



***KAUNO MIŠKŲ IR APLINKOS INŽINERIJOS KOLEGIJOS
VEIKLOS VERTINIMO IŠVADOS***

***INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW REPORT OF
KAUNAS COLLEGE OF FORESTRY AND
ENVIRONMENTAL ENGINEERING***

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I hereby certify that this is the final text of the institutional review report of Kaunas College of Forestry and Environmental Engineering.



Prof. Kevin Kendall

I. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

1. The purpose of the external review is to determine the quality of the performance of a higher education institution based on the findings of the external review, to create prerequisites for improvement of the performance of a higher education institution, to promote a culture of quality, and to inform founders, academic community and the society about the quality of higher education institutions.
2. This review report is based on the evidence given in the self-evaluation report, additional evidence requested by the panel, information provided by the Centre for Quality Assessment in Higher Education (hereinafter – Centre, SKVC) and a site visit, where meetings with a wide range of audiences were held.
3. The Panel was composed of the reviewers, following the Experts Selection Procedure approved by the Director of Centre for Quality Assessment in Higher Education on 31 December 2019 [Order No. V-149](#) and included the following members:
 - **Prof. Kevin Kendall** – panel chair
 - **Mr. Klemen Šubic** – review secretary
 - **Prof. dr. Rik Leemans** – panel member academic
 - **Prof. José-Antonio Bonet** – panel member academic
 - **Dr. Gediminas Jasinevičius** – social partner
 - **and Ms. Goda Kiaunytė** – student
4. As a result of external review **Kaunas College of Forestry and Environmental Engineering** is given a **positive evaluation**.
5. Evaluation areas:

Area	Assessment with points*
MANAGEMENT	3
QUALITY ASSURANCE	3
STUDIES AND RESEARCH (ART)	3
IMPACT ON REGIONAL AND NATIONAL DEVELOPMENT	4

*5 points - **excellent** – the area is rated exceptionally well in the national context and internationally;

4 points – **very good** – the area is rated very well in the national context and internationally, without any drawbacks;

3 points – **good** – the area is being developed systematically, without any major drawbacks;

2 points – **satisfactory** – the area meets the minimum requirements, and there are drawbacks that must be addressed;

1 point - **unsatisfactory** – the area does not meet the minimum requirements, there are fundamental drawbacks.

6. **7 (seven)** examples of good practices were found; **17 (seventeen)** recommendations are made.

II. INTRODUCTION

2.1. Background of the review process

7. The external review of Kaunas College of Forestry and Environmental Engineering (hereafter referred to as KMAIK or the College) was organised by SKVC and carried out in May 2022 by an Expert Panel of international experts (hereinafter – the Panel). It was conducted in accordance with the Procedure for the External Evaluation and Accreditation of Higher Education Institutions and Branches of Foreign Higher Education Institutions, Evaluation Areas and Indicators approved by the Minister of Education, Science and Sport of the Republic of Lithuania (hereinafter – the Procedure) on 19 of December 2019 [Order No. V-1529](#) and the Methodology for Conducting an Institutional Review in Higher Education approved by the Director of SKVC on 9 of March 2020 [Order No V-32](#) (hereinafter – the Methodology).
8. According to the Procedure the external review consists of the following stages: submission of a self-evaluation report prepared by a higher education institution to SKVC; formation of an expert panel and analysis of the self-evaluation report; expert panel visit to the a higher education institution; preparation of the external review report, decision-making on the external review as well as accreditation and publication thereof; follow-up activities aimed at improving the performance of the higher education institution, taking into account the external review report.
9. At the preparatory stage of the external review, the Panel received KMAIK’s Self-Evaluation Report (hereinafter – SER) with 23 annexes. SKVC provided to the Panel additional information about the College, as set in the Methodology (Chapter 26), including statistical data on students and staff; financial data; findings from the ex-ante and ex-post programme reviews, institutional reviews and evaluations of research and development activities; State-budget allocations for research activities; information on academic ethics from the Office of the Ombudsperson for Academic Ethics and Procedures of the Republic of Lithuania. The Panel requested additional information, such as KMAIK procedures for motivating staff, KMAIK remuneration system, Survey report on public education training, Survey report of public education and information events on Forestry, and Detailing material resources for studies, research and consultancy activities.
10. The site visit was undertaken after a training session organized by SKVC staff and preparatory Panel meetings. **Due to the worldwide pandemic situation, the review visit was organised online using video-conferencing tool Zoom** hosted by SKVC. Subsequently, the Panel met virtually to review and agree conclusions and recommendations. The review report was finalised by correspondence and submitted to the SKVC.
11. In line with the Procedure, the external review focused on four areas covered by the evaluation indicators and related criteria: **Management, Quality assurance, Studies and Research (Art)** and **Impact on Regional and National Development**. In analyzing the evidence collected, the Panel also gave due consideration to the recommendations of the previous review of KMAIK from 2013.
12. The review of a higher education institution assesses each of the evaluation areas with one of five ratings: **excellent** – 5 points – the area is rated exceptionally well in the national context and internationally; **very good** – 4 points – the area is rated very well in the national context and

internationally, without any drawbacks; **good** – 3 points – the area is being developed systematically, without any major drawbacks; **satisfactory** – 2 points – the area meets the minimum requirements, and there are drawbacks that must be addressed; **unsatisfactory** – 1 point – the area does not meet the minimum requirements, there are fundamental drawbacks.

13. The decision on **positive** evaluation is made when none of the evaluation areas is evaluated unsatisfactorily (1 point). The decision on **negative** evaluation is made when at least one of the evaluation areas is evaluated unsatisfactory (1 point).
14. In line with the Methodology, the review report, prepared by the Panel is reviewed by SKVC and sent to the higher education institution to submit comments on factual errors and the evaluations based thereon. The Panel revises the report in response to the comments from the higher education institution (if applicable) and submits it to SKVC.
15. The Panel received and considered KMAIK's comment. As a result, one change was made to the report (the number of student members in the Academic Council).
16. After the Panel considers comments from the higher education institution (if applicable) and finalizes it, the report is considered by the external Commission of the Higher Education Institutions' Review (hereinafter – the Commission), set up by SKVC. On the basis of the proposal, made by the Commission, provisioned in the Commission's regulations, approved by the order of the Director of SKVC on 8 of January, 2020 order [No. V-5](#), SKVC takes one of the decisions:
 - to evaluate the performance of the higher education institution positively;
 - to evaluate the performance of the higher education institution negatively.

The higher education institution shall be entitled to lodge a reasoned complaint to the Commission for Appeals formed by the Centre.

The decisions of the Centre and the Commission for Appeals may be appealed against in accordance with the procedure established by the Law on Administrative Proceedings of the Republic of Lithuania.

17. On the basis of the external review decision SKVC takes one of the following decisions on the **accreditation** of the higher education institution:
 - to **accredit for a period of seven years** if performance of the higher education institution is evaluated positively;
 - to **accredit for a period of three years** if performance of the higher education institution is evaluated negatively;
 - to **provide no accreditation** if the repeated external review results of the higher education institution are negative.
18. SKVC announces the decision on the external review together with the conclusions of the external review and the decision on the accreditation of the higher education institution on its website. The higher education institution announces the decision on the evaluation of the higher education institution together with the external review report on its website and maintains it until the next external review.

