STUDIJŲ KOKYBĖS VERTINIMO CENTRAS

ŠIAURĖS LIETUVOS KOLEGIJOS

VEIKLOS VERTINIMO IŠVADOS

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INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW REPORT OF

NORTHERN LITHUANIA COLLEGE OF HIGHER EDUCATION

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CONTENT

I. INTRODUCTION

1   This report presents findings of a review of Šiaurės Lietuvos Kolegija / Northern Lithuania College of Higher Education (hereafter referred to as SLK or 'the College') which was conducted in 2014 by a team of experts from Lithuania and other European countries (hereafter 'the team').

2   The review was organised by the Studijų Kokybės Vertinimo Centras / Centre for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (SKVC). It was carried out in accordance with the Procedures for the External Review of Higher Education approved by Government Resolution no. 1317 of 22 September 2010 and the Methodology for Conducting an Institutional Review in Higher Education approved by Order No. 1-01-135 of the Director of SKVC of 25 October 2010 ('the Methodology').

3   The team comprised the following members who, together, brought a breadth of previous experience in reviewing higher education institutions:
-    Professor Donald McQuillan (team leader), Emeritus Professor of Mathematics at the National University of Ireland, Dublin (UCD), former CEO of IUQB, and member of the Scientific Council of AVEPRO; Ireland
-    Professor Tiit Roosmaa, Rector of the Estonian Information Technology College, and Chairman of the Board of the Estonian e-University; Estonia
-    Ms Hannele Keranen, Quality Manager at Lapland University of Applied Sciences; Finland
-    Mr Mindaugas Juodaitis, Director of UAB WEB Partners; Lithuania
-    Mr Mantas Kinderis, student at Vilnius College of Technologies and Design; Lithuania
-    Dr Demelza Curnow (team secretary), Head of Quality at Bath Spa University; United Kingdom
The team was supported by an Evaluation Co-ordinator from SKVC.

4   The team was provided with a training day immediately before visiting the College, which included an overview of the education system in Lithuania. A preparatory meeting of the team also took place on this day. The team visited the College between 30 September and 2 October 2014, during which time meetings were held with staff, students, alumni and social partners of SLK. In addition, the team had a tour of the College's resources. After the visit, the team spent a further day in private meetings to agree their main conclusions. These were finalised by correspondence over the subsequent month during the team's confirmation of the draft report.

5   In advance of the visit, the College provided the team with a Self-Evaluation Report (SER) for them to review which was supported by a number of annexes providing further detail and evidence relating to assertions made in the SER. Additional supporting documentation was provided before and during the week of the review visit as requested by the team. The College was also invited by the team to proffer any additional evidence that it inferred from the team's line of questioning might be useful in providing reassurance or clarity on any point.

6   In meetings, the group that led the production of the SER explained that all members of the College – both staff and students – were given the opportunity to contribute to the SER, with the student representative system being used to aid this. This was corroborated in meetings the team had with the various members of the College community in which a lively engagement with the review process was evident across SLK.

7   The team also received the results of an external evaluation of SLK's learning resources and associated infrastructure that was carried out by MOSTA (Lithuania's Research and Higher Education Monitoring and Analysis Centre). Also provided to the team by SKVC were the recommendations that were made at SLK's previous review in 2007.

8   The team explored the four main areas of SLK's activity as set out in the Methodology: strategic management; academic studies and lifelong learning; research and art activities; and impact on regional and national development. In discussing the evidence collected and reaching its conclusions, the team made appropriate reference to the criteria and sub-criteria of the Methodology.

9   The team is grateful to the Director, his staff and SLK's students, alumni and social partners for their generous hospitality towards the team and their reflective engagement in the review process.

II. BACKGROUND INFORMATION ABOUT THE INSTITUTION

10   Northern Lithuania College is a non-state college located in Šiauliai. Its origins are in 1994 when it was founded as a Business Advisory Centre. This was followed by the development of an Adult Education Centre in 1997. It began to offer higher study programmes in Business Management and Law in 2001 and achieved formal recognition as a higher education college in February 2003. It has been at its current premises since 2004.

11   The College's co-founders continue to be very active in the College, holding the posts of Director (full-time throughout the period 2007/8 to the time of this review in 2014) and Deputy-Director for Infrastructure (increasing from 0.125 full-time equivalent in 2007/8 to 0.25 in 2010/11 and 0.75 since 2013/14) (Annex 20 Staff).

12   The College's mission is to 'carry out quality and practical studies of higher education oriented towards the needs of learners and the demands of society and develop applied research activities' (Annex 1 College Strategy 2014-19). Their Vision is to be a 'modern and open institution of higher education' and their Values are based on the key qualities of Integrity, Accountability and Respect (Annex 1 College Strategy 2014-19).

13   At the time of the review, there were six first-cycle programmes leading to the Professional Bachelor's awards available at the College: Business Management, Law, Computer Network Administration, Economics of Financial Institutions, Event Business Management, and Multimedia Technologies. These were offered in various modes, including full-time, part-time and by distance learning.

14   In October 2013, the College had 527 students enrolled on Professional Bachelor's awards. By far the greatest proportion of these came from Šiauliai county (432 students which was 81.97% of the student population) (Annex 23 Number of Students). The team heard during the course of the review that SLK considered 400 students to be a viable number. At the time of the review, there were approximately 475 students enrolled on Professional Bachelor's awards. Their aim was to maintain a student body of around 550 students, although the College recognised that this would be challenging at least until 2018 when the demography of Lithuania indicated that more students would be applying to higher education institutions. At the time of the review, SLK was one of the smaller higher education providers in Lithuania.

15 In 2013, there were 65 members of teaching staff supported by 17 administrative staff. Fewer than half of the teaching staff were full-time at the College, with others holding appointments at other higher education institutions or in practice. The team noted that the number of teaching staff was currently at its lowest for the period since the previous review, although the percentage of staff considered full-time (defined by the College as those having a teaching load in excess of 128 academic hours per year) had been increasing in the same period and, for 2013/14, stood at its highest point in that period at 40%. (Annex 20 Staff). The College noted that the average age of its academic staff is relatively low, with 52% under 40 years of age (SER).

16 In addition to the Professional Bachelor's awards, the College provided details of various informal education and Lifelong Learning opportunities (Annex 9 Informal Education; Annex 19 Lifelong Learning Activities).

17 The College has had one review since it achieved formal recognition as a higher education college. This took place in 2006. The overall evaluation on that occasion was positive, although the outcome relating specifically to 'Applied research and relationship with social partners in Lithuania' was negative and this area was where many of the recommendations of that review were positioned.

18 The College explained in its SER that the Quality Management System was based on the General Evaluation Model and Quality Management Standard ISO 9001, although staff confirmed in meetings that they were not formally certificated. During their visit, the team explored further with SLK how appropriate or helpful the ISO model was in engendering a quality culture throughout the College.

