studies. It can be stated that the involvement of teaching staff to Erasmus mobility is very active. However the motivation for international involvement of students was not expressed during the visit. The possibility of credits acquired abroad by Erasmus is intensively offered, but are not yet recognized as an advantage by students. Language skills of lecturers and students for enhancing confidence of international communication in research and studies could also add

value to the international communication indicated as a highly demanded competence by companies of social partners.

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

Despite the administrative initiative for research development, the current involvement of students in research is very passive. Only some individual cases of students confirmed awareness of participating in scientific research activities and conferences. The initiative of involvement in the research comes from teachers in relation to topics proposed by social partners, but the motivation from students was not expressed for this activity. The potential of student research activities within the framework of the study modules or during preparation of the final theses is yet highly underutilised, the development of research skills is not actively included to the learning outcomes of study modules. There is no clear evidence of study subject content related to the research methodology and increasing research skills and competences of the teachers.

ANALYSIS AND CONCLUSION (regarding 2.1.)

The readiness of the faculty for strengthening links between science and studies is high due to the clear vision of the administration of supporting research activities. The strategic measures are proposed for using the research support provided by the Lithuanian Research council for motivating lecturers and students to get involved and provide research output.

Good potential of linking study content and latest developments in research is demonstrated in the area of applied research and implementing industrial research projects in the faculty due to strong links to the social partners and organisations, preparation of final thesis based on real cases, good material basis, and planned international collaboration for project proposals. The revision of study subjects for including the latest developments and most advanced IT skills, as well as research -related study outcomes might ensure that the curriculum was linked to the latest developments in science.

The teaching staff has research experience and has research team experience for publishing their work. The participation in the industrial projects might build a good foundation for student involvement and research outcomes, however, this opportunity is not yet exploited.

The moderate activeness of teaching staff and low participation of students in the research activities might require administration to elaborate an efficient action plan for implementing the long term vision of research output. The proposed motivational measures for student involvement in the research seem to be inefficient and not clearly communicated for building awareness and for actively using them.

There is no clear evidence of study subject content related to the research methodology and increasing research skills and competences of the teachers.

AREA 2: CONCLUSIONS

AREA 2	**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			**X**		

COMMENDATIONS

1. The readiness of the faculty for strengthening links between science and studies is high due to the clear vision of the administration of supporting research activities.
2. Good potential of research is demonstrated due to involvement of applied industrial projects with the social partners and organisations
3. The teaching staff is demonstrating moderate, yet consistently increasing research output in the international level

RECOMMENDATIONS

To address shortcomings

1. The moderate activeness of teaching staff and low participation of students in the research activities might require administration to elaborate an efficient action plan for implementing the long term vision of research output
2. The revision of study subjects for including the latest developments and most advanced IT skills might ensure that the curriculum was linked to the latest developments in science.

For further improvement

1. Language skills of lecturers and students for enhancing confidence of international communication in research and studies could have a synergistic effect and add value to the international communication indicated as a highly demanded competence by companies of social partners.
2. As the research is an emerging field in the universities of applied science of Lithuania, it is recommended to amend study subject content related to the research methodology and increase the research skills and competences of the teachers.

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

VIKO follows a standard procedure for admitting students to higher education institutions in Lithuania. The admission criteria and procedures are aligned with the general requirements set by the Ministry of Education, Science and Sports. The process is transparent, as admission criteria and procedures are publicly available on the Institution's website. The self-evaluation report discusses the specifics of requirements of admission extensively, indicating that admission procedures are well-established.

Over the last four years, the number of applicants to the Information Systems field of study at VIKO has been decreasing, however, the amount of signed agreements remained relatively stable. Almost 80% of all admitted students hold state-funded positions which is a positive sign. Moreover, the highest, average and lowest competition scores are consistent and did not vary drastically over the last few years.

Overall, from experts' perspective, in terms of student admission VIKO does not seem to face severe challenges. However, it is noticeable that 34% of all admitted students (in 2020, 2021 and 2022) did not manage to finish studies on time. According to the staff, dropouts happen mainly due to the job opportunities available to the students.