2.2. Background information about the institution

19. Kaunas Forestry and Environmental Engineering College history dates back in 1927 where public enterprise Kauno miškų ir aplinkos inžinerijos kolegija was established in the city of Alytus. In 1939, it was moved to Vilnius, and in 1963 in Kaunas district (Girionys settlement). During Soviet times, the institution was reorganized into Forestry Technical School and after restoration of independence it again become higher school with one study programme (Forestry). In 2002 (August 30), upon the resolution of Lithuanian Republic Government, Kaunas Higher Forestry School was reorganized into the state educational institution by entitling it as Kaunas Forestry and Environmental Engineering University of Applied Sciences (hereinafter referred to as KMAIK, the College). Since gaining the status of HEI, KMAIK introduced several different study programmes: Landscape design (in 2002), Land management (in 2003), Hydrotechnical Engineering (in 2003), Recreation (implemented from 2006 to 2018) and Cadastral Measurements and Real Estate Valuation (in 2007). The name of the latter programme has recently been changed to Real Estate Cadastral Measurements.
20. In 2016 new study programme Horticulture was introduced. At the time of assessment, 6 (six) first cycle college study programmes are implemented at KMAIK (Forestry, Landscape design, Land Management, Hydrotechnical Engineering, Real Estate Cadastral Measurements and Horticulture), awarding professional Bachelor degree and 2 (two) vocational training programmes (Forestry Employee and Ornamental Planting and Environmental Management Business Employee).
21. All higher education studies are 1st cycle professional study programmes with special attention dedicated to practical training. KMAIK infrastructure includes two faculties -Faculty of Forestry and Landscape Architecture (including three departments) and Faculty of Environmental Engineering (including 4 departments, one of which is Department of Vocational Training) and the Information Centre (dealing with in-services courses and raising public awareness). As of October 1, 2021, 895 students are studying at KMAIK, of which 12 are foreign students (most of them from Republic of Belarus and Ukraine).
22. KMAIK currently has 84 employees, representing a total of 69.2 full time equivalent (FTE), of which 61 are academic staff (13 are employed full time, which equals 21% of all teachers)).

KMAIK is focused on implementing higher educational studies only in the 1st study cycle, as provided by the Law on Higher Education and Research of the Republic of Lithuania, and oriented to provide professional education with special emphasis on practical training and applied scientific research, that has been carried out since 2003 through a large number of commissioned work, consultancy and investment projects. It publishes its own scientific journal “Forestry and Landscape Management”, where students and teachers publish research results and has a deep and close relationship with external environment and social partners.

In 2013 an external institutional evaluation of KMAIK took place, which awarded College accreditation for a maximum period of 6 years.

III. ANALYSIS BY EVALUATION AREAS

3.1. Management

Management area is being analyzed in accordance to the following indicators and criteria, set up in the Methodology.

1.1. Compliance of the higher education institution's strategic action plan with the mission, assurance of its implementation:

1.1.1. The strategic action plan is consistent with the mission of the higher education institution, legal acts regulating research and study activities and it takes into account the provisions of the national research and study policy, the European Higher Education Area and the European Research Area;

1.1.2. The parts of the strategic action plan (analysis of the current situation, priorities and aims, objectives of the activities, implementation means, resources, planned performance indicators) are appropriate and justified;

1.1.3. Regular monitoring of the implementation of the strategic action plan is carried out and the results are used to improve performance management.

23. The Panel explored the strategic management of the College with reference to the criteria set out in the Methodology and explicitly considered the strategic plan's suitability for purpose, arrangements for the plan's publicity and its availability to stakeholders and the public at large, guarantees for its implementation, and management effectiveness.

24. The KMAIK strategy 2020 and its Strategic Directions (SDs) were successfully implemented. Currently, the KMAIK Strategy Plan 2030 and the KMAIK Strategy Plan 2021-2023 are being implemented and are in line with LR Law on Higher Education and Research, National Education Strategy 2013-2022; Lithuanian's Progress Strategy till 2030 and ESG Guidelines. These strategic plans were developed by analyzing the current situation and emerging trends, and by consulting all institutional and organizational units, staff members and students, and many national stakeholders. This **good-practice** process helped to define all required objectives and prioritize the many proposed activities. The plans all comply well with KMAIK's mission and are highly relevant for further developing Lithuanian's forestry, landscape architecture and other environmental sectors that are taught at KMAIK. These plans are definitely suited for the purpose. The plans are also approved by the responsible ministries, supported by the various stakeholders and communicated to broader audiences through KMAIK's website and social media. Nationally, KMAIK's Strategic Plan is broadly accepted.

25. The strategic plans recognize nine different strategic directions (SDs), which aim to:

SD1 Assure KMAIK's viability/cost-effectiveness;

SD2 Improvement of study quality and graduates' employability;

SD3 Develop applied financially sustainable scientific research and consultancy activities;

SD4 Enhance internationalization;

SD5 Improve and develop study and research facilities and infrastructure, and foster KMAIK's environment;

SD6 Increase attention to KMAIK community, so every staff member and student find favorable conditions for personal development;

SD7 Actively distribute knowledge in the society and develop life-long learning;

SD8 Improve the image and communication to exhibit change of technologies and progress of KMAIK;

SD9 Improve internal quality assurance systems and organization culture.

26. Progress towards these SDs is carefully monitored on an annual basis. Each SD is divided into many aims, objectives and measures, and responsible persons and executing departments are transparently appointed. The progress of each measure is quantified by one or more indicators. Progress is finally reported as an implementation percentage, based on the indicator values. The measures are aggregated towards objectives and aims by arithmetically averaging the indicator's percentage values and this is used to support management decisions. These procedures are all well organized and well established, but the Panel is critical of this complicated monitoring system for two specific reasons. First, the list of aims, objectives and measures is long and complicated. Not all indicators are quantitative and this makes the conversion to percentages challenging. Second, the percentages of achieved aims, objectives and indicators show that the progress towards the 2021-2023 strategy is already better than that of the Strategy Plan 2016-2020. However, this conclusion results from a much too positive algorithm for aggregating the indicator values. The values of achieved indicators range from 0% to 677%, while probably only two values matter (i.e. <100% (not achieved) and $\geq 100\%$ (achieved)). More relevant is likely to report how many measures are achieved for, for example, 50% or 95% and truncate values over 100%. As the current algorithm frequently provides misleading results [1], these changes would result in more reliable averages that are calculated for the objectives and aims. For example, not averaging, but only assessing if all indicators (or objectives) are achieved, the percentage of achieved aims and objectives drop to 43% and 59% respectively for the 2021-2023 strategy. This is much lower than the values on which management decisions are taken. **The Panel, therefore, recommends that the current aims, objectives and indicators, and the aggregation algorithm of the monitoring system should be re-evaluated and, if necessary, supplemented by more informative ones.**

27. The Panel finds the process of developing these strategic plans well organized but also recognizes some limitations. First, mainly national stakeholders are involved as consultants. Although this surely increases the plans' relevance for Lithuania, the international relevance stays inadequate and this could well hamper the desired internationalization (SD4). The strategic plan can better be also adjusted towards international research agendas, such as those defined by the European Commission (e.g. H2020, EUROREG and policy plans, such as the Green Deal and the Circular Economy), the international science-policy assessments (e.g. IPCC and IPBES), and international research and policy programmes (e.g. Future Earth and the UN-Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs, especially SDG6 on water, SDG7 on clean energy, SDG11 on sustainable cities, SDG13 on climate action and SDG15 on terrestrial ecosystems).

[1] For example, an aim with two objectives and six measures can be declared achieved (e.g. with 115%) with only one achieved objective (e.g. $O1=150\%$ and $O2=80\%$) and two

achieved measures (e.g. M1.1=320% and M2.1=120%), while most measures are not achieved (i.e. M1.2=80%, M2.2=70%, M2.3=80% and M2.4=50%) (data exploited from the SER).

28. Such internationally anchored focus (including research) is also highly relevant for Lithuania in the longer term (e.g. adapting forestry to climate change or developing renewable energy sources). **The Panel recommends that further effort should be placed on the internationalization of KMAIK when developing the next strategy.** Second, having developed and implemented a complicated monitoring system with too many objectives and measures can hamper innovation and flexibility to adequately respond to emerging challenges. Although the SDs are broad and well-targeted, the many objectives and measures could well lock in focus to just ongoing activities and miss new opportunities for timely course topics, research directions and consultancies. **The Panel recommends that KMAIK review the strategic monitoring system and, where appropriate, simplify and improve it and to effectively track strategic development and stimulate flexibility in responding to emerging national and international issues.**

1.2. Effectiveness of process management of the higher education institution:

1.2.1. A clear structure for governance, decision making and distribution of responsibilities is defined;

1.2.2. Regular process management analysis is performed, preconditions for process improvement and risk management are planned;

1.2.3. Stakeholders are involved in the management process at an adequate level.

29. The Panel analyzed how the current KMAIK's management bodies are properly designed to fulfill the strategic objectives of the institution. Particularly, the Panel explored the distribution of responsibilities across the organizational structure, the involvement of stakeholders in decision-making processes and the ability of the College to meet future challenges.