III. STRATEGIC MANAGEMENT

19 SLK's Self-Evaluation Report reflects briefly on the College Strategy 2008-13 and, as would be expected, focuses on its College Strategy 2014-19 which came into place from January 2014 (provided as Annex 1 to the SER). As noted above in paragraph 12, both the College's Vision and its Mission are expressed in very broad terms. Whilst the sentiments of the Vision and Mission are reasonable for the College's purpose, they might apply equally to most higher education providers. As such, although laudable, they do not enable SLK to be identified as a distinctive contributor either to the region or the higher education sector. Moreover, as the Strategy is predicated on the Vision and Mission, they are perhaps not entirely helpful in assisting the College to focus on and prioritise its strategic aims. Thus, the team recommends that SLK review its Vision and Mission statements with a view to making them more specific both to the College and the region that it serves. **[recommendation a]**

20 During the team's visit, the Director explained that, in a highly competitive market, sector benchmarking confirmed that SLK was continuing to succeed in recruiting students of a calibre comparable to those in the other local higher education providers. Additional admissions data was provided to the team to support this assertion. The Director attributed this achievement to the focus of the College which was to ensure that graduates were well prepared for industry and that this, in turn, was engendered by highly-competent staff, many of whom were practitioners. The students that the panel met also confirmed that they valued the industry experience they gained as part of their studies and that it was not unusual for placements to lead to employment after graduation.

21   Another feature of SLK that the College's staff and students also referenced as being particularly distinctive was the various ways in which students could engage with study at the College. In particular, the team saw and heard illustrations of how flexible the opportunities were and the efforts made to accommodate the needs of individual students. The College had been very successful in addressing the high rate of student attrition that had been identified at its previous review and sector benchmarking suggested that it was now one of the better-performing higher education providers for this measure. The team understood the focus on distance learning opportunities was considered particularly distinctive. The College may find it helpful to reflect on these attributes when considering the features that best differentiate it from its competitors. **[good practice b and e; recommendation a]**

22   In its SER, the College listed the key documents to which it made reference when developing the College Strategy 2014-19. These included: the EU Lisbon Strategy; Bologna process documents; Šiauliai City Strategic Development Plan of 2007-2016; the strategy "Europe 2020"; the communique "A Reinforced European Research Area Partnership for Excellence and Growth"; the general scientific research and innovation programme "Horizon 2020"; and the EU general scientific research, technological development and demonstration activity programme. In the College Strategy 2014-19, more detail is provided and the College provides information on Political, Economic, Sociodemographic and Technological factors that informed the Strategy. Whilst the team could see aspects of these key documents reflected within the Strategy Implementation Plan, this Plan was expressed in non-specific terms which made direct correlation more difficult to identify. **[recommendation b]**

23   The College's strategy for 2008-13 had four broad strategic goals worded as aspirations which could be considered appropriate to any higher education institution. The focus of activity was unclear to the team, however, and this was characteristic of its successor, the College Strategy 2014-19. Analysis of the current situation and specific actions to address it were unclear both in the documentation provided to the team and in the meetings that the team had during its visit. The team concluded that this lack of clarity was a consequence of there being so many diverse aims listed in the Strategy with supporting action couched in quite vague terms.

24   The team also noted that there was a tendency by the College to provide quantitative measurements without explanation of how these had been determined. Furthermore, many of the measurements termed as 'qualitative' could not, strictly, be described as such and did not allow for the reflection that would normally be expected and which would support meaningful evaluation and measurement of impact. **[recommendation b]**

25   Resources to support the strategic plan components were also unclear. The team attempted to explore this further in meetings and the College provided a Budget Plan for 2014/15 to support these conversations. A helpful example was given of how the Library budget was determined each year, including the level of consultation with staff directly responsible for that area. Similar examples were not forthcoming for other areas of the College, although unsubstantiated assurances were offered of the robustness with which resources were determined. The team took some confidence from the additional documentary evidence and the discussions that took place, although the College may wish to reflect further on whether there may be benefits to clearer mapping of resources to the proposals and aims encapsulated within the strategic plan.

26   The Implementation Plan for the College Strategy 2014-19 did not appear to the team to be fully cognisant of the needs of the Šiauliai region. For example, the negative trends in demography, decline in student numbers and unemployment rates of graduates were all identified by the College in the analysis of Strengths / Weaknesses / Opportunities / Threats (SWOT) in the College Strategy 2014-19. The intentions of the College in addressing these, however, remained unclear. The impression taken by the team was that two new study programmes would be launched and there would be more development into distance or online learning but there was little robust evidence provided regarding either the development of the new programmes or review of the viability of the existing programmes based on the needs of the region which lacks a large industrial base. Further, whilst the team was pleased to recognise the efforts made by the College to operate a flexible approach to study mode, there were concerns relating to the adequacy of the support mechanisms that had been put into place prior to significant rapid expansion in this area and it was not clear how targeting expatriate Lithuanians would directly benefit Šiauliai, although the benefits nationally were more apparent (see also paragraphs 51 and 94 below).

27   When considering the College's strategy in terms of the challenges that it faces, not least through the adverse demography of Šiauliai and Lithuania and the deleterious effects of the recent changes to funding for students at non-state institutions, a considerable amount of expectation appeared to be resting on quite limited proposals for ensuring student numbers continued to be viable: primarily some new course development and expansion into alternative modes of delivery to campus-based teaching. Furthermore, the detail relating to these proposals was not very advanced. For example, although the College indicated the subject area for one of the new programmes that it was intending to develop, there was no evidence that it would meet the needs of the Šiauliai region or the social partners that the team met and, as discussed in more detail in paragraph 51 below, the full implications of the College's distance learning ambitions did not appear to have been considered. The team was not completely reassured by the information available that SLK could be confident of achieving its projected student enrolments over the coming period. The team's primary concern, however, was that there did not appear to be a risk strategy for such an eventuality.

28   The team noted that, in total, the College had 21 Key Strategic Indicators for the period until 2019, with 80 quantitative measures of activity and a further 40 qualitative measures of activity (Annex 5 Qualitative Quantitative Criteria). Although arguably comprehensive, the number of measures seemed excessive for a small and relatively specialised College. Furthermore, the team considered many of the measures of activity under the 'Qualitative' heading to be, in fact, Quantitative in their nature, frequently stating only what would be done without any indication of measurement of impact. The team recommends that SLK reviews its College Strategy 2014-19 with regard to the Key Strategic Indicators and both the Quantitative and Qualitative Measures of Activity in terms of the numbers and focus of these. **[recommendation b]**

29   The team explored with different members of the College how progress against the Key Strategic Indicators would be measured. They heard in a number of meetings that, if Key Strategic Indicators were not met, the College would adjust the indicators rather than the activity. This is an unusual approach and would not seem to encourage a culture of enhancement nor, indeed, enable the College to achieve the aims and objectives agreed at the outset. SLK is advised to re-consider this approach.

30   On the Implementation Plan itself, little detail has been provided on how objectives are to be achieved. For example, there is an action related to creating conditions for teaching staff to pursue a PhD and the Indicator for measuring the success of implementation is 'Teaching staff pursuing a PhD'. There is no information, however, on how this success is to be achieved nor the numbers involved or any resourcing allocated to this purpose. Whilst the team was reassured to some extent by the evident high calibre of some of the College's senior staff, providing more detail on the Plan would serve a number of purposes, including mitigation of a single point of failure, greater transparency for stakeholders, stronger support and clearer direction for less senior staff charged with carrying forward strategic aims, and more effective risk management and planning. **[recommendation b]**

31   The College Strategy asserts that the Director is responsible for monitoring the Strategy Implementation Plan and submits an annual report to the Academic Council. The team was provided with papers relating to the Academic Council's business and met members of the Academic Council including its Chair. The documentary evidence and the discussions of the meeting satisfied the team that the Academic Council is serving its intended purpose.

