



Kuriame  
Lietuvos ateitį  
2014–2020 metų  
Europos Sąjungos  
fondų investicijų  
veiksmų programa



## **STUDIJŲ KOKYBĖS VERTINIMO CENTRAS**

# **ŠIAULIŲ UNIVERSITETO VEIKLOS VERTINIMO IŠVADOS**

---

## **INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW REPORT OF ŠIAULIAI UNIVERSITY**

Grupės vadovas:  
Team leader:

Prof. Andreas Knorr

Grupės nariai:  
Team members:

Prof. Tiiu Paas

Prof. Kari Jouko Raiha

Mr. Stasys Švagždys

Ms. Meda Andrijauskienė

Vertinimo sekretorius:  
Review secretary:

Dr. Helene Kamensky

## CONTENTS

I. INTRODUCTION.....	3
II. BACKGROUND INFORMATION ABOUT THE INSTITUTION.....	5
III. STRATEGIC MANAGEMENT .....	7
IV. ACADEMIC STUDIES AND LIFE-LONG LEARNING .....	13
V. RESEARCH AND ART.....	18
VI. IMPACT ON REGIONAL AND NATIONAL DEVELOPMENT .....	23
VII. GOOD PRACTICE AND ENHANCEMENT RECOMMENDATIONS.....	29
VIII. JUDGEMENT .....	32
ANNEX. ŠIAULIAI UNIVERSITY RESPONSE TO REVIEW REPORT.....	33

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The review team wishes to thank Rector Professor Donatas Jurgaitis, Vice-Rectors, members of the Council and Senate of Šiauliai University, members of the self-evaluation team, staff, faculty, and students for their hospitality, open discussions and committed participation in the review process.

The review team also wishes to express its gratitude and appreciation to the staff members of the Centre for Quality Assessment in Higher Education (SKVC) for the excellent planning and organization of the visit. The review team owes special thanks to Ms. Tautvilė Tunaitienė, the Evaluation Coordinator, for the efficient support in preparation for and during the site visit.

## I. INTRODUCTION

1. This report summarizes findings of a second institutional review of Šiauliai University (hereafter “SU” or “the University”) carried out by an international expert team (hereafter “the team”). The first review of SU occurred in 2012 with the report submitted in 2013. The Institutional Review was organized and commissioned by the Lithuanian Centre for Quality Assessment in Higher Education (SKVC), an Authorized Agency founded by the Ministry of Education and Science of the Republic of Lithuania. The review was conducted according to the “Methodology for Conducting an Institutional Review in Higher Education (hereafter “the Methodology”) determined by the Procedure for the External Review in Higher Education approved by the Resolution No 1317 of the Government of the Republic of Lithuania of September 22, 2010.

2. The primary purpose of this institutional review is to evaluate the changes and improvements against the recommendations made in 2012. At the same time, this follow-up institutional review provides an opportunity for the University to assess the effectiveness of its strategies and activities for fostering development and change in the context of internal and external challenges and opportunities. The team hopes that its recommendations will facilitate further enhancement of the University’s operations to achieve its mission, vision and strategic goals.

3. As background information on the present state of the University’s development, the institutional management provided the team with a set of documents comprising Šiauliai

University strategy, Annual Strategy Implementation Action Plans 2015 and 2016, University Quality Guide, the Self-Evaluation Report supported by detailed annexes as well as further documentation that was provided on request of the team. In addition, the team received the MOSTA Report of July 22, 2015 “Findings regarding the compliance of Šiauliai University learning resources with the minimum quality requirements for the infrastructure and organization of higher education studies.” The preparatory documents gave a concise overview of the current situation of SU and the main challenges it is facing.

4. The team commends the University on the efficient Self-Evaluation Report (SER). The SER is well-written, clearly structured and has a strong focus on self-analysis and self-reflection. The SER gave a comprehensive overview of the current University strategy and provided the team with a detailed assessment of the University’s actions in response to the recommendations made in the Institutional Review Report 2013.

5. The team visited SU from Tuesday, March 22 through Thursday, March 24, 2016. The team held a series of meetings with the University’s senior management, Council and Senate representatives, administrative staff, faculty, students, alumni and social partners. The team appreciated the open and constructive atmosphere during the site visit.

6. The team noted that the University has been able to address most of the issues raised in the Institutional Review Report 2013, and made substantial improvements in the targeted areas. As the team has witnessed during the site visit, SU’s leadership is strong and dedicated and the faculty and staff members are committed to the work of the University. The overall impression of the team is that SU does well given the internal and external constraints under which the University has to operate.

7. The team explored four main areas in the University’s activities as set out in the Methodology, i.e. strategic management, academic studies and life-long learning, research and art activities, and impact on regional and national development. The conclusions and recommendations of the team follow the criteria set out in the Methodology and represent the consensus of the team.

8. The expert team consisted of: Team Leader: Prof. Andreas Knorr; team members: Prof. Tiiu Paas, Prof. Kari Jouko Raiha, Ms. Meda Andrijauskienė; Mr. Stasys Švagždys; review secretary, Dr. Helene Kamensky.

## II. BACKGROUND INFORMATION ABOUT THE INSTITUTION

9. Šiauliai University is the largest university in the Northern Lithuania. The University traces its origin to the creation of the Šiauliai Teacher Training Institute in 1948. In 1954, the Šiauliai Teacher Training Institute was reorganized into Šiauliai Pedagogical Institute. In 1959, a branch of Kaunas Polytechnic Institute was founded in Šiauliai, and was later re-named as Šiauliai Polytechnic Faculty of Kaunas University of Technology. In 1997, Šiauliai University was established as a result of the merger between Šiauliai Pedagogical Institute and Šiauliai Polytechnic Faculty of Kaunas University of Technology.