30. The Panel concluded during the visit and the meetings that the KMAIK structure is very well recognized and that, in addition to the established rules of procedure, there is much informal communication and feedback between students, academic staff and the administration as a whole. Communication pathways are short and the students benefit from being in a small college. The College has a strong community and the loyalty and proudness of all its members are one of its greatest institutional values that need to be preserved.

31. KMAIK has solid and well-structured governing bodies that guarantee the correct management of the institution. The Council and the Academic Council, together with the KMAIK Director and his team bear the responsibility for the process of college management. The Council is the highest governing body, having the ultimate responsibility for defining the College strategy and the subsequent operational measures whilst the Academic Council has the subsidiary liability in all the academic-related issues. The Director, together with the Deputy Director for academic affairs, the Deputy Director for development and innovations and the heads of the units are in charge of governing the institution on a daily basis. The organizational structure covers the different fields of KMAIK's activity and responds to the strategic axes and operational measures fixed by the Council. Nevertheless, the Panel considers the need for reinforcing the responsibility and visibility of key areas in order to be more effective in achieving the College goals. Particularly, the need to increase internationalization, which is

recognized as one of the top-ranked institutional challenges, contrasts with the lack of strategic position of his/her responsible (currently the head of international relations reports to the information center). In view of that, the **Panel recommends placing the person responsible for internationalization affairs in a more prominent strategic position within the College structure.**

32. The process of decision-making is based on regular and well-established data gathering, and the assumption of responsibilities is defined through different rules and regulations. Risk-assessment is a process conducted in parallel with activity planning, by evaluating internal and external factors when developing KMAIK Strategy and Activity plan. However, the College tends to be reactive rather than proactive and thinking about the present and future challenges that the HEIs needs to face (i.e.: internationalization, student dropout, increment of part-time students), they need to adopt operational measures that go beyond compliance with KMAIK's strategic and operational plans. **The Panel recommends that KMAIK considers establishing plans for addressing the challenges mentioned above.**

33. The Panel noted the good cooperation and collaboration between academic and social partners. The students are present on the different committees and are included in the process of decision-making. The social partners are many and varied, hold prominent positions in Lithuanian society and are clearly engaged and committed to the mission, vision and activities of KMAIK. In spite of this positive alignment, the College's Self Evaluation Report recognized the internationalization as one of the main areas for improvement and, consequently, the involvement of international experts in the different governing bodies as well as using consultation panels that would contribute to achieve such objective. **The Panel encourages KMAIK to rethink its organizational structure in the governing bodies by involving international experts with the aim of strengthening the College's internationalization focus (in the College's management and/or advisory bodies).**

1.3. Publicity of information on the performance of the higher education institution and its management effectiveness:

1.3.1. Systematic collection and analysis of the performance data, results (including student employment and graduate career monitoring) is in place, data is used for the improvement of performance of the higher education institution;

1.3.2. Information on the performance of the higher education institution is clear, accurate and accessible to the academic community and the public, and is provided regularly to the founders and members of the legal entity.

34. KMAIK systematically collects data from its activity. It does this by conducting surveys with students, graduates, lecturers and employers. There is a procedure for using feedback in improving the quality of studies which details the organisation of feedback, data collection, analysis, access and dissemination to those that need it within KMAIK. Numerical data is also collected, for example, student recruitment, progression, achievement and destination data. Both surveys and numerical data are used effectively by KMAIK for the improvement of performance, which is evident from the self-evaluation report and action plans.

35. The fundamental part of the study programme quality assurance process is the collection of data from surveys. Stakeholders, for example, students, graduates, lecturers and employers, are routinely and regularly surveyed and this data is analyzed by the programme committees, the

departments and the Academic Council for improvement actions through the College quality assurance processes. In addition, qualitative feedback is collected from interviews, discussions, telephone calls, emails and focus groups.

36. Data on graduate employment show that 82% of interviewed graduates were employed six months after graduation and 48% in the specialist area. The College states that although these figures are good, they are actually lower than reality because some graduates take up a lower position to gain experience, six-eight percent of graduates go abroad and cannot be contacted and approximately 11% of graduates continue their studies in another higher education institution.
37. All surveys are conducted at programme level in the departments so this enables detailed analysis applicable to each programme. This also enables long term analysis of results each year to see trends and impacts of interventions. Feedback from the surveys is discussed at programme, department, Academic Council and Directorate levels. Actions arising from this analysis are used in the self-evaluation of study programmes and study areas and could include improvements of the organisation of the programme, development of academic staff, strategic planning or marketing. A summary of the regular feedback from these surveys is publicised on the website and the internal learning platform. The Panel conclude that the College has a system in place for the collection and analysis of performance data which is used for the improvement of performance and this information is clear, accurate and accessible to those that need it.

1.4. Effectiveness of human resource management:

- 1.4.1. Clear and transparent principles and procedures for the formation, management, evaluation of academic and non-academic staff are established and applied;*
- 1.4.2. The higher education institution has sufficient academic (in-house academic staff) and non-academic staff to meet its operational objectives;*
- 1.4.3. The qualifications of the academic and non-academic staff are appropriate for the purposes of the higher education institution;*
- 1.4.4. Conditions are created for the academic staff to improve the knowledge and skills required for teaching and research activities;*
- 1.4.5. Conditions are created for non-academic staff to develop competencies.*

38. General staff management principles are defined in the KMAIK Statute. Staff management issues are also targeted in the KMAIK Strategy 2030 and monitored through the implementation of strategic aims and objectives. Staff management is the responsibility of the KMAIK Department of Personnel Management and Law in cooperation with the Finance and Accounting Service and other administrative departments. The Department of Personnel Management and Law, taking into consideration proposals of structural departments, evaluates the demand for the staff, compiles lists of employees' positions, arranges competition and admission, regulates recruiting, organizes reporting of employees' activity and develops descriptions requirements for different positions of staff.
39. The arrangements for staff recruitment, management and evaluation are laid down in a number of internal KMAIK regulations (Statute; Description of Academic Staff Management Procedure; Description of Staff Promotion Procedure; System of Work Payment; Description of Staff Promotion Procedure; Procedure of Competition for a Lecturer's Position and Lecturers' Certification; Qualification Requirements for a Lecturer's Position). These internal regulations

are in line with the national legal acts such as the Law on Higher Education and Research of the Republic of Lithuania and the Labour Code.

40. Academic staff are recruited and assessed based on the Procedure of Competition for a Lecturer's Position and Lecturers' Certification. The key elements of these procedures are:

- Requirements for the Competition and Attestation Commissions, the procedure for the formation and work of these commissions;
- The procedure for announcing and organizing a public competition for the position of the College's lecturers;
- Lecturers certification procedure (conditions, procedure and organization).

These procedures ensure that staff recruitment and assessment is based on the principles of professionalism, transparency, honesty, publicity, equal opportunities and competencies.

41. The performance of academic staff is assessed every five years in a regular certification process. In between non-regular certification might take place based on the lecturers' annual activity report and students' feedback after each term. This information is discussed in departments, during meetings of the Directorate, Academic Council and used during lecturers' assessments. Regular academic staff certification (every five years) is clear and transparent process, however, assessment in between regular certification is largely uncertain moreover, there is no system for assessing non-academic staff. In the meetings with the Panel, it was found that individual appraisal is performed informally in discussion with the Directorate. Therefore, a uniform periodical staff evaluation system linked with Work Payment and Promotion systems is **recommended**. For example, an annual personal development discussion with all staff members would be sufficient for a college like KMAIK in order to obtain information on staff development and receive appropriate feedback.