32   The team attempted to establish how the annual monitoring by programmes and departments which is referenced in the SER and College Strategy informs the Director's annual report. The only evidence that SLK was able to supply relating to these comprised solely student feedback comments. Thus, whilst the team is satisfied that the Academic Council's consideration of an annual report is an appropriate method of monitoring, the lack of information and evidence regarding how that report is written and the evidence base on which it draws mean that the team cannot say with confidence that the procedures for monitoring the strategic plan implementation are relevant and robust.

33   In meetings, all those whom the team met expressed confidence in the adequacy of the information provided on the implementation plan for the Strategy and all were satisfied by the extent to which they had been consulted in the development of the College Strategy and / or the efforts made to ensure that they could access this document should they wish to take that opportunity. The team commends the efforts made to consult staff and students on all key issues and the apparent sense of collegiality that was evident. **[good practice d]** Nonetheless, as noted above in paragraphs 28 and 30, the team would question whether some of the information on the strategic plan was adequate for measuring progress and success effectively. **[recommendation b]**

34   The College notes in its SER that the Quality Management System is based on the General Evaluation Model and Quality Management Standard ISO9001. Further, the SER states that 'the College follows the provisions and guidelines of the Europe Higher Education Quality Assurance'. The illustrative example provided related to how the College assures itself that it achieves this in relation to Lifelong Learning. The team was satisfied overall through its consideration of the College's structures and its conversations with the various representatives of the College community that sufficient heed is taken of external expectations related to Quality Management policies.

35   As noted above in paragraph 31, the team considered that the Academic Council was serving its intended purpose. Care appeared to have been taken to ensure broad representation of stakeholders across committee membership, for example key social / business partners were included on the Programme-level Quality Committees and those who met the team were clear on their role and their contribution.

36   The team's meetings included formally-elected student representatives as well as a representative sample of students studying at SLK. The team explored with the students their contribution to the internal quality assurance systems as well as the extent to which the student body contributed to the Strategic Plan and the production of the SER for the purposes of this review. Students described their relationship with the College as one of partnership in which they were regularly consulted and they were keen to emphasise that they were given the opportunity to contribute to important developments such as the SER and Strategic Plan even if, as individuals, some of them chose not to engage.

37   All students were clear on individual opportunities to contribute their views and feedback on their experience. The team noted the comment in the College's SER that student surveys have a response rate between 80-85%. Illustrative examples were given by the students of additional, informal means by which their feedback was sought and provided examples of action that had been taken by the College to respond to suggestions and resolve issues or concerns that the students had raised. This dedication to the student experience was evident through meetings that the team had with SLK staff which indicated a strong commitment across the College to ensuring the best possible student experience. **[good practice b]**

38   In meetings, the review team explored how the Students' Representative Board operated. From the description of activities, the team inferred that the Students' Representative Board appeared to operate primarily for social purposes (for example, events organisation and peer support) rather than for making deliberate and coherent academic and strategic contributions to the College. This could relate to the nature of the current student body or is possibly indicative of a general student body that is confident there are ample and comprehensive opportunities available to all students to contribute their voice on an individual level. The College may be interested in reassuring itself that its Students' Representative Board is fully empowered to contribute on a strategic level and that it is appropriately equipped to do so.

39   The team was advised in meetings with College senior staff that the proposed new programme developments had been discussed with students and that had helped to inform the subjects on which the new programmes would be based. None of the students the team met, including those who were elected representatives, were aware of any such consultation although one or two of the elected representatives indicated that they were aware that some programme development was proposed by the College. The team found no compelling evidence to support either assertion.

40   Through evidence provided during the team's visit, the College demonstrated a commitment to collecting and collating student feedback comments. The significant number of quantitative indicators attached to the Implementation Plan for the College Strategy 2014-19 also indicates how seriously the College takes responsibilities related to data collection. The team concluded, however, there was a weakness in how this data collection is then used to inform reflection or measure the impact of activity. For example, numbers of international exchanges have been recorded and the team was provided with annual numbers of incoming and outgoing staff and students for the period 2007/8 to 2012/13. However, the impact of this on the College – for example, development of its curriculum or the enhancement of the student experience – did not appear to be considered or measured in any way. As a consequence, the team was not confident that data was being used effectively to inform strategic management or quality enhancement. **[recommendation b]**

41   Queries around collection and analysis of data are also related to the point noted above in paragraph 32 that the team found that, whilst a College-level activity report is produced annually, detail around some of the programme-level activity was harder to obtain. The perception of the team was that there was a lack of evidence that could provide reassurance that there is comprehensive collection and analysis of data at programme-level to inform reflection and review at institutional-level. As such, the team recommends that the College considers more effective mechanisms for reflection and annual monitoring at programme or department level and ensures that this is documented in such a way as to be transparent and helpful. **[recommendation c]**

42   As noted above, the team explored with the College the extent to which a Quality Management System based on the General Evaluation Model and Quality Management Standard ISO9001 could support a quality and enhancement culture, notably in the key area of Teaching and Learning. The view of the College was that their model was appropriate for this purpose because it set out clear expectations that everyone had a responsibility for assuring the quality of the student experience. The team's concern, however, was that such a procedural approach, whilst providing clarity on individual expectations, was inevitably focused on compliance, rather than enhancement. As such, and as illustrated in the evidence that the team had seen, there was a tendency for the College to measure activity without any real value or for any constructive purpose. The team would urge SLK to re-consider its approach accordingly. **[recommendation c]**

43   The College has made some changes to its organisational structure over the review period from 2007 to 2014. This has included the merger of the Economics and Management Departments and the establishment of the College Practice Training Centre. In terms of management, there has been a significant increase in the role of Deputy Director for Infrastructure from 0.125 full-time equivalent to 0.75 full-time equivalent, and the responsibilities of the Deputy-Director for Infrastructure and the Deputy-Director for Academic Affairs have been adjusted relative to each other. An indication was given in meetings that this was continuing to be kept under review and some other areas of responsibility might also sit more naturally under the other Deputy-Director to where they are at present. The team did find that the structure of SLK appeared overly-complicated in some respects and was not convinced either through the evidence provided or the meetings during the site visit that it provided the most efficient means of implementing the Strategy. The team was also of the view that there was a serious risk of 'single point of failure' with a lot of critical activity apparently reliant on an exceptional individual. In considering its structures and the responsibilities of respective postholders, the College would be advised to ensure that it has appropriate support structures in place to mitigate risk. **[recommendation d]**

44   The College demonstrated a strong commitment to the management of human resources and staff development in particular. There is a stated commitment to upskilling staff and supporting them in gaining further qualifications. Whilst, as noted above, the resource for this was less clear than it might be, the team was not given any indication that a member of staff was not supported adequately in their ambitions.