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

The principles of recognition of foreign qualifications, partial learning outcomes, prior learning and other learning are documented. The description of these procedures is publicly available on the Institution's website. Experts find the procedure to be clear and well presented.

During the last three years, 15 students have requested to recognize their previously obtained qualifications. The vast majority of these students obtained previous education in Lithuania. No cases of non-accreditation were provided.

ANALYSIS AND CONCLUSION (regarding 3.1.)

Student selection and admission criteria and procedures are adequate and transparent as they are in line with the general requirements set by the Ministry of Education, Science and Sport. The information regarding admission criteria and procedures is publicly available. Despite the decreasing number of applicants, the number of signed agreements appears to be stable. The share of students who do not manage to finish their studies on time is relatively high and should be addressed. The principles of recognition of foreign qualifications, partial learning outcomes, prior learning and other learning are documented and clear.

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

Opportunities for student academic mobility are available. The information related to mobility is accessible on the Institution's website. Students confirmed that they are frequently informed about mobility possibilities via email. Moreover, students are aware of the sessions held by their peers who have been on mobility programs. However, the participation in these sessions, according to students, is relatively low.

During the visit, experts were informed that VIKO also focuses on students with disabilities. These students have an opportunity to participate in the mobility projects with a supporting staff. For instance, a deaf student went on a mobility program with a translator who helped to communicate from English to gesture language.

Even though students are aware of the opportunities for academic mobility, they show little interest in participating. The discussion with students revealed that they do not go on mobility programs because the benefits are not as clear. Furthermore, students pointed out that, in many cases, they are already employed during their studies, making it difficult to study abroad for a certain period of time.

It is evident that participation in academic mobility needs to be boosted, as only two students have taken part in exchange programs or practice over the last few years. As social partners have indicated, modern companies value students' international experience and language skills. Therefore, VIKO should develop career consulting services further to ensure that students become more confident in participating in academic mobility and see the value of such opportunity.

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

The academic support is provided through various channels. The first point of contact is the Study Office which helps students find the needed information related to studies. All academic groups are assigned tutors - lecturers and students. VIKO also offers a student handbook on the website which contains the most important information and contacts.

Students from disadvantaged families and disabled students are eligible to receive financial help which is provided by the government. The eligibility and procedures for receiving financial support are documented and available on the Institution's website. Students also receive scholarships for their academic performance. Moreover, VIKO has a Students' Association which provides an opportunity for students to engage in more activities within the Institution. Students have confirmed that they are aware of the possibility to consult with a psychologist if need be. In addition to this, students specified they frequently receive information about financial support opportunities via email.

During the visit, VIKO's staff informed the experts that there are scholarships for scientific research projects. In addition to this, social partners contribute by offering scholarships for the best students. Unfortunately, students do not seem to be aware of such opportunities, indicating the need for a more targeted communication.

3.2.3. Higher education information and student counselling are sufficient

The College organises annual meetings with students to discuss academic matters. Higher education information is provided through VIKO's website and special events. VIKO offers the usual onboarding procedure to integrate newly admitted students. At the beginning of the academic year, first-year students are introduced to the College's staff, funding opportunities, systems used and assessment procedures.

Students confirmed that information regarding courses is available on the "Academic Information System" used at the College. Teams and Moodle are employed as additional tools of communication. Even though surveys regarding the quality of studies are conducted regularly, students' participation in them is low. According to students, there are known cases when despite students' complaints related to teaching staff, such concerns have not been addressed for many years. Moreover, there are courses which are chosen by a small number of students which implies that anonymity of the surveys cannot be ensured.

ANALYSIS AND CONCLUSION (regarding 3.2.)

Student support system appears to be running smoothly with some possibilities for future improvements. Student academic mobility opportunities are available, however, the participation rate is low. Academic, financial, social, psychological, and personal support provided to students is well-established. Nevertheless, students are not fully aware of the available funding opportunities, particularly those related to scientific research projects. Higher education information and student counselling are sufficient. At the same time, the communication regarding introduced changes based on the conducted surveys may be improved as students doubted whether any changes were truly implemented.