42. In the academic year 2017-2021, KMAIK on average employed 85 staff members with a good gender balance (44% men and 56% women). Out of 85 staff members on average 60 were academic staff, who occupied 36.3 positions whereas non-academic staff included 25 employees who occupied 18.7 positions. The number of academic staff and non-academic staff has slightly decreased in the last few years (from 88 staff members in 2017 to 83 in 2021) also the number of students has decreased. The share of lecturers working on a continuous employment contract constantly increased from 82.3% in 2017 to 90.5 % in 2021. For the period 2017-2021, the proportion of full-time staff remained fairly stable at around 65%. A rather small proportion of full-time staff might be explained by the fact that the teaching sector in Lithuania is rather small, therefore many lectures teaching or working as practitioners in more than one institution. The number of students per academic staff position (FTE) varied from 20.1 to 21.7 in the period from 2017-2021, and non-academic staff from 40.6 to 40 respectively. The number of students per staff position remained fairly stable and on average was below the maximum value recommended in methodological guidelines. A slight decrease of non-academic staff illustrates increasing working efficiency of the KMAIK non-academic staff. KMAIK had 25 administrative and support staff in the academic year 2017-2021. All non-academic staff have at least a Bachelor's degree, 19% hold a Master's and 17% Doctoral degree. In the Panel's view, the non-academic staff of KMAIK, given their number and their qualifications, is appropriate for effective support to the College in key areas of its activity. However, KMAIK should take an action to increase the share of younger lecturers. In the last five years the share of lecturers

below fifty years old dropped from 53% to 42%. This might have negative consequences in the long term when many lecturers will retire therefore it is **recommended** to develop measures to attract younger lecturers.

43. Academic staff are recruited based on the principle of professionalism that is defined in the Qualification Requirements for a Lecturer's Position. When recruiting academic staff, KMAIK assesses the candidate's teaching and scientific experience, subject competencies, experience of professional activity in the study field, interest in theoretical and practical issues of the subjects taught. Lecturers' achievements in the professional areas are evaluated during the certification process every five years. KMAIK encourages lecturers regularly to develop their subject, teaching, and professional competencies and to participate in research and development activities. The proportion of academic staff with a scientific degree increased significantly from 25% in 2017 to 46% in 2021. The proportion of staff with a scientific degree exceeds the national requirements and this increase illustrates achievement of KMAIK goals. **This might be an effect of promotion system applied in KMAIK where every five years lecturers can suspend teaching for up to a period of one year in order to conduct scientific research and develop their qualification (for instance, to pursue doctoral studies). During this period the average salary is paid for a lecturer. This is seen as a good practice to motivate academic staff and increase the proportion of academic staff with a scientific degree.** KMAIK non-academic staff have sufficient qualifications to perform their tasks. All non-academic staff members have at least higher education qualifications. In recent years the majority of non-academic staff have regularly developed their qualification by attending various training. In the Panel's view, KMAIK's academic and non-academic staff are qualified and appropriate for the purposes of the College.
44. KMAIK provides conditions for academic staff for development of knowledge and skills essential for teaching and scientific activities. The Information Centre collects and circulates information about upcoming activities that might be suitable for academic staff qualification development. Qualification development plans are present at the department level. Academic staff are encouraged to increase their qualifications by participating in various programmes and events such as conferences, internships, courses, training, seminars, field days, international exchange programmes and doctoral studies. Great attention is paid to improving lecturers' didactic competencies. During the pandemic, virtual events were popular among academic staff. In 2020 remote participation significantly increased the number of academic staff who improved their qualification moreover, decreased expenditure on qualification improvement by 2.5 times compared with previous years. The share of lecturers who developed their competencies in 2020 was 55.9% compared to 23.1% in 2017.
45. In the case of non-academic staff development of knowledge and skills looks less structured. A bottom-up approach is prevailing when selecting training or other forms of learning. This is understandable due to the small number of non-academic staff. Non-academic staff members usually approach the College administration when they find relevant training for their qualification development and ask for permission to participate. During the last five years on average, 80% of non-academic staff members annually develop their qualifications. In the Panel's view, KMAIK's academic and non-academic staff have sufficient conditions for developing their knowledge, skills and competencies.

1.5. Efficiency of financial and learning resource management:

1.5.1. Financial resources are planned, allocated and used rationally;

1.5.2. Various financial resources for the implementation of higher education activities are attracted;

1.5.3. Learning resources for provision of studies and research (art) activities are planned and used rationally;

1.5.4. Learning resources for conducting studies and research (art) activities are appropriate, sufficient and available.

46. KMAIK is a state higher education institution and consequently the Republic of Lithuania largely funds the institution. As an average of the last reported years, the State contributed approximately 70% of the College revenue, whilst the EU-funded research and investments projects represented between 9 and 24% (average of around 15%) and the earned revenues coming from scientific research, consultancy activities as well as other services amounted to around 15% of the total budget. The total budget of the College amounts, on average, to 2.2 million euros.
47. The annual budget is approved by the Council whereas the Director has the responsibility for the proper execution of the budget. In turn, the Director receives the support of the Deputy Director for Development and Innovations Finance and Accounting Office, who has the direct responsibility of managing the institutional economics. The KMAIK structure scheme shows that the Information Centre, the Facilities and Maintenance Service, the Public Procurement Office and the Department of Personnel, Management and Law are the different sections that directly report to such Deputy Director.
48. The College follows the regulations established in the Financial Management Procedures, that guarantee the efficiency and efficacy of the financial resources management. On an annual basis, the different departments provide a procurement plan for the consideration and approval of the Directorate. This plan serves as the basis for the yearly breakdown expenditure. The Panel considers that KMAIK is properly managed from the point of view of the financial resources, the fulfillment of the budget in the last few years, in spite of the abrupt changes in the percentage of expenses distribution categories caused by the COVID-19 pandemic is one of the evidences of the good health of the financial system.
49. KMAIK is accomplishing the mandate of Strategic Direction 3 that establishes the need for increasing the earned revenue by extending the volume of scientific research and consultancy activities. The evolution of the fundraising shows a positive trend, mainly due to the increase in the percentage of consultancy activities, that benefits of the diversity of disciplines taught by the College. However, the academic staff recognize that they are also attracting funds at small scale with an excess of time-consuming projects. Due to the KMAIK's growing financial dependence on the success of project applications, as well as the high independence provided by Lithuanian regulations in managing its own resources, **the Panel recommends that KMAIK develop a fundraising strategy in parallel with the research plan.**
50. The yearly distribution of expenses is split among staff costs, that amount to around 70% of the total expenses, infrastructure maintenance and improvement (18%), and other expenses, which include student grants, services, loans, etc... amounting on average to around the remaining 12% of the budget. This distribution of expenses, which feeds the different study

programmes as well as the other institutional activities, follows the measures and indicators established in the Strategic and operational plan of the KMAIK. **However, the Panel recommends that the College review the Budget to increase institutional resilience in light of future institutional challenges. The Panel recommends exploring possibilities of increasing the reserve funds aiming to face unexpected expenses and/or finance the strategic actions listed in the current evaluation.**

51. The KMAIK premises have been progressively adapted to the needs of handicapped people and all of them are fulfilling the legal requirements for safety. The College has a correct balance between managing its own facilities and agreements with other institutions for the use of shared infrastructure. Despite the appropriate level of present premises and facilities, new investments, that are currently dependent on occasional extraordinary budget allocations, will be required in the future. **The Panel recommends investigating investment opportunities aligned with the KMAIK's research plan.**

52. The Panel confirmed the adequacy of the learning resources applied to both, studies and research. The evidence raised from the Self Evaluation Report together with the high level of satisfaction expressed by the users with such learning resources during the Panel's visit, confirm this fact. The KMAIK management bodies invested a large part of their available budget in the renovation of buildings and premises, always conditioned to the availability of external funds. The secretariat also demonstrated its capacity to positively react to the need for increasing IT resources and technological equipment as a consequence of the COVID-19 pandemic. The College largely uses the available premises in an efficient way, overpassing the average indicators of floor space per student (13.9 m²/student in the case of KMAIK whilst recommended floor space per student in the methodological guidelines is 12.0 m²). The College users also enjoy a well-equipped library and the research infrastructures of other institutions through inter-institutional cooperation agreements.