10. The key characteristics of the University are

- 4000 students
- 300 academic staff members
- an organization structure of three faculties and two institutes being established after the reorganization of the University's division on February 1, 2016: Faculty of Social Science, Humanity, and Arts; Faculty of Technology, Physical and Biomedical Sciences; Faculty of Education Science and Social Welfare; Continuing Studies Institute; Research Institute; 12 research centres as well as a European Studies Centre
- a three-cycle degree structure (Bachelor-Master-Doctorate)
- 43 Bachelor study programmes, 29 Master study programmes and Doctoral study programmes in 4 fields
- 24 international study programmes taught in English or Russian
- 130 cooperation agreements with foreign higher education institutions from 40 countries
- active participation in the EU projects including ERASMUS+, EUREKA, EQUAL, INTERREG, LAT-LIT, and EU Structural funds

11. The University's mission

“to promote the progress of the region and the country by research, artistic and innovative studies activities of the international level”.

12. The University's vision

“to be a University of innovative research and studies – a leader of regional progress”.

### 13. The University's strategic aim

“by developing strategic management, to ensure training highest qualification specialists, developing research and artistic activities and increasing impact on regional and national development”.

### 14. The University's strategic directions 2015-2020

- “development of strategic management
- increasing internationalization of research and artistic activities and development of international partnerships
- development of the studies process
- increasing impact on regional and national development”

### 15. The University's values

“openness – responsibility – creativeness – breakthrough – sociality”

### III. STRATEGIC MANAGEMENT

16. The efficiency and effectiveness of the University's strategic management was explored against the criteria set out in the Methodology, i.e. the strategic plan's fitness for purpose, publicity, guarantees for its implementation and management effectiveness.

17. In the 2012 Review, the topic of strategic management was given a negative evaluation. The main reasons for the negative evaluation were lack of a clear profile and strategic focus of the University against the backdrop of its manifold external and internal challenges.

18. The team found that the University has succeeded in making tangible improvements since the first institutional review despite the challenging economic and demographic environment. The team has the opinion that the improvements are essentially due to two factors: the appointment of several new members to the management team (in the capacity of rector, vice rector and quality manager) after the 2012 review, and a very active role currently played by the Council in supporting the University's management team and the Senate in formulating, revising and implementing the Strategic Plan. Also, the Council's efforts to assist in optimizing the regional impact of the University are considered by the team to be a best practice example in Lithuania. In addition to fulfilling all legal requirements to formally involve stakeholders in the strategic planning and decision-making processes, the University's management pursues an efficient communication strategy towards stakeholders and actively seeks their input also through informal channels.

19. SU's mission, vision and strategic goals make it clear that the University seeks to contribute to the growth and development of the Šiauliai region and the Republic of Lithuania without compromising research requirements of the international academic community. However, this strategic approach poses significant challenges to the University. The team notes in this respect that this challenge is not unique to SU and is common for research universities worldwide. Recommendations on how to address this issue will be proposed in the respective chapters of this report.

20. The team found that the SU's Strategic Plan and its implementation status are now fully aligned with the University's mission and consistent with all pertinent legal requirements. The Strategy recognises the underlying principles of the European Higher Education Area and the European Research Area as well.

21. In 2012, the previous review team gained the impression that SU tried to be “everything to everyone” having to overstretch its limited resources instead of trying to identify and build on the institutional strengths. Furthermore, the previous university management did not undertake a SWOT analysis. Instead of devising and executing a coherent strategy, the previous SU’s management relied almost exclusively on planning and operational tools and processes. Strategic aims and staff responsibilities were not clearly defined. There was no strategic guidance through appropriate enforcement of roles and responsibilities and achievement indicators, and, therefore, the overall staff motivation was very low.

22. The team found that substantial progress has been made to transform SU’s strategic management into an effective tool for achieving improvements in all of the aforementioned areas. First, SU conducted a meaningful SWOT analysis as a basis for the strategic planning process. It is evident to the team from all discussions held that the SWOT analysis will be conducted on a regular basis. Second, a comprehensive Strategic Plan 2015-2020 has been developed, and is now being implemented. The Strategic Plan also addresses the shortcomings and challenges which were identified in the MOSTA report with the aim of overcoming them during the reference period. The Strategic Plan is consistent with the SU’s mission and vision; the latter are now much more focused and provide a working framework for strategic decisions. It is commendable that the University, in very close collaboration with all relevant stakeholders, particularly those represented by the Council and the Senate, including employees and student representatives, identified a limited number of focus areas for research, teaching and outreach to society. These areas are now organized in an interdisciplinary and inter-sectoral manner in an attempt to overcome the partitioning of activities into silos, ultimately fostering collaboration between SU’s faculties, departments and administrative units. Also, all relevant information on the Strategic Plan and its implementation status is made available not only to the Council and the Senate; it is also communicated to relevant government authorities, the general public and the academic community.

23. The key performance indicators of the SU Strategy (a total of 16) and the implementation indicators foreseen by the Annual Action Plan (a total of 123) were developed in cooperation with relevant stakeholders, including the Council. They provide a reasonable mix of both qualitative and quantitative characteristics and cover all aspects of the SU Strategic Plan including finances. The number of indicators, especially of the implementation indicators, appears to be relatively high. Nevertheless, the team considers that the indicator-driven approach



used by the University's management to monitor the implementation of the Strategic Plan is fit for purpose.

24. As the team learned during the visit, faculty and staff members are familiar and executing their activities based upon the indicators relevant to their areas of work.

25. The team recognized an adequate exchange and information flow between all stakeholder groups, and particularly between the University's management and the Council. The staff interviewed confirmed as well that their tasks, responsibilities and administrative procedures are now clearly defined, and redundancies have been substantially reduced. As a result, staff commitment to the University was considerably improved. The University's management continuously monitors the progress towards the achievement of targets set against the indicators. Performance shortfalls with respect to the achievement of indicator targets are addressed and discussed with relevant stakeholders and remedial action is taken, if necessary.

26. The team recognizes that SU operates an integrated system for quality assurance which emulates the approach of the University of Jyväskylä, Finland. The quality assurance system was introduced in 2012, and it is now fully operational. The quality assurance processes and procedures are very well documented and are in line with the legal requirements of the Republic of Lithuania as well as with the requirements of the European Qualifications Framework (EQF). The team found that staff members, students and other stakeholders are familiar with the objectives and the functioning of the quality assurance (QA) system the University has put in place.