45   The College highlighted in its SER that it had a relatively young staff and considered this to be one of its strengths owing to the energy and enthusiasm that this generated in its academic community. This was certainly evident to the team during their period at the College and was a distinctive strength of SLK. **[good practice a and c]**

46   The team discovered during its site visit that SLK had made some bold appointments of individuals with fairly limited experience to roles that would normally be considered reasonably senior and which certainly appeared as such in the College's structure. To illustrate, the Head of Department's role was described both as supervisor and manager providing amongst other duties pedagogical support for academic staff in the unit, yet the Heads of Department did not appear to have power over financial resources and, for the postholder truly to have been able to contribute to the development of their unit, s/he would be required to have versatile expertise. Whilst the team respected SLK's philosophy of identifying and promoting talent amongst its academic community, they considered that it would be wise for the College to balance this with its own needs and the importance of creating an effective and efficient structure to deliver on its strategic aims. This may mean reconsidering what is required from a post such as Head of Department to ensure that the role is pitched at an appropriate level to support other senior managers. **[recommendation d]**

47   The team noted that a significant number of academic staff were part-time, either holding teaching posts at other institutions or working in practice. The implications of this were explored in meetings, in particular the challenges for staff in juggling commitments outside of the College with the needs of students and, equally, the effect of this on the student experience. Throughout meetings, the team was given unambiguous assurance that the diversity of staff was, in fact, a strength of the College and that students benefited significantly from the breadth of voices and experience to which they were exposed in their academic study. The team was given anecdotal evidence of the marked efforts that were made by staff to ensure that students received rapid responses to any queries. Moreover, the students clearly benefited from the enthusiasm and direct industry experience of the staff who taught them. The team commends the College for the way in which it manages these challenges so effectively. **[good practice a and c]**

48   The College asserts in its SER that academic and administrative staff are actively involved in the decision-making processes. The College is relatively small and a strong sense of collegiality was apparent to the team during its site visit. Throughout meetings, the team was assured by College staff of the extent to which they were consulted on key issues and were encouraged to contribute. The team recognised this empowerment of its staff as a strength of the College. **[good practice d]**

49   In terms of management of change, as noted already, the team identified a weakness around risk management. In particular, the College does not seem fully prepared for the situation of falling student numbers. Earlier in the current review period, the College had 750 students. At the time of this review, numbers were below 500 and, despite efforts focused on distance learning, were dropping further.

50   At the time of this review, the strongest recruiting programme was Law, but data indicate that Law graduates have the worst employment prospects of all graduates from across the programmes in the College's portfolio. This would normally call into question whether it is genuinely aligned with national or regional needs and, therefore, whether it is an appropriate programme to be offering. In other respects, the Law programme appears to be the strongest at SLK as it was the only programme at the College to have been given a six-year accreditation, with scores of 3 or 4 against all criteria; the College's other five programmes each had a score of 2 against at least one criterion and were therefore given only a three-year accreditation yet these show stronger employability, implying there is greater need for them. The College does not appear to have identified this coincidence of

factors as a risk either in its SER or elsewhere. Thus, the team cannot have confidence that SLK is responding appropriately to its situation.

51   Related to this is the apparent lack of planning around distance learning. Numbers have increased significantly and rapidly and the College is actively seeking to increase this area of its provision. In meetings, the College offered details of communities of Lithuanian emigrants that have been visited by the Director of the College for recruitment purposes, for example in Ireland. Although resource and planning has gone into the development of the virtual learning environment, there was a lack of understanding of the needs of distance learning students (both pastoral and pedagogic) and management of their expectations to protect staff. In every meeting the team had with SLK staff, students, social partners and alumni, reference was made to the College's distance learning ambitions, sometimes in rather unexpected contexts which also raised concerns for the team that the College did not fully understand the implications of increasing and managing cohorts of distance-learning students. When the team queried with senior staff where the tipping point might be regarding numbers of distance-learning students balanced against those of on-campus students, they agreed that they could not manage all students being distance learners although they seemed unsure of the point at which that might become the case. This approach seemed reactive, rather than proactive, and the team had serious reservations about how this area and these ambitions were being planned and managed. The team recommends that attention to this area is made a priority and encourages the College to continue engaging with the national forum on best practice in distance learning. **[recommendation e]**

52   The College described the investment made into its infrastructure over the period that this review covered, noting a particular emphasis on technology in excess of that required under MOSTA and also increased library resources. As noted above, SLK has also been investing in the virtual learning environment to support delivery to distance learners. Management of infrastructure and learning resources appeared to the team to be appropriate at present and the College indicated that this was forming part of their considerations around the proposed development of their academic portfolio.

53   SLK acknowledged that changes to the funding for students at non-state institutions has had serious implications for them and has been active in identifying and applying for other sources of funding in addition to student fees. This has included obtaining EU funding for projects. As SLK states in its SER, the College's financial statements have continued to record a positive operating balance throughout the period for this review.

54   The College notes in its SER that it has a College Academic Ethics Code to govern general ethical standards as well as those relating specifically to academic matters, teaching, applied research activity and student general ethical standards. This Code is published on the College website and the link was provided in the SER. The team explored with students their understanding of academic ethics. The students explained that expectations relating to academic integrity were made clear to them from early in their studies and that penalties were applied when anyone was found to transgress, although such students were very much in the minority. They also described how assessment tasks were designed in such a way as to reduce the opportunities for dishonesty.

Overview
55   In its SER, the College identifies incomplete strategic management as a weakness and the team would concur with this. Overall, the Strategic Management of SLK appears to be unfocused and reactive in its nature rather than proactive and the team found no evidence

of meaningful risk analysis. The staff of SLK are clearly highly-committed to the College and to offering the best possible student experience, for which the team commends SLK, but a number of weaknesses of strategic management were evident that have the potential to undermine the College's capability and its capacity to manage change in the context of the current economic and demographic climate. Interestingly, the SER notes the vision, mission and strategic goals of the 2008-13 Strategy lacked clarity and specific definition around research activity, yet these weaknesses have not been resolved in its successor which is intended to take the College up to 2019. Whilst credit must be given to SLK in recognising these challenges, the College has not been successful in reconsidering any of these areas. An agile approach is evident, for example in the College's recognition of the opportunities in distance learning and the activity in response to that, but there is a lack of direction and informed planning to support effective work and manage risk appropriately and this exposes the College to serious risk.

56   Quality management is relatively sound in terms of procedure but the culture is one of compliance rather than enhancement. In particular, the reflection that might be expected – and which would inform strategic aims and the underpinning implementation plan – is not evident.

Judgement on the area: ***Strategic Management is given negative evaluation.***

IV. ACADEMIC STUDIES AND LIFE-LONG LEARNING

57   The College currently offers six Professional Bachelor's programmes, as detailed above under 'Background Information about the Institution' (see paragraph 13). According to the College's website, these were all available for both full-time and part-time study and, additionally, Business Management, Economics of Financial Institutions and Event Business Management could be studied through the distance-learning mode. During the review visit, representatives of the College noted that they were currently reviewing the portfolio of awards, with plans to approve two new awards. In addition, discussions were taking place about the possibility of offering current subjects in combination with each other. Discontinuation of current programmes of study was not part of these plans at present, although staff suggested that the modes of study and delivery might not all continue to be available for all programmes. They added that curriculum was kept under continuous review and they were consulting with business partners on how they might address different areas to ensure that the academic offering remained current and attractive to applicants and prospective employers.

58   The College's six programmes of study are offered as full-time study over three years or part-time study over four years. Although numbers of part-time students significantly outstripped those of full-time students at the beginning of this review period, the numbers of the two modes of study relative to each other have been drawing closer since 2009 and, since 2012, full-time students have outnumbered part-time students and are doing so increasingly (Annex 23 Number of Students). The College informed the team during its visit that they would tailor the mode of study to suit an individual student where necessary and, as a consequence, there were several different patterns of study in place across the College. They noted that the percentage of students now studying via distance learning had significantly increased in the 2014/15 academic year so they had been investing in software to support distance learning delivery. During its visit, the team explored with the College further how it was supporting this shift.