53. **In summary**, KMAIK's strategic planning is suited for its purpose and offers adequate monitoring of the strategic measures and activities on an ongoing (annual) basis and planning accordingly for the next evaluation period, for which it has in place a full and comprehensive set of indicators in 9 areas of strategic directions. The Panel acknowledges the effort made to ensure that the Strategic Plans have been developed by analyzing the current situation and trends in close collaboration and involvement of relevant internal and external (national) stakeholders and that they are well aligned with KMAIK's mission and the disciplines developed in the KMAIK study programmes, and national and international strategic documents. In addition, the Panel learned that, despite the reduced number of aims, measures and objectives, following the recommendations from the previous institutional assessment from 2013, the list remains overly complex and long, and the monitoring does not allow KMAIK adequate flexibility, progress and enhancement. This is also due to the monitoring methodology, which is limited to quantitative indicators (measured as percentages) when measuring also qualitative objectives. The fact that the monitoring system for achieving the set objectives and measures is rather administrative and complex to ensure greater flexibility and adaptability in finding solutions at the national and international levels means that it should be simplified and improved in the future.

The current KMAIK organizational structure is well-established and guarantees effective management of the institution, covers all fields of KMAIK's activity, and responds to the strategic orientations and operational measures and objectives, but is lacking in the

organizational structure a dedicated working position responsible for international affairs and cooperation. In its operation, decision-making, and strategic planning, the College tends to act more in a reactive than proactive way. For the most part, it is focusing more on current than future challenges, like internationalization, student dropout, innovations in T&L, as well as international research projects. Therefore the Panel advises properly addressing these challenges in future strategic documents.

The Panel learned that cooperation with external stakeholders and social partners is very well established and transparent, the students, as well as social partners, are involved in different committees and included in the decision-making processes at KMAIK. Regular and systematic collection and analysis of data provided in formal and informal ways are relevant and useful, and results are (publicly) available to all interested parties.

KMAIK provides transparent staffing and recruitment, management, and evaluation procedures in accordance with internal and national acts based on the principles of professionalism, transparency, fairness, publicity, equal opportunities, and competencies. KMAIK also provides academic and non-academic staff with sufficient support and opportunities for development, acknowledged by the Panel as adequate for career development and personal growth.

With a total budget of an average of 2.2 million euros per year, the Panel notes that KMAIK is adequately financially managed with sufficient financial and material resources for the day-to-day operation of the College. Despite the positive financial trend observed in the expansion of scientific research and advisory activities, the Panel identified some recommendations for improvement in terms of investment planning and fundraising strategy.

54. **Judgment:** the area is being developed systematically, without any major drawbacks and is given 3 points (good).

55. **Recommendations for the area:**

- The current aims, objectives and indicators, and the aggregation algorithm of the monitoring system should be re-evaluated and, if necessary, supplemented by more informative ones.
- When developing the next strategy, a further effort should be placed on the internationalization of KMAIK.
- To effectively follow strategic development and stimulate flexibility in responding to emerging national and international issues it is recommended to review the strategic monitoring system and, where appropriate, simplify and improve. This includes planning and developing a fundraising strategy and investment plan in parallel to the research plan. A part of the budget shall be allocated to support financing of strategic actions.
- The person responsible for internationalization affairs should be placed in a more prominent position within the College structure.
- In order to further promote the internationalization of KMAIK and to strengthen the College's international focus, it is recommended that relevant foreign experts should be included in the College's management and/or advisory bodies.
- It is recommended that the academic and non-academic staff evaluation system linked with Work Payment and Promotion systems is reviewed to ensure a periodical, fair and structured evaluation of staff members.

- It is recommended that KMAIK undertakes thorough succession planning for teaching and research staff in order to attract young specialists and foreign lecturers.

56. Good practice examples:

- In KMAIK the proportion of academic staff with a scientific degree increased significantly from 25% in 2017 to 46% in 2021. Stimulating working conditions and the opportunity that lecturers can suspend teaching up to a period of one year in order to conduct scientific research and develop their qualification (for instance, to pursue doctoral studies) gave excellent results and raised the number of staff with scientific degree. During this period the average salary is paid for a lecturer.

3.2. Quality assurance

Quality assurance area is being analysed in accordance to the following indicators and criteria, set up in the Methodology.

2.1. Implementation and effectiveness of the internal quality assurance system:

2.1.1. The higher education institution has approved and made publicly available internal quality assurance documents that are consistent with the Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area;

2.1.2. Internal quality assurance measures of planning, implementation and improvement are appropriate, applied periodically and ensure the involvement of the whole institution and stakeholders;

2.1.3. Processes for planning, implementation, monitoring, periodic evaluation and development of activities are specified;

2.1.4. Students and academic and non-academic staff of the institution receive effective support;

2.1.5. Provisions and procedures for academic integrity, tolerance and non-discrimination, appeal and ethics are specified and applied;

2.1.6. The results of the external review are used to improve the performance of the higher education institution.

57. The Improvement of the internal quality assurance system and organizational culture was identified as a strategic direction in the Strategy 2020 published in 2012. The objectives were to install an integrated, modern quality management system that meets the needs of the College, to install a strategy monitoring system and to foster organizational culture. The responsibility for this strategic direction was given to the Deputy Director of Academic Affairs who reports to the Director every quarter. The Director then provides intermediate reports to the Academic Council every six months and annual reports to the College Council. College annual reports, which include quality assurance activities, are published on the website.

58. The Institutional Review Report published in 2013 identified that some improvements to the gathering and analysis of management information would be useful to the College to help in its decision-making capacity and to be able to benchmark against similar colleges elsewhere. They, therefore, recommended that the College make a continued effort to embed a quality culture within the College, taking into account national and international good practices, such as European Standards and Guidelines. The team acknowledges that the College has made

considerable progress on this objective and has also done a mapping exercise that shows how it complies with the Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the Higher Education Area (ESG).

59. In 2017 the Academic Council approved an improved Quality Policy and published Quality Guidelines that describe the processes and responsibilities for quality assurance. This is a very detailed document that describes the procedures for quality improvement in all aspects of the College activity. It also describes the surveys organized by the College with its stakeholders which include, surveys of first-year students during the Autumn term, of all students at the end of each term, of students returning from an exchange, of students after completing professional practice, and of final year students. The Panel discussed these surveys with students, and they confirmed that they all had the opportunity to give feedback via these surveys, **however, feedback through the student representative system is underdeveloped as they were not aware of how this was used to provide feedback, and were also not aware of any mechanism for them to get feedback on their feedback to close the loop. The panel recommends improving communication and informing students about the results of surveys through student representatives in governing bodies.**
60. There is also an annual lecturers survey, a graduates' survey and an employers' survey which is often followed up by telephone to get more qualitative feedback. As the College is a **relatively small institution, the Panel also acknowledges that there are many formal and informal ways of gathering feedback from a large range of stakeholders, which can be considered a good practice. The Panel identified the strong moral and organizational culture and dedication of all internal and external stakeholders.**
61. The Strategic Plan 2021-2023 addresses Strategic Direction 9, Improvement of the internal quality assurance system and organisational culture but no aspects of quality assurance are identified in the SWOT analysis despite it being very comprehensive in other respects. The overall analysis of each Strategic Direction is commendable in its detail and actions to address the objectives of improving the quality management system and fostering internal culture and external communication of the organisation. The quality management system at the College is consistent with both the College's strategic direction and the European Standards and Guidelines (ESG).
62. Decision-making procedures and responsibilities at the College are described in the Statute. The Management Representative for Quality is appointed by the Director and is responsible for the dissemination of actions arising from the quality management system. The governing body responsible for quality assurance is the Academic Council which has the responsibility to establish programmes of study, approve study programmes and submit proposals to the Director on their funding and rearrangement of the College structure necessary for implementation of the programmes; evaluate results, quality and level of scientific research and experimental development and approve internal system of quality assurance and monitors its implementation. The Academic Council has fifteen members, including three students, and they meet at least once per term. Decisions of the Academic Council are communicated internally at the College and must be observed.
63. College stakeholders, for example, students, lecturers, graduates, and employers, are represented on many colleges governing bodies and committees such as the College Council, the

Academic Council, the Directorate, the Ethics Committee, and participate in decision making and improvement at the College.