27. The team commends the University for establishing the Quality Month as part of the internal QA system. The Quality Month is organized at regular intervals bringing together senior management, faculty, research and administrative staff, students and external stakeholders to review and discuss the quality assurance processes, procedures and actual outcomes.

28. The team notes that high-quality study programmes depend significantly on a sufficient number of good prospective students and qualified teachers. In recent years, the University reduced the size of its teaching staff due to financial constraints and a decline in student enrolment. Full-time teachers are now concerned whether they can maintain their status in the future. Some of those with reduced appointments have been able to find additional opportunities by teaching part-time in schools. Evidently, uncertainty of the future can be detrimental to the

University's educational atmosphere. As the team learned, SU is deploying a longer-term recruiting strategy which is likely to help reduce the aforementioned concerns.

29. The team commends the University for putting in place a new motivation and staff development system as an integral part of the internal quality assurance system. It is the understanding of the team, however, that this system is not yet fully effective - though some important elements have been recently introduced. It applies to teaching, research and administrative staff alike. To illustrate the point: as a result of shrinking number of staff members, the University raised salaries and provided financial and non-financial support for visible research outputs, teaching excellence and professional development. Nevertheless, indicators on staff satisfaction show only slight improvement among academic staff members. This might be due to several reasons including the time lag in the data given the recent and only partial introduction of the new motivation system. It might also be due to the fact that the current motivation system primarily relies on non-financial perks given the limited resource base of the University.

30. The team's overall assessment of the SU's new indicator-driven strategic management approach - including its general recommendations with respect to the University's strategic management system (see below) - also apply to the SU's quality assurance system. Nevertheless, SU should further refine its quality assurance system. While the current quality assurance processes are centred on the achievement of existing quality targets/indicators, efforts should be made to ensure that the University's quality assurance schemes have a strong focus on continuous quality improvement. As a best practice the University might consider benchmarking its own quality assurance system against those of leading universities worldwide. It should be noted, however, that the challenge of fostering both the quality assurance and quality enhancement is not unique to SU but a common issue for many universities in the Republic of Lithuania and around the world.

31. The implementation of the SU's Strategic Plan has substantially altered and improved the institutional process management, change management and resource management – the latter includes the sale of surplus real state and facilities aiming, *inter alia*, at stabilising the University's financial position. Spending of funds has also been optimized since the 2012 review and brought closely in line with the goals of the University's Strategic Plan. A consistent and unified approach in these three management areas is now in place. This assessment was confirmed through the interviews conducted by the team with SU's management and different

stakeholder groups as well as by means of the pertinent internal documents provided by the SU's management to the team (including but not limited to the SU's Annual Action Plan).

32. Adherence to the international standards of academic ethics is ensured in manifold ways. Obviously, there is a strong awareness among faculty and students on the overriding importance of ensuring academic ethics and integrity. The awareness is created and raised through dissemination of pertinent information and regular training. Plagiarism is not tolerated, and adequate procedures are in place to identify and properly sanction cases of plagiarism.

### 33. **A brief overview of the area (strengths and weaknesses)**

It is evident to the team that the management of the strategy and the internal quality assurance has been substantially improved since the first institutional review in 2012. All recommendations of the previous review team were taken into account. The implementation of these recommendations is well documented.

The team identified the following areas of **strengths**:

- SWOT analysis conducted in a systematic manner;
- Development of a comprehensive Strategic Plan based on the results of the SWOT analysis;
- Significant involvement of stakeholders in the strategic planning process;
- Creation of an indicator-driven management system of strategy milestones.

The team identified the following areas of **weaknesses**:

- A large number of implementation indicators;
- Rigid adherence to the reporting intervals of the implementation indicators. Since the external conditions in which SU operates remain challenging as well as its funding structure, it is essential, that the implementation indicators are regularly reviewed and revised depending on current or future conditions.

### 34. **Recommendations for enhancement**

- The implementation of the Strategic Plan should be monitored and assessed at regular intervals on the basis of a firm schedule with clearly defined milestones.
- Existing key performance indicators as well as implementation indicators should be regularly reviewed for their fitness of purpose. This recommendation holds true for the internal quality assurance system as well. An appropriate framework might be a comprehensive mid-term assessment which would be conducted by management, internal and external stakeholders as well as by independent experts. In this exercise, efforts should be made to identify both redundant indicators and areas of relevance for strategic management which are not yet adequately covered by the indicators. An example could be additional measurements of the regional impact of the University based on the proven methodology of regional economic impact analysis (which includes direct, indirect, induced and the catalytic effects of the university on the region).
- Reporting intervals for implementation indicators should be reduced to an optimum cycle in order to minimize the administrative burden and the transaction costs of running the monitoring and reporting system. It might take several cycles of reporting to determine the proper interval for a given set of implementation indicators, but the effects of lowering administrative burden on faculty and staff should have a positive effect on their morale. An example could be the implementation indicators related to research performance because there is often a long lead time between the completion of the manuscripts and their publication dates, and reporting on research outputs once a year seems to be adequate. On a more general note, management should consider moving towards yearly indicators or even three-year gliding averages wherever this fits the reporting and monitoring objectives.

**35. The team's judgement on the area: Strategic Management is given a positive evaluation.**

#### IV. ACADEMIC STUDIES AND LIFE-LONG LEARNING

36. The team evaluated academic studies and life-long learning of the University against the criteria set out in the Methodology from the perspective of assessing compliance within the requirements of Lithuanian higher education and harmonization with the principles of the European Higher Education Area.

37. In the 2012 review, the area of academic studies and life-long learning was given a positive evaluation. The University was commended for a strong focus on the implementation of advanced teaching and learning methodology including problem-based learning, case study method, etc. as well as for the effective participation in the pertinent international mobility programs for faculty and students.