AREA 3: CONCLUSIONS

AREA 3	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				X	

COMMENDATIONS

1. VIKO's admission criteria and procedures are transparent and aligned with national requirements, ensuring an easy admission process.
2. The recognition procedures for foreign qualifications and prior formal/non-formal learning at VIKO are well-documented and clearly presented on the institution's website.
3. VIKO provides comprehensive support for students with disabilities, enabling their participation in academic mobility programs.
4. The institution offers extensive academic, financial, social, and psychological support to students, promoting their overall well-being and success.

RECOMMENDATIONS

To address shortcomings

1. None.

For further improvement

1. Addressing the reasons for a relatively high share of students who do not manage to finish their studies on time.
2. Encouraging students to go on academic mobility programs - currently students seem to have doubts about the benefits of such opportunity.
3. Better communication about funding for student scientific research projects and financial support from social partners.

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

The programme encourages active learning through diverse teaching methods and provides extensive support materials via Moodle.

The absence of a lecturers' learning centre and the lack of application of new methodologies negatively impact students by limiting their exposure to innovative and engaging teaching practices, which can result in a less dynamic and effective learning experience.

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

The evaluation of conditions ensuring access to study for socially vulnerable groups and students with special needs at Vilnius HEI reveals a structured and supportive approach, yet there are areas for potential enhancement.

Advisory services at the Faculty's Study Department offer essential guidance on accessibility issues, demonstrating a commitment to supporting students from socially vulnerable groups. The planned training course for lecturers on developing accessible learning materials is a positive step, indicating a proactive approach to improving educational inclusivity.

However, the impact of these measures could be further strengthened by regular assessments and feedback from the students who benefit from these services. Additionally, expanding training opportunities for lecturers to include more comprehensive and ongoing professional development could ensure that all faculty members are well-equipped to support diverse student needs effectively.

ANALYSIS AND CONCLUSION (regarding 4.1.)

While Vilnius College effectively addresses student needs through active learning and comprehensive support, the lack of a dedicated lecturers' learning centre and innovative teaching methodologies presents a drawback. Enhancing professional development and incorporating new teaching practices could further improve the learning experience. The institution's support for socially vulnerable groups and students with special needs is commendable, but continual evaluation and enhancement of these measures are essential for maintaining and improving their impact.

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

Vilnius College employs a comprehensive and systematic approach to monitor learning progress and provide feedback, which effectively supports student development and self-assessment.

However, there are areas for improvement. Although there is a quality assurance (QA) process in place with periodic internal assessments of the study program, the participation of stakeholders. Students have expressed that their feedback is not adequately heard, indicating that the QA process could be further enhanced by ensuring more inclusive and effective stakeholder participation.

4.2.2. Graduate employability and career are monitored

Vilnius College has a robust system for monitoring graduate employability and career success, supported by high employment rates and positive feedback from graduates and employers. However, the lack of specialisation - specific employment data and the absence of internal survey results limit the depth of insights. Addressing these gaps could enhance the understanding of graduate outcomes and further improve the alignment of the program with market demands.

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

Vilnius College has robust policies in place to ensure academic integrity, tolerance, and non-discrimination, effectively maintaining high ethical standards and supporting a respectful and inclusive academic environment. The updated assessment requirements, which include comments on completed tasks, further enhance the institution's commitment to academic rigour and transparency. The institution's proactive measures and the absence of reported violations highlight the effectiveness of these policies.

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

The establishment of the Appeal Committee and the detailed process for examining appeals and making decisions provide a transparent and systematic framework.

However, the absence of any appeals during the review period raises questions about the effectiveness and visibility of these procedures. It could indicate that students are either unaware of their right to appeal or do not feel empowered to use this process. Additionally, the lack of appeals might suggest a high level of satisfaction with the assessment processes, but it could also imply potential gaps in communication or trust between students and the administration regarding the handling of complaints and appeals.

While the procedures for submitting and processing appeals and complaints are comprehensive and structured, the effectiveness of these procedures is difficult to fully evaluate due to the absence of actual appeals during the review period. Ensuring that students are well-informed about their rights and the appeal process, and fostering an environment where they feel comfortable raising concerns, could enhance the practical effectiveness of these procedures. Regularly reviewing and promoting these processes might also help ensure that they serve their intended purpose effectively.