64. Study Programme Committees are responsible for the continuous monitoring and improvement of the study programmes. They meet once per term and report directly to the department on quality improvement proposals. Departments formally meet at least twice per year. Up to 10% of the subject content of a programme can be changed every year without additional approval by the College Programme Committee and of course, lecturers are constantly updating their teaching every year to keep up with new developments in the subject, which is considered positively by the Panel.
65. Annual plans, including areas of identified improvements, are written in advance of each academic year and timescales and responsibilities are agreed upon. Quality Improvement Plans are approved at the Academic Council and at the end of the year the Management Representative for Quality monitors progress against the plan. All documents regulating internal quality assurance are published on the website and the internal network.
66. The College states in the Self Evaluation that a fundamental part of the quality assurance system for study programmes is the collection and analysis of feedback from students, graduates, lecturers and employers in order to monitor quality and make improvements. However, the College has a long-standing issue with student drop out from programmes which was identified in the 2013 institutional report and the College assured the team at the time that they were investigating the reasons for the student dropouts and was trying to put solutions in place. One reason is that students arrive from secondary schools with gaps in their knowledge and understanding of exact sciences, such as maths, physics and chemistry, and find difficulty in catching up. However, the student dropout rate was discussed on this review also and the Evaluation panel **recommends that the College continues to investigate the reasons for student dropout and consider introducing an exit survey to help analyse the reasons for this. The team acknowledges that students who drop out may change to part-time or evening delivery and the College is active in accommodating this.**
67. Student support is specifically itemized in two objectives in the strategic plan. One objective is to improve the system of student motivation enhancement and the other is to encourage academic staff to devote more attention to every student's individual needs. For students in their first year, particular priorities and measures to support their personal, financial and mental health support are in place. Many students have work or family commitments and the College is very flexible in accommodating these through, for example, flexible timetabling arrangements and online delivery of modules. Students with particular needs, for example mental health, are signposted to the services of a free mental health professional, and information about this is provided on the website. The College supports students to get financial support from the state and they also will cover the tuition fees of students who successfully complete the first year.
68. The College accesses funds through the European Union (EU) in order to ensure equal opportunities for students with special needs. In particular, significant funds have been acquired in recent years to adjust the physical environment at the College for students with physical disabilities. The College has a coordinator for disabled students and students from socially vulnerable groups and students with special needs can have an individual study plan. College staff, both academic and non-academic are supported by the College in their work. An example

of this is provided in the Statute, where every five years lecturers can take a paid sabbatical of up to one year to conduct research or take a teaching qualification. The College states that this regulation is particularly important for young lecturers to prepare for their PhD theses.

69. In 2018, the College approved an improved Academic Ethics Code which is overseen by the Ethics Committee. Staff and students are obliged to abide by this code which refers to areas such as academic integrity, trust, respect, sexual harassment, equal rights and discrimination. There is also an Examinations Appeals Committee and a Committee of Staff and Students Dispute Resolution. However, during the period of 2017-2021, all issues were resolved at the department or faculty level without reference to these committees. **Despite zero cases referenced, the Panel identified an opportunity to actively involve Ethics Committee in communication and information activities on academic integrity. The Ethics Committee could be engaged as an ambassador for academic integrity and lead the way in informing the academic community about academic values.**

70. The results from the external review activity are incorporated into the College's quality improvement processes as detailed above. Examples of external input include changes in regulatory legislation for study programmes, plans to increase internationalization and mobility of students, changes needed due to the covid pandemic, feedback from employers particularly following student practice and improving the College infrastructure to enable access for people with disabilities.

71. **In summary**, the priority objective of the KMAIK activities is to ensure the quality of research and studies, for which the College has adopted adequate documents and procedures. The quality monitoring and improvement model at KMAIK follows a four-step process: planning → implementation → testing → improvement.

The Panel recognized the strong and active involvement of KMAIK's relevant stakeholders in the management, quality assurance and improvement activities, and in the decision-making processes at the College. However, in reflecting on the self-evaluation (monitoring) process and taking into account the size and resources of the College, the Panel notes that the number and type of indicators should be optimized (and sometimes reduced). In reviewing the adequacy and applicability of indicators, their relevance for the purpose and their number must be taken into account.

The overall analysis of each Strategic Direction is commendable in its detail and actions to address the objectives of improving the quality management system and fostering internal culture and external communication of the organization. The quality management system at the College is consistent with both the College's strategic direction and the European Standards and Guidelines (ESG).

There is a noticeable strong involvement of internal stakeholders at different levels of cooperation, for this purpose, both formal (questionnaires) and informal mechanisms (discussions, meetings, focus groups) and communication channels are available to them.

All documents governing internal quality assurance as well as results of quality monitoring and improvement are widely discussed among the academic community and with external stakeholders during various events and are published on the KMAIK website (www.kmaik.lt) and on the internal network. All information relating to KMAIK's annual performance is summarized and published in annual reports (on the KMAIK website), presented at open day

events, in popular newspaper articles, and presented to employers, professional associations and other social partners at various events and meetings.

The Panel concludes that the KMAIK has appropriate frameworks, documents and mechanisms in place to solicit and monitor feedback from all key stakeholders by using formal and informal channels of communication. The self-evaluation results are made public and communicated to stakeholders as appropriate. However, more emphasis needs to be placed on monitoring the reasons for students dropping out and on designing measures and mechanisms for early detection of the reasons, and in particular on designing appropriate measures and providing adequate support to prevent excessive drop-out in the future.

Despite the fact that it was clear from the interviews and documentation provided that all open issues and problems have so far been successfully resolved at the informal level, mostly at the departmental level, the Ethics Commission, since its establishment, has not considered a single case of unethical behavior. Therefore, The Panel recommends that the College continues to properly inform the entire academic community about the importance of respecting academic integrity, in order to prevent various forms of illicit conduct and behavior also by actively involving the Ethics Committee in communication activities and promotion of academic values.

72. **Judgment:** the area is being developed systematically, without any major drawbacks and is given 3 points (good).

73. **Recommendations for the area:**

- Continue to investigate the reasons for students dropping out, develop measures and mechanisms for early detection and consider the introduction of an exit survey to help analyze the reasons for this.
- Student representatives' feedback mechanism needs to be strengthened to provide adequate information to students about the results of surveys.
- Continue to properly inform the academic community about the importance of respecting academic integrity and academic values also by engaging the Ethics Committee in communication activities and promotion of academic values.

74. **Good practice examples:**

- The Panel identified the strong moral and organizational culture and dedication of all internal and external stakeholders.

3.3. Studies and research (art)

Studies and research (art) area is being analysed in accordance to the following indicators and criteria, set up in the Methodology.

3.1. The level of research (art), compatibility of studies and research (art) and its compliance with the strategic aims of activities:

3.1.1. The study and research (art) activities carried out and their results are consistent with the mission and strategic aims of the higher education institution;

3.1.2. The level of research (art) activities is sufficient for the ongoing studies of the higher education institution;

3.1.3. Studies are based on research (art);

3.1.4. Consistent recognition of foreign qualifications, partial studies and prior non-formal and informal learning is performed.

75. KMAIK offers Bachelor's Degree study programmes in Forestry, Horticulture, Hydrotechnical Engineering, Landscape Design, Land Management and Real Estate Cadastral measurements. This is consistent with the College's vision of providing high-quality professional education and performing applied research of international level in the fields of forestry, agriculture and environmental/measurement engineering. The mission of the College outlined in the Strategy 2030 document is:

- By adopting advanced worldwide-accumulated experience, to prepare specialists with a professional higher education qualification able to satisfy the needs of country's forestry, agriculture and environmental/measurement engineering sectors;
- To ensure a modern study process in compliance with European standards, providing lifelong learning possibilities;
- To elaborate new technologies in forestry, agriculture and environmental/measurement engineering sectors and to carry out applied research at the international level;
- To raise public awareness on environmental, cultural and national issues.