38. The 2012 review team recommended that SU become more active in asking for support from the local industry and public administration and to go beyond just telling the needs. On the whole, this recommendation has been addressed.

39. The team explored the relevance of SU's academic activities to the University's mission. SU is the only university in Northern Lithuania. Therefore, the University offers a broad range of study programmes and the majority of students stay in the region after graduation. On the national level there are some specializations, such as speech therapists that can get their education only at this university. Thus, the University's study programmes serve both regional and national goals as set forth in its mission statement.

40. The team commends the University on the versatile steps it has taken to address the needs of students with different life situations. These include standard means like providing opportunity for both full-time and part-time studies and the increased use of eLearning possibilities, including exceptional and unique actions like establishing a childcare facility to provide care to children on an hourly basis. The reported diminishing interest in part-time studies that can be attributed to the increased use of eLearning facilities are positive developments in modernizing the implementation of study programmes.

41. The team found that the University offers a broad spectrum of opportunities for lifelong learning. SU delivers lectures and provides relevant courses for school children and adult learners. Educational activities in continuing professional development are accessible through the Continuing Studies Institute. The team found evidence in various discussions that this

principle of implementing a one-stop shop works effectively in the renewed organizational structure. In addition, the infrastructure provided by the University, such as the library, is made available to the community.

42. The discussions with academic staff and students suggest that SU's teachers strive to facilitate student learning by creating a learner-centred educational environment. Students confirmed during the visit that faculty members use a broad set of approaches to facilitate active learning (e.g. debates, case studies, group projects) as well as involve students in the assessment process.

43. The team recognized that the University has taken actions to help graduates find jobs. The streamlining and the modernizing of study programmes is a fundamental step; inclusive of additional support activities. For instance, agreements have been signed with companies and the municipality on their intent to hire students after graduation. This also directly helps the University to serve the needs of the region and nation by assuring availability of professionals that are in high demand. The employment of graduates is monitored on a regular basis. The graduate employment indicator has been included in the Annual Action Plan of strategy implementation. Respective data are drawn from the information provided by the national computerised career monitoring system (KVIS). The graduates' employment rate has been slightly improved being 70 % in graduation year for full-time students, and more than 80% one year after graduation. For part-time students the numbers are even higher. This shows the usefulness of the education provided by the improved study programmes. The actions that have contributed to this include an increase in the number of ECTS credits given for practical placement and increased teaching of transferable skills.

44. An extensive academic programme review process has taken place in order to rationalise the portfolio of degree programs. Market research on the needs of the nation and the region was conducted including competitor analysis and cost-effectiveness analysis of the existing study programmes. Annual quality days and regular feedback collected from courses helped to pinpoint possible issues with existing study programmes. As a result, only those study programmes that have been accredited for six years or are cost-effective and unique in Lithuania or in high demand in the labour market, have been retained and revised to fit the current needs. This is necessary and positive development considering especially the Lithuanian demographics (decreasing numbers of school-leavers on a national scale), the competition with other universities in bigger cities, and the local competition with the Šiauliai State College.

45. The study programme development process has been extensively documented and shows the involvement of all relevant stakeholders. In particular, student feedback is collected regularly on an annual basis, and findings are analysed at the Department of Strategic and Quality Management as well as at the meetings of Faculty and Study Programmes Committees. The development process should be continuously monitored and additional actions are to be taken when the need arises. At the same time, the team considers that the University should maintain reasonable stability of its study programmes. If the main programmes are revised too often e.g. every three years, it could negatively affect the value of graduates of phased out study programmes in the labour market because employers might think that the study programme is of poor quality. Further, if study programmes are revised too often it could reduce the amount of time needed to develop the content of individual course modules.

46. In addition to developing its own study programmes, several study programmes are delivered jointly with other institutions, particularly, in the field of business, management, educational science and philology. Such cooperation is beneficial in making better use of meagre financial resources as well as for broadening and diversifying the selection of study modules available to students.

47. The University is committed to facilitating study for students who require special arrangements because of temporary changes or permanent needs in their study possibilities. The commitment of the University to providing classrooms with access to study materials for students with disabilities (problems with sight, hearing, or motor control) is remarkable.

48. The University has signed a number of exchange and co-operation agreements (approx. 100 Erasmus agreements and approx. 50 bilateral cooperation agreements). Many doctoral students interviewed reported spending several months at the University of Nebraska in Omaha. This international experience proves to be of high value for doctoral students while broadening their perspectives in carrying out the dissertation research. The exchange rate of degree programme students has decreased, which is understandable taking into account the overall decrease in student population over the last years. Despite that, the University should search for new measures, such as bi-directional agreements in key study programmes that could serve as incentives for degree programme students to make use of pan-institutional learning opportunities. The international mobility of teachers has slightly decreased; however the share of

teaching staff involved in the international mobility programmes has considerably increased due to the reduction in teaching staff positions.

#### **49. A brief overview of the area (strengths and weaknesses)**

The area of academic studies and life-long learning has received positive evaluation in 2012, and positive development has continued.

The team identified the following areas of **strengths**:

- Development of a broad spectrum of study programmes to meet the labour market needs at both regional and national levels;
- Implementation of unique study programmes of study not found elsewhere in Lithuania;
- Addressing diverse needs of students by providing opportunities for eLearning, part-time studies and life-long learning;
- Active cooperation with relevant stakeholders in a range of ways including the ongoing involvement of stakeholders in the development of new study programmes as well as entering into agreements where future employers commit to hiring students after graduation.

The team identified the following areas of **weaknesses**:

- Ability to attract a sufficient number of new students - a challenge not unique to SU but to all higher education institutions in Lithuania;
- Strong need to increase possibilities for internationalization, either at home or abroad, for those students who have chosen to study at SU.