59   As noted previously, at the time of the review, these were all advertised as being available in both full-time and part-time modes, with some also advertised as having a distance learning option. As the team heard in meetings, however, the College takes a flexible and individually-tailored approach to its students' needs and supports several more permutations to enable students to engage with their studies where necessary. Students valued the efforts that SLK made to ensure that they were each given the best possible opportunity to succeed with special arrangements put in place to enable them to continue should their circumstances change. **[good practice b and c]**

60   The College's Mission and Strategic documents are worded such that considerable latitude exists for the compliance of its qualifications. The team agreed that the six Professional Bachelor's programmes currently in the portfolio could reasonably be considered to be aligned with SLK's Mission and Strategic documents.

61   The extent to which the Professional Bachelor's awards were aligned with the needs of the national economy and social and cultural development was less clear. In particular, the team raised with the College the fact that there was high unemployment amongst its Law graduates, reflecting the national situation, yet numbers of enrolled students indicated that this was significantly the College's largest programme (Annex 23 Number of Students). The College acknowledged that this was the case but explained that there was a demand from applicants for a Professional Bachelor's programme in Law at SLK, as illustrated by the number of students who were accepted and then enrolled on the Law award.

62   In terms of enhancing employability, the panel did note that entrepreneurship was included in each Academic Programme, although the academic credit attached to this area of the curriculum did not appear to be significant overall and the College might wish to consider developing this aspect further. Also, as noted above in paragraph 20, efforts were made by the College to ensure that students were being prepared for industry, particularly through work placements and the number of staff-practitioners involved in the academic delivery.

63   The College explained that it was seeking to develop its portfolio of Professional Bachelor's awards further and provided broad outlines of the two areas which were proposed. There were discrepancies between the various documents and different meetings as to whether these were both intended for 2015/16 start or whether one would be for 2016/17 entry, but neither appeared yet to have advanced beyond a subject area. Whilst there were verbal assurances from senior College staff that both subjects had emerged from consultation with business partners, students and graduates, none of those with whom the team met during its visit was able to confirm involvement in that consultation process. The team accepted that this might have been attributable in part to the particular individuals who had been available to meet them, and that consultation would continue as development of the proposed programmes advanced. The team did still question, however, the extent to which the proposed new programmes aligned with local need as this was not clear from the information available to them and, depending on how advanced the College's plans were, SLK may wish to continue considering the most appropriate subject area for expansion.

64   The team heard how the College was making its developments into distance learning a particular specialisation and, through this, was seeking to meet the needs of the national economy. The team recognised that SLK had been proactive in identifying localities around the world which were now home to communities of expatriate Lithuanians and heard how the Director had been out to visit such communities, for example in Ireland, to

encourage them to engage in the study opportunities that the College could offer. Although the team had reservations regarding aspects of the planning related to this, as outlined above in Section II, nonetheless SLK was to be congratulated on identifying this sector and the particular efforts to meet the needs of learners. **[good practice e]**

65　The team encouraged SLK in its distance learning activities and suggested that the College might wish to consider ways in which the internationalisation of the College might be enhanced through these pockets of distance learners resident in other countries.

66　As noted above in paragraph 21, the College was also working to meet the needs of individual students with tailored flexible opportunities in which students could engage with study at the College and a number of blended learning models were apparently in existence and operating successfully.

67　The College provided the team with a diagram indicating the different types of lifelong learning it offered and at which audiences these were aimed (Annex 19 Lifelong Learning Activites). These included Professional Education Programmes at the Adult Education Centre, as well as non-formal education programmes and a broad spectrum of seminars and lectures for secondary school children, students, the community in general or specialist career-focused audiences. Although levels of engagement varied across these, the team recognised the challenges inherent in the region in encouraging people to take up these opportunities, and the College was clearly fostering good relationships where it could, particuarly with local schools.

68　The more formal opportunities offered through the Adult Education Centre were the least successful area. Only two certificates were awarded in 2013 for the more substantial programmes offered there and the College confirmed that, although nine programmes were currently in approval, no courses were running in 2014/15. This is an area of activity which the College might consider further to ensure that its activity is aligned with the needs of the region and local community. Thus, the team recommends that SLK concentrates more resources on the strengthening and enhancement of the Lifelong Learning programme. **[recommendation g]**

69　The team understood that the employment and careers of SLK graduates had been difficult to monitor to date as the formal check was carried out within the first year after graduation only. Although there was anecdotal evidence that some graduates achieved more after this period, contact details were less reliable after a year had passed following graduation. The team heard that the College had signed up to a national initiative, the CMIS, which enabled students to be tracked for five years after graduation and information from that would be available shortly. This would provide much more detailed information and additional benchmarking opportunities. There were some limitations as it required graduates explicitly to opt in to the scheme owing to some sensitve data protection issues involved but the College had clear plans on how they could maximise the opportunities this initiative offered. The team encouraged the College in these plans.

70　The College has also recently established an Alumni Club to enable them to maintain contact with graduates. This is intended to provide support to graduates but should also enable the College to benefit from its alumni, for example by bringing alumni back to talk to current students. Of the recent alumni that the team met, all but one were members, although none seemed sure how they could contribute to SLK through being part of the Alumni Club. The College gave examples of graduates from whom it was already benefiting, for example by graduates coming back as part-time lecturers or offering

placements to current students. SLK senior staff added that they hoped the Alumni Club would support this further as it became more established. The team endorsed the creation of the Alumni Club and the intentions for it, whilst recognising that it had not been in existence long enough for any benefits to be evident yet.

71   The College has a Careers Office and runs an annual Careers Day to which recent graduates are invited and from which current students have benefited as well. Students spoke positively about the support that the Careers Office provided on a one-to-one basis. The team considered that this resource could be strengthened further by developing clearer links between the Careers Office and the Alumni Club and through the Careers Office becoming a proactive facilitator in relations between SLK and local business. **[recommendation f]**

72   The social and business partners that the team met were uniformly positive about their relationship with the College. The College has also developed some particularly valuable links, such as the Šiauliai Business Incubator, the Director of which was a member of a programme-level quality committee. As such, the team was confident that there was evidence of effective cooperation with social and business partners, including the ongoing monitoring and review of study programmes. Although there was little evidence of social and business partner involvement so far in the two new programmes proposed for development, the team accepted that this might have been attributable to the particular partners they met and that, as the developments progress, partners will help to shape such proposals to ensure they do meet the needs of the region.

73   The primary contribution of social and business partners to the College appeared to be in providing placements and supporting projects for final theses. There were strong relationships evident between the College and a broad spectrum of partners. In particular, partners valued the contribution that the College's students made during placements and through their final-year projects. Although the College had been led to believe that a more formal relationship with its business and social partners would be desirable, the partners themselves were unequivocal in their assurances to the team that the current arrangements worked well for them. The College may have need to formalise some aspects of its relationship with partners, but a light touch approach is clearly effective. **[good practice f]**

74   In its SER, the College provided a table mapping how SLK is meeting the provisions of the European Higher Education Area and EU documents relating to higher education. This includes use of ECTS to support mobility of students. The College also notes compliance with key regulatory frameworks and expectations such as the Bologna Process and the Lisbon Strategy. The College's programmes of study have also been subject to the necessary scrutiny by external experts.