76. The academic departments are responsible for implementing these programmes with regard to legislation and college requirements. They ensure that the programmes are organised correctly and coordinate research and publication of research papers. The Study Committee oversee the quality of the programmes and they are supported by Study Administrators who also provide information for students.

77. Total student numbers decreased from 920 in 2017 to 825 in 2018, but these have steadily increased since then and there were 895 students in 2021. Of these students in 2021, 481 studied part-time and 414 studied full-time. Each study programme comprises two student groups; part-time and full-time. Student dropout rate has been an ongoing concern with 62-76 students terminating their studies after year one over the last five years. However, 874 students have successfully graduated from KMAIK between 2017 and 2021, of which 449 were full-time and 425 were part-time students.

78. Scientific activity at the College is coordinated by the Deputy Director for Development and Innovation and is organized through the relevant departments. There is also close cooperation between lecturers at the College and social partners, particularly employers. Lecturers are able to spend some time in the industry to gain or update themselves on current technology used in their industry. Employers also provide equipment for use by lecturers and students at the College.

79. Strategic Direction (SD3) is the Qualitative and quantitative development of applied scientific research and consultancy activities in order to ensure financial sustainability of the University. Also, one of the aims of KMAIK, as stated in the Statute, is to develop applied research of forestry and environmental engineering necessary for the region, to provide consultations to the individuals of authority and economy. KMAIK monitors the aims and objectives stated in the Strategic Plan and have reported that overall, the aims related to scientific activity have been achieved, although some areas, for example, the number of applied scientific and consultancy projects, scientific publications in peer-reviewed international scientific journals, inter-institutional projects and the proportion of students who carried out active applied scientific research were lower than planned. However, the objective relating to resources for research and

consulting activities was especially successful due to financing by EU Structural funds for the purchase of laboratory and office equipment.

80. The College states that the aim to develop international scientific cooperation has been fully achieved due to scientific activity carried out by lecturers. The participation in projects funded by the Lithuanian Rural Development Programme has also been successful. Despite the overall achievement of the objectives, some indicators were not achieved including the number of students involved in applied scientific research which is masked by a positive global figure. Some objectives were very successful such as the funding for employees and students to develop scientific and consultancy activity. The aim relating to developing international scientific cooperation was not fully achieved as fewer applications for international scientific projects were submitted, and no scientific research activities were carried out in cooperation with foreign institutions and the Panel **recommend** that steps are taken to improve the performance against these objectives. However, publications in scientific peer-reviewed publications had a high achievement level. During the 2017-2021 period, College lecturers published 180 scientific papers in peer reviewed journals, which is a considerable amount given the size of the College, and the Panel view this as **good practice** in the context of the College.
81. Research and consultancy activities in forestry and environmental engineering have been most well developed and agriculture is also growing. Between 2017 and 2020 there were 39 agreements in Lithuania for applied scientific research and consultancy completed which brought in considerable funding to the College, being approximately 15% and the College's annual budget, although the College would like to increase this.
82. The research and development activities carried out by the College are directly related to the study programme areas and are incorporated into the teaching of those programmes. They are also publicized through conferences organized by the College and are published in the College's own journal Forestry and Landscape Management, as well as through the College website and social media networks.
83. Students are introduced to scientific activity through a module called Research Methodology which is compulsory on all study programmes. This gives them a grounding in applied research and enables them to participate in research carried out by lecturers and following this, carry out their own research projects, for example in their theses. Students also participate in scientific conferences, organized by the College, alongside their lecturers.
84. The link between theory and practical training is considered very important by the College and at least one third of the time spent by students on the study programmes is in practical training. Professional activity spent with social partners is especially valued. Lecturers also need to have had at least three years of relevant practical experience before teaching on the programmes. The College closely cooperates with other Lithuanian institutions, including research institutions and has 97 cooperation agreements currently in place and the Panel concludes that this close cooperation between lectures and social partners in research and development to be good practice.
85. Students can get recognition for qualifications and competences gained in Lithuania or abroad, and if they meet the learning outcomes for a module on a study programme, they can get exemption from studying it again and gain certification for the module. The College has a Committee of Competence Recognition and Evaluation which is responsible for evaluating

whether a student has met the learning outcomes. These learning outcomes can be achieved formally or informally, for example, practical experience in employment can be taken into account. In the last five-year evaluation period (2017-2021), 10 full-time and 39 part-time students applied to the University for recognition of partial learning outcomes acquired while studying at other Lithuanian HEIs (15% of all learning outcomes applied for recognition were not recognized due to inadequate curriculum or insufficient number of credits) and 8 persons addressed KMAIK for recognition of competencies acquired in an informal or non-formal way. The Panel learned that the recognition procedures are transparent and fair and in line with the principles and values of Lisbon convention.

3.2. Internationality of studies, research (art):

3.2.1. The higher education institution has a strategy for internationalisation of research (art) and study activities (including indicators of internationalisation), means for its implementation, and measurements of the effectiveness of these activities are performed (not applicable to colleges unless provided for in its strategic documents);

3.2.2. The higher education institution integrates aspects of internationalisation into the content of studies and research (art) activities.

86. Internationalization is a clear KMAIK goal. In fact, in the strategy 2020 of Kaunas Forestry and Environmental Engineering College of Higher Education, the College's vision established the aspiration of the KMAIK's recognition at the European scale in the field of forestry and environmental engineering. Such a vision has been newly confirmed in the strategy 2030. In accordance with such a strategy, one of the nine strategic directions of the KMAIK focuses on internationalization enhancement.

87. The operational objectives to develop the internationalization of the institution includes the increase of student and staff mobility within exchange programmes but also the increase of cooperation in the fields of research and consultancy. The achievement of such objectives is monitored on an annual basis. Despite the efforts made by the KMAIK, the objectives have been only partially accomplished.

88. Currently, KMAIK has 41 Erasmus+ bilateral agreements with 15 different countries including Latvia, Poland and Sweden among others that favour personnel mobility. Parallel to the increment of the cooperation network, the College also fixed the ambitious objective of developing joint study programmes with other European HEIs, but this goal has not been achieved due to the lack of interest of other universities as well as incompatibilities in the study programmes. The Panel acknowledges the difficulties in implementing such a strategy, but also confirmed the advantage of going one step further and targeting international cooperation with selected HEIs. Thus, **the Panel recommends that KMAIK analyze the potential cooperation with other international study programmes across Europe, aiming to establish joint study programmes.**

89. The College clearly prioritizes actions for increasing the skills and competencies of its students in the domain of the English language. Additionally, KMAIK is supportive of the students and a legal bridge that recognizes the foreign qualification and results of exchange studies are transferred to local records. Consequently, the number of foreign students achieved a maximum in the institution during the year 2021 (12 full-time international students representing 1.3% of the total number of KMAIK's students), showing an increasing trend during the last

years. However, and despite this valuable result, this figure is far from the average of foreign students in Lithuanian HEIs which averages 6.3% of the total students. KMAIK realistic strategic objective planned in the Strategy 2030 is that the share of foreign students in comparison to the total students' number shall make up at least 2%. **The Panel recommends exploring possibilities to attract more international students to KMAIK's study programmes.**

90. The number of outgoing students ranged in the analyzed period from 3 students (the year 2021) to 28 (the year 2018). The causes of the low acceptance of the mobility by the Lithuanian students seem to relate to the lack of enough economic support for travelling abroad and the fact that an increasing number of students currently have permanent jobs. Considering the increasing trend of part-time students, the **Panel recommends developing a strategy that also favours the part-time students' mobility.** Concerning the number of incoming students, the figure ranges between 1-3 students per year during the analyzed period, mainly coming from Republic of Belarus, Ukraine or Russian Federation among other countries. The reason behind such low student numbers could be the specificity of the study programmes that are very focused on the Lithuanian needs. **The Panel recommends preparing programmes that have a more international focus whilst also considering the interests of Lithuanian students.**