#### **50. Recommendations for enhancement**

- The University should keep stabilizing and eventually increasing the number of new students as its top priority, as it is foreseen in the Strategic Plan. Recruiting good students is another important goal. However, a stable rate of new students is more important than being able to raise the entry-level scores. There was anecdotal evidence that the drop-out rate of local students is lower than average in all the University's study programmes. Thus, it can be anticipated that their graduation rate remains acceptable, although the



entry-level scores of new students in the University are in general lower than the national average. Offering remedial courses in key academic disciplines might be able to fill the gaps for local students who might need a graduate ramp to more competitive courses in order to avoid frustration and higher drop-out rates.

- The University should continue working in close cooperation with the social partners in shaping the content of study programmes. At the same time, careful attention should be paid to maintaining the scientific level of the education received by the University's graduates. It is certainly beneficial for the University to maintain close contacts with society e.g. by inviting visiting lecturers to the courses or defining study topics and research areas in collaboration with companies and the municipality, however, leaving too much of the teaching of entire study modules to social and business partners can potentially skew the curriculum and affect academic qualifications of the students.

**51. The team's judgement on the area: Academic Studies and Life-Long Learning is given a positive evaluation.**

## V. RESEARCH AND ART

52. The team explored and assessed SU's research and art activities with reference to the criteria set out in the Methodology and evaluated their relevance, international links and harmonization with the provisions of the European Research Area and following the conclusions and recommendations of the institutional evaluation in 2012.

53. In the 2012 review, the topic of research and art was given a positive evaluation. The University was particularly commended for an interdisciplinary approach to research. The previous review team found that SU developed a comprehensive set of performance indicators in an attempt to encourage and improve research activity and outputs. Overall, the University was advised to strengthen its research cooperation at the local, national, and international levels.

54. The team found that there is a positive alignment of research activities with the University's mission and strategic goals.

55. It is evident to the team that SU seeks to establish the necessary links between the priorities of the European Research Area and the needs of regional development. Thus, a special administrative unit was established at SU with the goal to support the preparation of applications for participation in international and regional research projects and networks. The unit provides consultations and technical aid during the project development and application process.

56. The SU's strategic documents (e.g. the Institutional Strategy for 2015-2020, the institutional three-year Strategic Activity Plan and the Further Activity Plan) provide a framework for developing and enhancing research and art activities of the University. These documents determine the way forward in strengthening SU's research and artistic activities, particularly, by fostering internationalization and inter-sectoral partnership. The objectives set by the strategic documents define concrete measures for strengthening inter-sectoral partnerships by fostering innovations and improving international standards of research outcome following strong prioritization of research fields.

57. The team commends SU for its efforts to stimulate faculty and research staff to enhance qualifications in order to be competitive for applying and conducting internationally and regionally relevant research projects.

58. The University's Strategic Plan has been developed to achieve key objectives as well as respond to the majority of recommendations made by the previous review team. For instance, the award system for scientific groups and young scientists is implemented in order to enhance research cooperation with business and public sectors. For increasing international dimensions of research and art output and improvement of the quality of publications, a financial support system is introduced stimulating researchers to publish in journals that have references in *ISI WEB of Science* databases. Furthermore, SU provides financial support for research trips and participation in international research and professional networks (e.g. business trip fund for faculty members; students' mobility fund, etc.). Evidently, these newly implemented measures will have a long-term effect on the improvement of SU's research. However, from a short-run perspective, the effects of these measures are not self-evident. For instance, the implemented measures cannot bring significant improvement in quality of publications very quickly. That probably explains, why despite of recognizing the importance of internationally high level research activities and outputs, international publication activities of faculty members are still rather modest and did not show substantial improvement in the period 2011-2014 (SER, Annex 3.5)

59. Given the scope of measures elaborated in the Strategy Implementation Action Plan as well as the additional information provided by faculty members and other stakeholders during the site visit, the team presumes that the majority of the necessary preconditions for enhancing research are created, and there is a good potential for increasing publication activities and the quality of publications in the near future. A vigorous internal review process by peers prior to submission to quality journals will effectively "move the needle" with regards to increasing acceptance and publication.

60. The expert team recognises that faculty members, students and other stakeholders clearly understand the University's mission and role in the Šiauliai region, and they are ready to support research activities allowing the integration of regional and international development trends.

61. SU is actively involved in several research projects supporting local development and well-being of people (e.g. projects focused on the recreation services, technological innovations, improvement of education, regional growth, etc.) trying to integrate regional and international research experience and creating new knowledge that will be valuable regionally as well as internationally.

62. SU is making considerable efforts to improve competitiveness in attaining higher level of involvement in the international research projects and getting additional research funding by stimulating faculty members and PhD students to submit applications. For instance, in the recent reporting period, faculty members have prepared more than twenty project proposals getting the necessary support from the administration of the University. SU is involved in COST, ERASMUS, ERA-NET and other international networks and thereby, gains additional experience to improve competitiveness for fruitful academic and professional cooperation.

63. SU offers first, second and third cycle (doctoral) degree study programmes that create the necessary preconditions for educating young generations of researchers and enhancing research. However, the University offers doctoral degree study programmes only in four fields of study: Educational Science, Economics, and Management. The number of students admitted in each of the doctoral study fields is rather small varying annually from one to four. According to the SER, the total number of PhD students has been rather stable in the period 2012-2014 (around 42-46 students). The number of admitted PhD students has been 27 during the reported period (19 of them are full-time and 8 of them are part-time PhD students).

64. A relatively small number of students pursuing doctoral studies as well as a small number of doctoral study programmes offered by the University affect the development of high quality doctoral study programmes. Therefore, as the team learned, consortia with the leading Lithuanian universities were established for the purpose of collaborating on the joint implementation of doctoral study programmes. The team acknowledges this approach but also recommends expansion and cooperation with academically strong international partners as well as to make concerted efforts to attract additional funding outside Lithuania (e.g. EU structural funds) for enhancing quality of doctoral studies (organizing joint doctoral schools, inviting co-supervisors outside Lithuania, offering possibilities for dual degrees).

**65. A brief overview of the area (strengths and weaknesses)**

The SER and the team's discussions during the site visit clearly demonstrate that there are remarkable strengths and opportunities for fostering research advancement of SU as a higher education institution with a clear regional niche.