75   As noted previously, the College's strategic documents are also couched in terms of such breadth that compliance with these legislative requirements is also assured.

76   The College is working to develop international opportunities and the numbers of incoming and outgoing staff and students over the review period were provided in the supporting evidence to the SER (Annex 27 International Mobility). Exchange numbers have grown considerably, and the College is to be congratulated on this, albeit in the context of starting from a very low base rate. A number of students and alumni that the team met gave examples of international activity in which they had been engaged. Many of these appeared to be of the nature of short study trips or project work, rather than

exchanges, but the team recognised that these can be extremely valuable to a student's development and internationalising the student experience.

77   The College demonstrated the efforts it was making to engage in international projects and develop partnerships with other higher education providers outside of Lithuania. Examples that were given included the 'Under My Wing' entrepreneurship project which enabled a small number of SLK graduates and academic staff to work with other students, staff and entrepreneurs from six international partners; the introduction of a new technology programme that SLK staff encountered on visit to a partner in Turkey; and the 'Blue Button' programme which offered an alternative to a programme that SLK had used previously.

78   The College's measurement of such activity was, however, limited to numerics, rather than impact, a systemic weakness that has its roots in the fundamental flaws identified within its strategic management, as outlined above in Section III. The team recommends that the College reviews its approach to the measurement of activity to ensure that it is assessing impact rather than simply measuring the quantity of activity. **[recommendations b and c]**

79   The College recognised English language skills as a key area for development in increasing mobility of teaching staff and students. The team heard that English language competence is now a skill that the College expects from applicants when making new appointments. The team endorses SLK's activity and ambitions around English language and would also encourage the College to invest further in the provision of English language courses both for its students and its staff. **[recommendation h]**

Overview

80   The team was satisfied that the College is fostering an appropriate environment for study and that it is making efforts to align both its Academic Studies and Lifelong Learning activities with national and regional needs. There are areas which would benefit from some attention, such as a more comprehensive infrastructure to protect the distance-learning student experience and investment of more resources into the more formal opportunities offered in Lifelong Learning, but overall the College's approach to this area is reasonably secure. There is also some distinctive good practice in this area, notably the willingness of SLK to embrace new opportunities such as distance learning and the staff's dedication to creating a positive learning environment for all students.

Judgement on the area: *Academic Studies and Life-Long Learning is given positive evaluation.*

V. RESEARCH AND (OR) ART

81   In its Mission, SLK states simply that it will 'develop applied research activities' (Annex 1 College Strategy 2014-19). Later in the Strategy, the College identifies the challenges it is facing in this area, acknowledging under Weaknesses in a SWOT analysis 'Applied research, consulting activities are insufficiently effective'. An objective within the Strategy is 'To carry out applied research for the region' and the Implementation Plan has four actions listed against this. As noted above in Section III, however, there is no detail provided in the Implementation Plan and the metrics have little meaning. A list was provided of activities that the College deemed to be Research, although the team did not recognise much of the

activity as such. Furthermore, the team noted that the income from such activities was very small indeed. In meetings and documentation, the team was unable to extract any sense of focus or plan of specific action that would enable SLK to address the weakness that it recognised in research activities. **[recommendation i]**

82   Regarding the College's definition of research, three of the four actions in the Implementation Plan for the College Strategy 2014-19 place an emphasis on students' contribution to research, rather that that of academic staff, and one action specifically refers to students' Final Thesis projects. The Final Thesis is a component of the Professional Bachelor's Programmes and whilst it may in some cases be developed into something more substantial or help the College to identify an area where there is a need for an applied research project, it is nonetheless part of a first cycle qualification. This level of achievement would not reflect the competencies and capabilities that would normally be understood by the term 'research' in an international context (by which the review team includes the concept of applied research). To aid its focus and strategic approach towards this area, the College should first clarify terminology against which it can then map activity. **[recommendation i]**

83   Whilst the College has a Research Activity Co-ordinator, strategic responsibility for research in the College was less clear. The team was given the impression that Heads of Department had a role to play but this also was presented as one of co-ordination, and the emergence of research from Departments appeared to be organic rather than deliberate or planned.

84   The team also heard that the College Director owns the research budget. Whilst the team recognised that the College was small and might reasonably be wary of over-engineering its structures, SLK may wish to consider whether its current infrastructure is as efficient as it might be in identifying and enabling research opportunities. The place of oversight of research within the College's governance was also unclear and the team would also advise SLK to reconsider this, for example by establishing a high-level Research Committee that might focus on suitable areas for applied research and oversee the completion of projects. **[recommendation i]**

85   The team found very little evidence that SLK conducted research which served the needs of national or regional economic, cultural and social development. The team's view was that research in the College suffered from a lack of organisation and planning and, perhaps as a consequence, the integration between programmes of study and identified research appeared weak with activities failing to cover all study fields. In many respects, the fundamental flaws in strategic management were evident here through a lack of focus and direction, creating additional challenges for identifying and prioritising activity that would be aligned with national and /or regional priorities. These deficiencies need to be addressed to enable SLK staff to achieve what is expected of them in relation to research. **[recommendations b and i]**

86   As noted in other sections within this report, the College has yet to develop effective strategies and mechanisms for measuring impact of activity, rather than simply quantifying it. In terms of the contribution that academic, social and business partners have on the research activities of the institution, the team noted that the College is working hard to achieve effective relationships around placements and Final Thesis projects for its Professional Bachelor's students, and that a plethora of other activity is taking place to strengthen links with partners. The lack of focus and strategic direction for research, to which allusion has already been made in this section, means, however, that there will be

additional challenges for the College in measuring the impact of its partners on the areas of research. **[recommendation b]**

87   The College described strenuous efforts that were being made to engage with international partners and participate in projects outside of Lithuania. Since 2008/9, the College has signed a further 41 International Cooperation Agreements, taking the total from six to 47 (Annex 26 International Partners). Whilst the level of engagement will inevitably vary across agreements, examples were offered to the team of joint projects and sharing of good practice across international borders, and the staff of SLK demonstrated enthusiasm and commitment to develop opportunities further. As noted above, the College will need to consider carefully how it categorises activities when assessing the extent to which it is achieving against research metrics, but the team commends SLK's willingness to engage with other higher education providers around the world to inform its own activity and offering to students. **[good practice g]**

88   The team was mindful that, in the previous review which was the first since the College achieved formal recognition as a higher education college, the area relating to applied research received a negative evaluation and attracted a number of recommendations. The Methodology of review requires that the team considers an institution's response to its previous review and the recommendations therein. Progress is expected against any previously-identified weaknesses. On considering the findings of the review of SLK in 2007, the team concluded that all of the weaknesses relating to the area of research that were identified in 2007 were still apparent, including: weak efficiency of research and consultancy activities implemented by the College; very few activities that might realistically be identified as applied research; research that is not thoroughly grounded in the needs of the region; a lack of responsibility, organisation and focus throughout the College; insufficient impact evaluation of activities; and weak links with the development of studies. The team recommends that the College revisits both its understanding of the expectations relating to research that are made of it and also its management of and activity in this area. **[recommendation i]**

Overview

89   Although the College is making efforts in this field, the lack of focus that pervades strategic management is symptomatic in its approach to applied research and art as well. The team was not unsympathetic and recognised the challenges presented by the needs and character of the Šiauliai region but there was little or no evidence that the College was focusing its resources appropriately to compensate for this. In reaching its judgement on this area, the team was conscious of the recommendations that emerged from SLK's previous review in 2007. After careful consideration of the evidence they had seen and the additional contextual information gleaned in meetings, the team agreed that the three aspects that were listed in the 2007 review report as needing to be improved and the arguments on which they were grounded had not changed. This lack of progress was a significant factor in the team's decision that this area should receive evaluation.