ANALYSIS AND CONCLUSION (regarding 4.2.)

Vilnius College has a comprehensive and systematic approach to monitoring learning progress and providing feedback, effectively supporting student development and self-assessment. However, the quality assurance process could be improved by increasing stakeholder participation, as students feel their feedback is not adequately heard. The college effectively monitors graduate employability and career success, with high

employment rates and positive feedback, though the lack of specialisation-specific employment data and internal survey results limits deeper insights. Addressing these gaps could better align programs with market demands. Policies ensuring academic integrity, tolerance, and non-discrimination are robust, maintaining high ethical standards, and updated assessment requirements enhance academic rigour and transparency. While procedures for submitting and processing appeals are well-structured, the absence of appeals raises questions about their visibility and effectiveness. Enhancing student awareness and comfort in using these processes could improve their practical effectiveness, and regular reviews and promotions of these procedures are recommended.

AREA 4: CONCLUSIONS

AREA 4	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			X		

COMMENDATIONS

1. Vilnius College has a comprehensive and systematic approach to monitoring learning progress and providing feedback.
2. The institution has good enough policies to ensure academic integrity, tolerance, and non-discrimination, maintaining high ethical standards and an inclusive academic environment.
3. Vilnius College demonstrates a strong commitment to supporting socially vulnerable groups and students with special needs through structured services and planned training courses for teaching staff.

RECOMMENDATIONS

To address shortcomings

1. Increase the visibility and accessibility of feedback surveys to ensure that students feel their input is valued and acted upon, thus enhancing their engagement and satisfaction.

For further improvement

1. Collect and analyse employment data, ensuring consideration of whether graduates are employed in their respective specialities.
2. Develop a dedicated centre for lecturers' professional development to foster continuous learning and the adoption of innovative teaching methodologies.

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 staffing of the field of study and the qualifications of the lecturers is sufficient.

The scope of employment (the number of hours taught per semester) is controlled, it is set according to the employment given in the contract. There are limits of students per class and a limit of supervised theses per teacher.

Processes for evaluating student success and applying graduates are established.

Due to the trend towards the internationalisation of teaching, it is an important aspect to ensure the language competence of lecturers and scientists.

ANALYSIS AND CONCLUSION (regarding 5.1.)

If the school requires publications in the area of taught subjects and these publications are to be in valuable publication outputs (e.g. journals with IF), clear conditions must be set and specified from which sources of funding are possible.

The language competence of teachers is important - the IT field is characterised by a high degree of internationalisation and knowledge of professional terminology in English is an absolute must.

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

The HEI supports teacher mobility and a selection procedure is defined. Teachers have the opportunity to travel for a teaching stay as part of Erasmus+. The HEI provides a sufficiently extensive network of partner universities within Erasmus. There is also support for travelling abroad as part of other activities, such as conferences. The conditions for receiving such a form of support are not specified in detail.

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

According to the self-evaluation report, the HEI declares support for increasing the competence of lecturers. The extent of financial support per teacher and sources of finance are not specified. It is also not stated whether the HEI provides grants to ensure quality publication outputs in impact journals.

ANALYSIS AND CONCLUSION (regarding 5.2.)

The possibilities of pedagogues in the field of internationalisation are at a good level. The school provides support for the professional growth of teachers. When teaching subjects connected with IT technologies that are characterised by rapid development, the continuous development of lecturers is essential. To ensure the

teaching of specific technologies, it is advisable to use experts from practice, given the practical focus of the teaching.

AREA 5: CONCLUSIONS

AREA 5	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			X		

COMMENDATIONS

1. The range of workload of lecturers is controlled according to the scope of contract
2. KPIs for employee evaluation are established and managed
3. Assessment process and students feedback evaluation
4. The HEI encourages lecturers to participate in other international events.

RECOMMENDATIONS

To address shortcomings

1. Ability of lectures to teach subjects in English.

For further improvement

1. Support for the arrival of teachers from abroad and lessons from experts in practice.
2. Support for improving the foreign language (English) skills of lecturers.
3. Greater awareness of teachers about existing processes and procedures.
4. Establish procedure of substitutability in case of long-term or sudden absence of a teacher.