The team identified the following areas of **strengths**:

- well elaborated vision, development strategy and implementation plans including measures that stimulate enhancement of research quality;
- good management system with quantitative indicators allowing regular monitoring of the SU's development processes;
- supportive social partners;
- demand for applied research oriented towards regional needs;
- dedicated and qualified staff;
- sufficiently well-developed infrastructure mated to resource availability.

The team identified the following areas of **weaknesses**:

- lack of strategic systematization of international research cooperation activities, resulting in a lower quality of publications than might be expected;
- comparatively weak competitiveness of SU in terms of attracting research funds from international sponsors;
- relatively low level of internationalization of the PhD studies;
- a small number of doctoral degree study programmes offered;
- limited foreign language proficiency among faculty members.

66. In summary, SU has not demonstrated significant progress towards the advancement of research activities and research output for the period 2012-2015. Nevertheless, the team found that the SU's strategic plans and elaborate measures for implementing strategies create the necessary preconditions for enhancing research quality in accordance with the University's mission statement and the regional role of SU.

#### **67. Recommendations for enhancement**

- Following the suggestion made by the 2012 review team, the University should continuously strengthen research collaboration at the local, national, and international levels; e. g. the University might consider establishing a Science Park in cooperation with social partners.
- SU should take appropriate measures to enhance internationalization of doctoral studies. It is advisable to involve international members in inter-university consortia; to attract

international co-supervisors; to offer study courses provided by well-qualified foreign instructors; to develop joint degree and dual degrees study programmes in cooperation with international partner universities.

- SU should amplify and further enhance the impact of its research specializations, focusing on high quality applied research and foster the international publication of research output.
- SU should develop a more systematic approach to planning and performing research activities involving social partners and independent evaluators in this process.

**68. The teams' judgement on the area: Research and Art is given a positive evaluation.**

## VI. IMPACT ON REGIONAL AND NATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

69. The team analysed the University's impact on the regional and national development following the criteria set out in the Methodology and from the perspective of effectiveness and relevance of its contributions to the economic, cultural, social and environmental development.

70. In the 2012 review, the area of impact on regional and national development was given a positive evaluation. The previous review team concluded that SU demonstrates strong regional embeddedness and acts as a catalyst for socio-economic and cultural development in Šiauliai and the region. Nevertheless, the recommendation was made to establish a system for measuring SU's economic, social and cultural impact. In addition, the previous review team recommended to initiate systematic market research for the development of academic programs and to accelerate engagement of social partners in the University affairs.

71. The University's vision and mission make it clear that SU seeks to promote the progress of the region and the country by research, artistic and innovative educational activities at the international level. Accordingly, the University set up four strategic directions in its Strategy 2015-2020 including the strategic aim of "increasing impact on regional and national development." Four indicators are used to monitor the University's progress in the area of regional and national development: "1) percentage of the graduates' employability according to their qualification; 2) percentage of the implementation of research based recommendations and created products (art outputs); 3) the average wage of graduates; 4) the number of events including social partners."

72. Every year the University approves the Annual Strategy Implementation Plan incorporating detailed actions and indicators. The University assigned the responsibility for tracking the indicators to certain key oversight groups. Nevertheless, the team would advise to avoid appointing groups of specialists (e.g. a group of scientists, academic departments) for tracking the achievement of one indicator because in reality this usually means that nobody is responsible.

73. The team commends the University for taking action "to prepare systematic conception of impact to environment" mentioned in the Annual Strategy Implementation Plan 2016. The team notes that it would be beneficial for the University to achieve this result in a shorter period of time than foreseen in order to use it for the preparation process of the Annual Strategy Implementation Plan 2017. It is also advisable to include qualitative indicators.

74. After the analysis of the results of planned actions, the team found out a number of inaccuracies in the information provided (e.g. in the SER the specified number of organized events in 2015 is 550; in “the Annual Strategy Implementation Plan 2015” – 284; in the Rector’s report 2015 – 415). Furthermore, several of planned activities were transferred to another year (e.g. “to apply the results of science and art activities in practice”). Although the review team understands that different campus units might account for activities with different standards, the lack of consistent documentation complicated the evaluation of real effectiveness of the implementation of specific measures of impact.

75. As the team learned during the visit, the University has strengthened the partnership with private, public and non-governmental sectors. Such partnerships not only lead to an increase of applied research but also to higher employability of students; the majority of whom found jobs in their specialties.

76. It is evident to the team from all discussions held that SU is the centre of science, education, culture and arts in Northern Lithuania. The University’s interdisciplinary knowledge of disability, inclusive education, wellness and social well-being is being practically applied in the SU Logopedic Centre (offering services for children, students and adults with speech and language impairments), SU Hypo Therapy Centre (offering rehabilitation of children with developmental disorders), SU Wellness and Counselling Centre (offering consultations for children with emotional and behavioural problems, their parents, educators and other specialists).

77. The University’s library, Art Gallery, and Botanical Garden are open to the public. Furthermore, since 2012 the library has a childcare facility where children can be left on an hourly basis. It is the only facility of this kind in such institutions in Lithuania visited by more than 550 kids every year. Other university premises such as S. Gliaudys’ Natural History Museum, Creative Self-Expression Studio “Good Day”, Sports Education Research Laboratory, Sound Recording Studio and Centre of Polygraphic Services are also intended for public use. It is commendable that the University promotes cultural enhancement in the region and organizes hundreds of various events including art and cultural festivals, exhibitions, and concerts.

78. During the reference period, SU and its social partners have founded three new clusters, i. e. the Lithuanian Association of Producers and Exporters of Automobile Spare Parts, the Šiauliai Region Light Industry Cluster and the Children’s Rehabilitation Cluster of North-West



Lithuania. The social partners interviewed commended the University's scientific input in their joint projects. Further, SU's Inter-sectoral Partnership Centre (previously, Social Partnership and Innovation Centre) was established to strengthen the University's collaboration with businesses and government institutions as well as to foster innovations. Social partners also admitted that they are strongly involved in the development of study programmes. For instance, employees of a telecommunication company give lectures to the students in their future work environment. Overall, partners are satisfied with the collaboration activities with the University as well as with the quality of graduates who were described as proactive and able to apply their skills in the labor market.