<u>Judgement on the area</u>: Research and (or) Art is given negative evaluation.

VI. IMPACT ON REGIONAL AND NATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

90   As noted above in Section III Strategic Management, there is an inherent weakness in the College in terms of how it measures impact, with a tendency to count instances of activity

without further analysis of what that actually means or measuring the consequences of the activity. However, within this context, the team could see the efforts that SLK was making to contribute to the region. The importance of making a positive impact on regional and national development is included within the institution's strategic documents. Furthermore, there are quantitative measures in place and these are reflected in the College's Implementation Plan which supports its Strategy 2014-19. To better support its work and the effectiveness of its efforts, and as noted previously in this report, SLK is advised by the team to review the College Strategy and Implementation Plan, including the Key Strategic Indicators and quantitative and qualitative criteria, to increase focus and better enable reflection and enhancement through genuinely qualitative measures that also consider impact. **[recommendation b]**

91   The College keeps a list of all its activity and the table presented in the SER demonstrated the breadth of activity that the College was undertaking to make an impact on Šiauliai. This varies from Adult Education courses to social volunteering projects, all of which are intended to enable positive outcomes for the area. A number of cultural opportunities are also offered, from the College running events such as a Film Club open to the public to its organisation of annual life-enriching activities such as the Christmas Tree in the College Square. There was anecdotal evidence of how much this is valued.

92   The team also saw a considerable number of certificates framed and displayed at the College, all of which commended the College for work that it had done.

93   SLK suggests that it is the unique provider in Šiauliai of the six programmes of study it offers, although that is a moot point as other higher education providers in the region appear to offer overlap in some subject areas. However, admissions data – notably the afore-mentioned high percentage of students from the Šiauliai region itself – indicates that there is a need or interest in taking these programmes. There is a question over the employability of students from Law, significantly the College's largest programme. As the College improves its data collection relating to graduate employability, it would be advised to keep its portfolio of programmes under review to ensure that they do align with national and regional needs. Moreover, in furthering current proposals for programme development, the team notes that the College is seeking guidance from local business partners on what is needed and counsels SLK to consider future need and employability very carefully when committing resource to any development.

94   SLK's work in flexible modes of study and distance-learning also seeks to address the needs both of the region and Lithuania. The College recognises that students sometimes have individual needs or challenging personal circumstances and there was a clear and stated commitment from the College to do its utmost to support such learners. The College also stated a particular ambition to educate and upskill Lithuanians in exile. By focusing study areas on the needs of Lithuania and Šiauliai, this work was intended to enable expatriate Lithuanians to return with more skills and qualifications which would be relevant to local needs, thereby also increasing the employability of the returning nationals. The College is commended by the team for its ambitions in this area and commitment to meeting national and regional priorities. **[good practice e]**

95   The College has worked effectively with its social and business partners to provide its students with valuable placements that contribute to their academic study and employability skills. Furthermore, the team heard from a broad spectrum of social and business partners how much they valued the contribution of SLK students who came to them on placement.

96   SLK has also made particular efforts to work with its social and business partners on the final thesis projects. The College provided data that showed it was attempting to measure the practical applicability of final thesis projects and that this was improving each year (Annex 11 Final Thesis Evaluation Practical Applicabiliity). Final-year students and recent alumni spoke positively about the interesting and relevant projects that were made available to them. The social and business partners that the team met showed considerable engagement in the complete process related to final thesis projects, from initiating projects through to sitting on defence panels. They also confirmed the value of projects in contributing to their needs.

97   The College provided data relating to staff involvement in voluntary service activities, such as elected professional bodies, and participation in voluntary organisations not directly related to professional activities (Annex 21 Staff Public Activities). Although limited contextual information reduced the value of these data to the team, they did demonstrate efforts were being made by some staff to engage in activities such as professional boards, committees and strategic planning working groups. Additionally, the SER notes that the College is a member of nine public and professional associations. A small number of staff were noted as being engaged in voluntary activity, with a breakdown provided of the types of activity this entailed which showed that union activities, club activities and participation in public events juries and event organisation working groups were the main ways of volunteering.

Overview
98   The College has clearly worked hard to foster positive relations with business partners in the Šiauliai region. There is a wide range of activities at the College that show the efforts that have been made to align projects with the needs of the region. There is particular strength evident in how effectively the College has worked with its business partners to ensure that final-year students have interesting opportunities for their final theses; the resulting projects are clearly of use and are valued by business partners, and the students benefit from the professional experience and industry-relevant academic achievement they gain which is likely to support their future employability. Furthermore, the College demonstrated commitment to flexible educational needs and is working on initiatives that will support expatriate Lithuanians to return. More thought on measurement of impact – rather than just metrics – will enable further enhancement of this area.

Judgement on the area: *Impact on Regional and National Development is given positive evaluation.*

VII. GOOD PRACTICE AND ENHANCEMENT RECOMMENDATIONS

The expert team would like to commend the following areas of good practice:

a)   The dedicated and highly competent staff, both academic and administration, as evidenced through the enthusiasm and commitment to the College and its students that was demonstrated in meetings with the team;

b)   The strong commitment to enabling the best possible student experience and student achievement that was evident in the meetings that the team had with students and alumni of the College as well as the College's staff;

c)   The positive and supportive atmosphere of the College, which was reflected in the meetings with alumni of SLK and the College's social partners as well as staff and current students;

d)   The clear efforts made to consult academic staff on all key issues, giving a sense of shared ownership and collegiality;

e)   The College's openness and willingness to adapt to new ways of delivering education, for example its efforts around distance learning;

f)   The strong and effective relationships that the College has achieved with its social and business partners;

g)   SLK's enthusiasm and willingness to engage with other higher education providers around the world to inform its own activity and enhance practice.

For the enhancement of its performance, the expert team would like to make the following recommendations:

a)   Review the Mission and Vision to make them more focused and to reflect the distinctive characteristics of the College

b)   Review the College Strategy and Implementation Plan, including the Key Strategic Indicators and quantitative and qualitative criteria, to increase focus and better enable reflection and enhancement through genuinely qualitative measures that also consider impact

c)   Although the quality management system is working in terms of procedures, the College should consider opportunities to enable reflection and support the development of a culture of quality enhancement

d)   SLK should reassess the effectiveness and appropriateness of its current organisational structure

e)   As a matter of priority, SLK should review its planning and support frameworks for all issues related to distance learners

f)   The resource offered by the Careers Office could be strengthened further by developing clearer links between the Careers Office and the Alumni Club and through the Careers Office becoming a proactive facilitator in relations between SLK and local business.

g)   SLK should concentrate more resources on the strengthening and enhancement of the Lifelong Learning programme

h)   The College should further strengthen and develop the provision of English language courses for academic staff and students

i)   In order that SLK can achieve the statutory requirements made of it with regard to research, the College should review its understanding of and approach to research, including the terminology it uses to define different types of activity, the structures and responsibilities (including committees) it has in place to support and oversee activity, and the establishment of a clearly-defined strategic focus underpinned with appropriate and detailed action.