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

Self-evaluation report confirms that the material and methodological base of the College is sufficient to carry out the programmes of the study field of Information Systems.

Almost 9000 sq.m. of total area, the faculty has 11 shared computer classrooms with the necessary hardware and software for teaching courses, teaching practice, and time for individual work; in total the number of workstations is 497. 12 laboratories for practical and laboratory work (laboratory models, stands, computers, system and application software) are available at the faculty; the study programme is implemented in 3 specialised laboratories with 59 workstations: Cybersecurity Laboratory, Computer Networking Laboratory, CISCO Academy and Computer Networking and Telecommunications. All auditoriums and classrooms meet fire prevention requirements and sanitary standards; buildings are adapted for the persons with special needs.

The properly funded library has a good amount and level of up-to-date scientific sources, both paper and digital, as well as good subscriptions and cross-library links available for all students and teachers. ISACA membership provides students with additional valuable sources of information.

In both SER and interviews a description of how existing infrastructure is or can be used for R&D activities of teachers and students, developing projects for industry or science, was missing.

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

Classroom and laboratory equipment is regularly updated (annual renewal rate is average of 20%) and the necessary hardware and software is purchased. The IT resources upgrade is planned by the teachers annually, while the purchase has been organised centrally at HEI level. It is not clear how the goals of the study programme are supported by the resources, while it is excluded from the purchase decision process.

ANALYSIS AND CONCLUSION (regarding 6.1.)

The analysis herein is based on the information provided in the Self-Evaluation Report (SER, pp. 41-44) with the annexes to it, as well as in the interviews conducted during the visit. All above mentioned criteria are satisfied. No major shortcomings have been identified.

The College has allocated all needed provisions (scientific, informative, material, technical and financial) such that the bachelor's program can be implemented efficiently and correctly. The funding of the programme seems to support the program implementation in this current form. However, the concerns exist related to the (a) strategic use of resources to involve students and teachers in scientific research, and (b) support of the study programme goals by the resources.

AREA 6: CONCLUSIONS

AREA 6	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				X	

COMMENDATIONS

1. Sufficient facilities for the implementation of the study process, well-equipped laboratories, and easily accessible full-service library. The College premises are adapted to persons with special needs.
2. Good working cooperation with local industry providing internship/practice places for students (32 in 2020-2023)

RECOMMENDATIONS

To address shortcomings

1. None.

For further improvement

1. Strengthen the cooperation with the industry, ensuring internships/practice for the students, traineeship for the teaching staff, participating in research and development activities and projects.
2. Plan activities to increase the popularity of the R&D among students in order to create additional value from the use of IT resources
3. Consider the re-designing of the resource acquisition procedure in order to organise it for maximum benefits of the study program.

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

Internal QA system is described in “The Quality Manual”. It defines the organisation’s commitment to quality, defines stakeholder involvement and the role of a QA management system. The structure of field study management, decision-making process and the periodicity of internal assessment are described.

The structure is defined, human resources are allocated to effective management.

The program is designed to meet the needs of the society and the labour market, aligns with the institution's mission and strategic goals, complies with legal requirements, and employs a variety of teaching/learning and assessment methods to ensure quality education.

The organisation’s strategic indicators are given for 2021-2025 in the Quality Manual, which make it dependable - the evaluators don’t find this as a good practice.

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

The QA description outlines the roles of various stakeholders, including the Head of the Information Systems Department, lecturers, and a student representative, among others. They are part of the Self-Evaluation Group, which is responsible for the QA process. The document also mentions the involvement of social partners in formulating and updating the learning outcomes of the program, reflecting a collaborative approach to QA. This was confirmed on the visit during the interviews.

Additionally, the study process is student-centred, with opportunities for students to individualise their study process and provide feedback, which is considered in the QA process.

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

VIKO has established a comprehensive framework for maintaining transparency and accountability through its "Description of Procedure for Informing the Public on Quality Issues." This document outlines the responsibilities of specific departments in providing information related to various activities. It mandates the publication of both general and field-specific information, ensuring that stakeholders (both students and social partners) have access to essential information.