79. The team recognizes that SU faces considerable challenges including demographics, mass emigration and the consequences of the world economic crisis. Taking this into account, the University strived to become more international. In order to recruit more students, agents in Sri Lanka, United Kingdom, India, Bangladesh, Hungary, Kazakhstan, and Ukraine were hired. Social partners admit that the University makes significant contribution to increase the attractiveness of the city of Šiauliai worldwide.

80. In meetings with alumni, it was emphasized that SU's reputation got better during the reference period. SU is now well known for its joint international research in aerobiology, uniqueness in disability and gender research studies. Further, graduates underlined the importance of the Continuing Studies Institute which constantly helps improve and develop skills needed by the changing labor market. Alumni can also use the services of the Career Centre for up to five years after graduation and can consult on study opportunities, get guidance on work search, CV writing as well as get advice and guidance on preparing for a job interview. Furthermore, they can participate in the Career days started to be organized five years ago. On April 16, 2016, alumni representatives will establish the SU Alumni Association which is supposed to advance collaboration between the University and its graduates.

81. As it was confirmed during the visit, the University makes a substantial impact on regional development on a number of fronts – the University is described as “a lighthouse in the region.” However, the team noted a lack of experience in evaluating the scope of the progress and the efficiency of the impact. It would be beneficial for the University, therefore, to continue developing the system which would help to monitor the actions and systemize the achieved results.

82. The SU Strategy was officially presented to and approved by the Parliament of the Republic of Lithuania. The University's aim to take part in the regional and national processes of social, economic and cultural progress corresponds to the priorities set out in the Strategic Development Plan of Šiauliai City for 2014-2020, the State Long-Term Development Strategy, the Lithuania's Progress Strategy "Lithuania 2030", the Future Vision for Research and Studies "Learning Lithuania 2030", the Law on Education and Research of the Republic of Lithuania, the Leuven Communique 2009, and the Budapest-Vienna Declaration 2010.

83. In order to become the regional progress leader, SU took an active part in the popularization of science and dissemination of research outcomes. Thus, SU organized 131 scientific conferences; took an active part in various scientific festivals and events ("Spaceship Earth", "Researchers' Night"); 50 scientific cafes were founded (SER, para 106, p. 34). During the visit, SU provided evidence that around 62% (328/532) of scientific articles produced in 2015 have focused on issues directly related to regional problematics.

84. SU continuously involves its students in the solution of urgent problems of the state. As the University's representative stated, bachelor theses are more oriented towards concrete problems of the region and of the country, master theses explore broader issues important for social partners, and doctoral dissertations focus on issues that are relevant in a global context (for instance, "Income inequality in the context of the economic growth," "The analysis of personal consumption and economic growth relationship," "Modernization of investment and financing decisions in financial markets in the context of globalization").

85. Students' practice activities provide important evidence of the impact of the University. In 2014, 1140 students went on practical placements, 78% out of which were in the region. It demonstrates the growing efficiency of collaboration between the University and its social partners which contributes to the improvement of the competences of prospective specialists.

86. The team found that SU's teachers are socially very active: they deliver lectures and distance classes, practical seminars, courses, in-service training seminars, organize various activities for professional societies, school students, and members of the city. During the visit, social partners gave a number of examples which showed SU staff's willingness to serve the community (e.g. there was a request for an open lecture about anthropology for vocational school students and the lecturer from the department immediately agreed to provide this lecture for free).

87. SU actively participates in the process of the development of the region: it is included as a social partner in the Šiauliai Regional Development Council, SU Rector participates in the Šiauliai Regional Development Council and Šiauliai City Strategic development Council, V.J. Vaitkevičius, Associate Professor, is the chairman of the Šiauliai City Municipality Community Health Council. During the analyzed period, the University had 6 members in Šiauliai City Council out of 31 (SER, 124, p. 39).

88. The team confirms that the teaching and administrative staff members are active participants who make a visible socio-economic and cultural influence in regional, national and international levels.

**89. A brief overview of the area (strengths and weaknesses)**

It is evident from the SER and all the discussions held that SU carries out a wide range of activities to achieve impact on regional and national development.

The team identified the following areas of **strengths**:

- Strong partnerships with private, public and non-governmental sectors;
- Strong regional integration and embeddedness - the University is the center of science, education, culture and the arts in Northern Lithuania;
- Focus on meeting public needs – the University’s library, the Art Gallery and the Botanical Garden are open to the public;
- Strong support from social partners - social partners are significantly involved in the University’s management as well as in the development of study programmes;
- Committed participation in the popularization of science and dissemination of research outcomes in the region;
- Active engagement of the University’s teachers and administration in social work.

The team identifies the following areas of **weaknesses**:

- A lack of experience in evaluating the scope of the progress and the efficiency of the regional impact;
- Diffusion of responsibility of tracking the achievement of some indicators;
- A lack of qualitative indicators for the evaluation of regional impact.

**90. Recommendation for enhancement**

- Despite the fact that the University makes a substantial regional impact on a number of fronts, there is a lack of experience in evaluating the scope of the progress and the efficiency of the impact. The team recommends the university continue to develop the system which would help to monitor the actions and memorialize the achieved results.