VIII. JUDGEMENT

Northern Lithuania College of Higher Education is given negative evaluation.

Grupės vadovas: Team leader:	Prof. Donald McQuillan
Grupės nariai: Team members:	Prof. Tiit Roosmaa
	Hannele Keränen
	Mindaugas Juodaitis
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Vertinimo sekretorius: Review secretary:	Dr. Demelza Curnow

ANNEX. NORTHERN LITHUANIA COLLEGE OF HIGHER EDUCATION RESPONSE TO REVIEW REPORT

ŠIAURĖS LIETUVOS KOLEGIJA | **NORTHERN LITHUANIA COLLEGE**

VIEŠOJI ĮSTAIGA ŠIAURĖS LIETUVOS KOLEGIJA

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To: Centre for Quality Assessment in Higher Education   2015-01-16 No. SD-77

Re: INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW REPORT OF NORTHERN LITHUANIA COLLEGE

The academic community of Northern Lithuania College appreciates the insights and recommendations provided by the review team during their site visit. The self-assessment document preparation group has considered the provided draft report (hereinafter - Report) and would like to draw your attention to the following:

1. Regarding experts' comments on resource allocation for particular parts of the Strategic Plan (Report, Paras. 25, 30) we would like to add that in order to safeguard the confidential information, there are separate long-term financial, annually reviewed plans prepared by the College.

2. Risk management actions are set out in the Annual Action Plans of the College, Departments, units and determine changes to the Strategic Plan for 2014-2019. The Strategic Plan undergoes a revision taking into account internal and external changes.

3. Commenting the experts' opinion on the Vision and Mission Statement of the College (Report, Para. 19) we would like to highlight that the vision and the mission has been discussed, formulated and approved by the academic community and social partners. A private college faces keen competition and must promptly and flexibly react to changing market dynamics. The following factors have an impact on changes in the region: state policy, emigration rate, different conditions and opportunities for private and state-funded colleges to compete (e.g., private colleges do not receive state funds through student baskets, they compete with state-funded colleges and many study programmes which duplicate each other). We assume that flexibility and adaptability must be highlighted in the vision and mission statement of a higher education institution. A college must offer an open atmosphere, activity methods, and competent staff in order to meet student expectations. The vision and mission statement of a private college is effective if its study programmes are popular and graduates get jobs. Our College is a non-state-funded private college committed to competing in the higher education market therefore its vision and mission statement must be broadened beyond the needs of the region. We claim that the vision and mission statement of our College is effective; it has been approved and accepted by the academic community and social partners. The activity of the College, productive social partnerships shows that the College significantly contributes to the development of the region.

4. The following good practices, which have been positively evaluated by the review team, prove that the strategy developed by the College is effective: teaching and research staff are dedicated and competent, committed to providing students with the best experiences, ensuring good learning outcomes; a positive and favourable learning environment has been created; supportive management and administrative staff on all important matters instil a sense of responsibility and collegiality; the College is open to innovations, innovative methods of teaching and learning have

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been adopted there; productive partnerships with social partners and enterprises, collaboration with higher education service providers worldwide allow the College to develop activities and expand student practice placements (Report, p. 21).

5. Student positive feedback and the recommendations of the Lithuanian Association of Distance and E.Learning (LieDM) (see Annex 1) also prove that particular attention is paid to distance studies and successful study process management at the College.

6. The concept of applied research (experimental development, R&D) and other related terms, used in our self-assessment documents, are commonly used in college higher education of Lithuania and the official documents of the Ministry of Science and Education of Lithuania.

7. With regard to Applied Research Strategy of the College (Report, para. 81), we would like to explain by adding that preparation of a separate long-term Applied Research and Consultancy Strategy has been foreseen in the Strategic Plan (see Self-Assessment Report, Annex 1, p.38, task 4.5).

8. Membership in the Alliance of Lithuanian Regional Colleges from October 2014 allows the College to pay particular attention to the development of Applied Research Strategy and increase its contribution to the development of the region. The College is involved in the project *Developing the Alliance of Regional Colleges INNO S2B (Innovative Services 2 Business)* launched by the Agency for Science, Innovation and Research (MITA). A pilot study on commercialisation of R&D results has been prepared, knowledge and technology services are to be provided and long-term Applied Research Strategy for 2015-2020 is prepared.

9. The review team is of an opinion that all weak points, identified in research activity in 2007, are still present (Report, para. 88). We disagree that applied research is not carried out in all fields of study and links between research and the offered study programmes are weak and note that:

9.1. The unity of research and studies is ensured through tight bonds with practice: research on internal quality assurance as well as a need for specialists in the region is regularly carried out (see Self-Assessment Report, Annex 16), contract research for regional enterprises conducted and consultations provided. Department staff and students are involved in research;

9.2. The fields of applied research is aligned and carried out in all fields of study: Economics, Law, Informatics Engineering, Business and Management (see Self-Assessment Report, para. 17);

9.3. Scientific-practical conferences on the themes in all fields of study are annually held at the College. Reports are presented in the Economics, Law, Informatics Engineering, Business and Management sections.

9.4. Teaching staff prepare research papers in the research fields approved at the College. They appear in the journal *Studies in Modern Society,* periodically published by the College. Thus the conditions to develop research and subject competencies, renew the content of the courses are created.

10. Comparing applied research and consulting activities at the College, its scientific potential, research impact on the region during the two periods (2002-2006 and 2007-2014), intense achievements are evident:

10.1. From 1 scientific conference organised during 2002-2006 to 16 scientific conferences during 2007-2014 (8 conferences of teaching staff and 8 conferences of students) (see Self-Assessment Report, Annex 14);

10.2. From 1 scientific journal (during 2002-2006) to 21 journals (during 2007-2014): 7 annual students applied research journals of *Professional Bachelor Studies: Applied Research*

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(ISSN 2029-1752); 5 teachers periodical journals of *Studies in Modern Society* (ISSN 2029-431X); proceedings of 9 conferences in digital format (see http://www.slk.lt/mokslas/leidiniai);

      10.3. From 1 contract research (during 2002-2006) to 26 contract research (during 2007-2014), from 6 consultations (during 2002-2006) to 69 seminars and consultations (during 2007-2014). Contract research is set out in the Strategic Plan, Annual Action Plans, Applied Research and Consultancy Strategy. Research activities are determined by taking into account research interests of the Departments, available human resources and needs of the region.

      10.4. Incomes from contract research have increased four times from 30 000 LTL (during 2002-2006) to 122.500 LTL (during 2007-2014) (see Self-Assessment Report, Annex 6).

      The College is committed to implementing the recommendations provided by the review team and actions have been taken already: to set up a Research Division, the Applied Research and Consultancy Strategy is prepared and approved; the activity of the Career Centre is developed by launching a new career training and professional guidance project under the Euroguidance programme, etc.

      We would like to express our thanks to the review team for recognising our achievements and providing valuable recommendations which will help College to improve.

Director   Dr. Mykolas Dromantas

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