In addition to general information about studies, they also provide information about graduate careers, monitoring results, and external evaluations. By providing this information, the institution helps potential students understand the career opportunities of graduates and their study quality assurance processes.

All this above-mentioned information is made publicly accessible on the VIKO website.

7.1.4. Student feedback is collected and analysed

National Student Survey app (NSA) is not utilised: the college collects and summarises the students' opinions on their own. We got the understanding that the app is not used because it has problems with the national level administration.

The student surveys are conducted periodically, their results are analysed and discussed, and a plan is drawn up and implemented to improve the quality of studies. These documents suggest a structured approach to collecting and analysing student feedback, involving periodic surveys and active involvement of students and graduates in the evaluation process to enhance the quality and relevance of the study programmes.

Students claim their feedback is not heard while the team has seen evidence that the college reflects the opinion of the students but we could recommend to make more direct contact and make updates on the changes that are made.

ANALYSIS AND CONCLUSION (regarding 7.1.)

The documents (self-report and other documents) have given a real good impression: the documentation is well prepared.

The college has stable QA processes in place. However, there is some gap in transparency of the executing processes (e.g. complaint process).

AREA 7: CONCLUSIONS

AREA 7	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				X	

COMMENDATIONS

1. Stable QA processes are in place.
2. The organisation has its own “Description of procedure for informing the public on quality issues”.

RECOMMENDATIONS

For further improvement

1. Any action planned or already taken following the assessment should be communicated to all stakeholders. This includes a complaint process, which was reported as non-transparent by some students.
2. Take actions to improve the student survey response rate.
3. Detail the stakeholder participation by having minutes of the meetings and their suggestions clearly seen.
4. Improve the Quality Manual by making it non-dependent on current strategic goals as they might change frequently.

V. SUMMARY

Vilniaus kolegija /Vilnius Higher Education Institution (hereinafter referred to as HEI) is an accredited state higher education institution of the Republic of Lithuania. Currently, the HEI is the biggest vocational higher education institution in Lithuania. The Faculty of Electronics and Informatics (hereinafter referred to as the Faculty) is a subdivision of the HEI, responsible for the organisation of studies, applied research activities carried out in the respective groups of researchers in the respective fields of study, ensuring the quality of academic activities, and the planning of the Faculty's activities. At the HEI, the Information Systems study programme is the only one in the Information Systems field of study. In 2017, this study programme was substantially renewed and registered as a new programme of study in the field of Information Systems. The Information Systems degree programme has 3 specialisations: Information Security, Financial Technologies and IT Service Management.

The study programme is well-aligned with industry and labour market needs, and has a sophisticated system of learning outcomes. Students' soft skills could be enhanced, and the recommended actions are to increase the popularity of R&D among students, and develop wider possibilities for elective courses. The internationalisation of the education system is underdeveloped, the students are not aware and not prepared to go for Erasmus exchange, whereas the social partners highlighted the requirement of employees with good language skills, ability to work in a multicultural environment and communicate to international partners.

A cooperation with the ISACA Association which provides lecturers and students with exceptional opportunities to obtain relevant information and other methodological resources from the world of IT activities is to be praised as a good practice.

The faculty is ready to strengthen links between science and studies, and there is good potential for research due to industrial projects. However, the involvement of students is not intensive - a small number of students are aware of the possibilities for participating in scientific research projects and conferences. The scientific conference for joining IS and IT students is not organised by the faculty, and the possibilities to participate at other IT conferences is not used.

The faculty could create an action plan for research output, revise study subjects to include the latest IT developments, and improve language skills for international communication. The high share of students not finishing on time should be addressed and academic mobility further encouraged.

Student Career services could be enhanced for exposure of students to the requirements of the companies to be successfully employed (e.g. business models, presentation, teamwork, motivation to learn new skills).

The college has stable processes in place; however, there is some gap in transparency of the executing processes (e.g. complaint process). There is a QA process in place, there are periodical internal assessments to the study program.

The evaluation group did not find any obstacles that would object to the continuation of the study program, that is there are no substantial shortcomings to be eliminated.

The evaluation team wants to thank the HEI for their efforts and for engaging in discussions with the review panel.