**91. Team's judgement on the area: Impact on Regional and National Development is given a positive evaluation.**

## VII. GOOD PRACTICE AND ENHANCEMENT RECOMMENDATIONS

### **The team commends the University for:**

- The efficient Self-Evaluation Report
- Substantial improvement in the areas of strategic management and internal quality assurance
- Development and use of a SWOT analysis
- The versatile approach to addressing the diverse needs of students
- A broad spectrum of opportunities for life-long learning
- The relevant alignment of research activities with the University's mission and developmental goals
- Good information flow among all stakeholder groups
- Strong regional engagement

### **Summary of recommendations**

- The implementation of the Strategic Plan should be monitored and assessed at regular intervals on the basis of a firm schedule with clearly defined milestones.
- Existing key performance indicators as well as implementation indicators should be regularly reviewed for their fitness of purpose. This recommendation holds true for the internal quality assurance system as well. An appropriate framework might be a comprehensive mid-term assessment which would be conducted by management, internal and external stakeholders as well as by independent experts. In this exercise, efforts should be made to identify both redundant indicators and areas of relevance for strategic management which are not yet adequately covered by the indicators. An example could be additional measurements of the regional impact of the University based on the proven methodology of regional economic impact analysis (which includes direct, indirect, induced and the catalytic effects of the university on the region).
- Reporting intervals for implementation indicators should be reduced to an optimum cycle in order to minimize the administrative burden and the transaction costs of running the monitoring and reporting system. It might take several cycles of reporting to determine

the proper interval for a given set of implementation indicators, but the effects of lowering administrative burden on faculty and staff should have a positive effect on their morale. An example could be the implementation indicators related to research performance, because there is often a long lead time between the completion of the manuscripts and their publication dates, and reporting on research outputs once a year seems to be adequate. On a more general note, management should consider moving towards yearly indicators or even three-year gliding averages wherever this fits the reporting and monitoring objectives.

- The University should keep stabilizing and eventually increasing the number of new students as its top priority, as it is foreseen in the Strategic Plan. Recruiting good students is another important goal. However, a stable rate of new students is more important than being able to raise the entry-level scores. There was anecdotal evidence that the drop-out rate of local students is lower than average in all the University's study programmes. Thus, it can be anticipated that their graduation rate remains acceptable, although the entry-level scores of new students in the University are in general lower than the national average. Offering remedial courses in key academic disciplines might be able to fill the gaps for local students who might need a graduate ramp to more competitive courses in order to avoid frustration and higher drop-out rates.
- The University should continue working in close cooperation with the social partners in shaping the content of study programmes. At the same time, careful attention should be paid to maintaining the scientific level of the education received by the University's graduates. It is certainly beneficial for the University to maintain close contacts with society e.g. by inviting visiting lecturers to the courses or defining study topics and research areas in collaboration with companies and the municipality, however, leaving too much of the teaching of entire study modules to social and business partners can potentially skew the curriculum and affect academic qualifications of the students.
- SU should build on its strengths to develop opportunities for sustainable development. It is advisable for the University to implement the suggestions made by the 2012 review team and consider establishing a Science/Technology Park in cooperation with social partners. Further, the University should consider developing the Centre of Excellence relying on particular competencies of the SU's faculty members in educational science;

consistently involving PhD students in team-based research projects; and, advancing internationalization of doctoral studies.

- SU should take appropriate measures to enhance internationalization of doctoral studies. It is advisable to involve international members in inter-university consortia; to attract international co-supervisors; to offer study courses provided by well-qualified foreign instructors; to develop joint degree and dual degrees programs in cooperation with international partner universities.
- SU should amplify and further enhance the impact of its research specializations, focus on high quality applied research and foster the international publication of research output.
- SU should develop a more systematic approach to planning and performing research activities involving social partners and independent evaluators in this process.
- Despite the fact that the University makes a substantial regional impact on a number of fronts, there is a lack of experience in evaluating the scope of the progress and the efficiency of the impact. The team recommends the university continue to develop the system which would help to monitor the actions and memorialize the achieved results.

## VIII. JUDGEMENT

*Šiauliai University* is given a **positive** evaluation.

Grupės vadovas:  
Team leader:

Prof. Andreas Knorr

Grupės nariai:  
Team members:

Prof. Tiuu Paas

Prof. Kari Jouko Raiha

Mr. Stasys Švagždys

Ms. Meda Andrijauskienė

Vertinimo sekretorius:  
Review secretary:

Dr. Helene Kamensky



# ANNEX. ŠIAULIAI UNIVERSITY RESPONSE TO REVIEW REPORT



ORIGINALAS NEBŪS SIUNČIAMAS

ŠIAULIŲ UNIVERSITETAS

ŠIAULIAI UNIVERSITY

Centre for Quality Assessment in Higher Education  
Acting director Nora Skaburskienė

2016-05-12 No. 1-04-520-0654

## ŠIAULIAI UNIVERSITY RESPONSE TO REVIEW REPORT

On the grounds of the project of evaluation report sent by CQAHE (10 – 05 – 2016), we are grateful for experts for valuable remarks and recommendations. We have no factual remarks for the content of evaluation report.

We would like to mention, that valuable expert's recommendations that they told us during their visit were already considered during meetings, and some of them are under implementation:

- Quality Manual was renewed, procedures and regulating documents of study programmes' committees and evaluation committees were renewed;
- Indicators of Annual Strategy Implementation Action Plan for the first quarter were approved by the Council;
- Documents for refusal of buildings were prepared, in order to optimize expenses;
- Strategic plans of academic divisions are under intensive preparation;
- International discussions of scientific network RENET are implemented, as well as international seminars for doctoral students, which are conducted by scientists from abroad.

On the grounds of evaluation results, the follow – up activity plan is going to be made in order to implement expert's recommendations and remarks.

Vice – rector for Studies Substituting Rector

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to be 'RB' followed by a long horizontal stroke.

Remigijus Bubnys

Renata Bilbokaite, Tel. No. +370 684 402 35, E-mail [renata.bilbokaite@inbox.lt](mailto:renata.bilbokaite@inbox.lt)

Public Institution  
Vilniaus st. 88, LT-76285  
Šiauliai, Lithuania

Tel. No. +37041 59 58 00  
Fax: +37041 59 58 09  
E-mail: [ufi@crs.lt](mailto:ufi@crs.lt)  
<http://www.su.lt/en>

Data is collected and kept in  
the Register of the Legal Entities  
Legal entity's code 111951345  
VAT code LT119513417  
SWIFTcode CDEGLT26

Šiaulių bankas AB  
Current account  
LT767180000000141119