91. The Panel recognizes the effort of the academic staff in increasing the English courses offer (The Self Evaluation Report shows that about 88% of all study programme modules were taught in English during the year 2021). KMAIK lecturers were also very active during the last five years, participating in international scientific conferences with more than 70 contributions and 49 scientific publications in conference proceedings. On average, around 25% of KMAIK lecturers participated in mobility programmes during the analyzed period (9 participated in teaching and 6 in training mobility) visiting a total of 27 institutions in 14 countries. Poland (15 visits) and Latvia (8 visits) were the preferred destinations. The College is very supportive of the international staff mobility since it covers from their own budget part of the travel and accommodation costs. Alternatively, visiting lecturers average 10 KMAIK's visits per year with a peak of 26 during the last 5 years, mainly coming from Latvia, Poland, Finland and 7 other countries. However, and in spite that the participation of academic staff in international research projects is still under improvement, **the Panel encourages the College to continue with the policy of favoring the international networking of the academic staff as a way to increase the KMAIK's internationalization.**

92. **In summary,** the studies are pursued by KMAIK's academic departments, which ensure the implementation of external and internal standard legal acts, regulate the study process, coordinate scientific research, publication and application of its results. The number of part-time and full-time students is reaching a ratio of 50-50 (in favor of part-time students) with successful expenditure of resources gained from applied research and consulting activities in the last evaluation period (from 2017). With exception of three objectives (number of developed and submitted applications, number of implemented interinstitutional scientific projects per year and a part of students involved in applied research from all enrolled students) all other objectives were exceeded.

One of the key KMAIK strategic directions in College Strategy 2030 is qualitative and quantitative development of applied scientific research and consultancy activity. This activity is consistently implemented following KMAIK strategic planning documents by retaining KMAIK

specialization in the fields of agriculture and engineering in accordance with the needs of the labour market.

Internationalization is a clear goal in KMAIK Strategy 2030, and accordingly one of the nine strategic directions focuses on internationalization activities and enhancement. The operational objectives include an increase in student and staff mobility but also an increase in cooperation in the fields of research and consultancy. Despite the fact of having 41 Erasmus+ bilateral agreements signed from 15 different countries, the College set an ambitious goal to develop joint study programmes with other European HEIs, but this objective has not been achieved yet due to the lack of interest of foreign HEIs and differences in the content of study programmes. The Panel acknowledges the difficulties in implementing such strategic objectives but encourages KMAIK to focus on targeting the most relevant and selected HEIs by analyzing in-depth the potential cooperation with other international study programmes across Europe, aiming to establish joint study programmes. Great effort is put toward increasing English proficiency for both students and lecturers in order to attract more international students and enhance international appearance in the sector.

93. **Judgment:** the area is being developed systematically, without any major drawbacks and is given 3 points (good).

94. **Recommendations for the area:**

- Take further steps to develop international scientific cooperation and scientific research activities in cooperation with foreign institutions.
- Analyze the potential cooperation with other international study programmes across Europe, aiming to establish joint study programmes.
- Explore the possibilities to attract more international students to KMAIK's study programmes.
- Develop a strategy that also favours the part-time students' mobility.
- Prepare programmes that have a more international focus whilst also considering the interests of Lithuanian students.
- The policy of favouring the international networking of the academic staff, as a way to increase the KMAIK's internationalization, should be further developed and explored.

95. **Good practice examples:**

- In the period 2017-2021, KMAIK recorded a significant increase of published scientific articles in peer-reviewed journals (180), which is a very good achievement considering the size and potential impact of the College.
- A large and increasing number of active cooperation agreements with other Lithuanian institutions and organizations demonstrates close and high-quality cooperation of the College in research and development activities with the external environment.

3.4. Impact on regional and national development

Impact on regional and national development area is being analysed in accordance to the following indicators and criteria, set up in the Methodology.

4.1. Effectiveness of the impact on regional and national development:

4.1.1. The higher education institution carries out an analysis of national and (or) regional demands, identifies the needs to be met and foresees the potential impact on national and (or) regional development;

4.1.2. The monitoring, analysis and evaluation of the effectiveness of the measures on national and (or) regional development are performed.

96. The study programmes offered at the College are aligned to Lithuania's development strategy which focuses on, for example, environmental protection, land use, preservation of natural resources and the development of agriculture. The College cooperates with many social partners in Lithuania and elsewhere, including businesses, professional associations, research institutes, colleges and universities and non-governmental organizations (NGOs). Forestry, Horticulture, Land Management and Hydrotechnical Engineering study programmes are unique in Lithuania and cannot be studied elsewhere so potentially have a **national impact**. This is particularly so for the flexible part-time study routes developed by the College to meet the needs of students in employment or with family commitments that might prevent them from full-time study and the Panel concluded that this **is good practice**.
97. The demand for employees in the subjects offered by the College is high and social partners value graduates from the College in these subjects. The feedback from graduate employers confirms this as does data from sector analysis. Graduates from the College are in demand as there are many employment opportunities available to them and therefore the employability rates are high.
98. Between 2017 and 2020, academic staff at the College carried out 39 applied research and consulting projects thus contributing significantly to regional and national development. Twenty items of commissioned work carried out included an inventory of green areas in Vilnius and Kaunas and many landscaping projects.
99. The College is involved in consulting on work of regional and national importance, for example, environmental quality, biodiversity and ecosystems and the development of innovative technologies. Another example is work financed by the Ministry of the Environment to consult with forest owners and educating and informing members of the public about forestry issues. Together with the State Forest Service, this resulted in ten remote seminars and 360 participants. The Lithuanian Rural Development programme financed a series of consultations and demonstrations for farmers, forest owners and foresters throughout the country with the involvement of over 2,600 people. During the period 2017-2021, students also completed 844 theses in agriculture, forestry, water management, landscaping, land management and rural and urban infrastructure, 94 of which were commissioned by businesses, public institutions or private individuals. During meetings with social partners, who are highly supportive of the College, it was evident that consultancy and research are applied to the region and are highly appreciated.
100. The College is actively involved in the public popularization of science through organizing events targeted at the general public, schools and other organizations and the College sees this as a growing area. For example, in 2021, 57 events were organized for the general public and 68 events were targeted at school pupils involving 4,151 participants.

101. The College has a rapidly growing number of cooperation agreements. In 2021 a total of 209 cooperation agreements with social partners were signed with businesses, organizations, scientific institutions, schools and higher education institutions. These agreements facilitate student internships, research, commissioned work, consulting activities and also enable the College to understand the needs of the country in a more informed way.
102. Staff at the College are also involved in many public activities and professional organizations, societies, councils and committees. They are also invited as experts and are members of state institutions and organizations related to their professional activities where they can influence and participate in the regional and national discussions. They also are invited to attend working groups and participate in the preparation of strategic documents in geodesy, real estate cadastre and land management and the environment. Students also participate in national competitions in sports and creative activities.
103. Measures relating to the country's development are integrated into the College's Strategy Monitoring system and are therefore directly related to the College's strategic development. According to the College, all the aims set out in the 2021-23 Strategic Plan related to this area were fully achieved or exceeded. The Panel agrees that the impact of the College on the development of the region and the whole country in the subject areas concerned is an example of **good practice**.

4.2. Assurance of conditions for lifelong learning:

- 4.2.1. The higher education institution monitors and analyses the need for lifelong learning;*
- 4.2.2. The higher education institution anticipates the diversity of forms and conditions of lifelong learning and ensures their implementation;*
- 4.2.3. The higher education institution performs the evaluation of assurance of conditions for lifelong learning.*

104. KMAIK is actively developing various forms of lifelong learning (LLL) activities based on the social partners' needs. The main channels for monitoring LLL demand are lecturers, KMAIK Alumni Club, National Employment Service and other social partners. The topics for both formal and non-formal education activities are selected based on the needs of public authorities, the labour market and social partners through direct communication or questionnaires. KMAIK Information Centre is responsible for collecting and analyzing information on LLL demand and possible measures. Information on possible LLL measures is passed to the academic departments and KMAIK's Department of Vocational Training. These units together with the Information Centre prepare specific curricula for measures planned. New formal training programmes are registered in the Register of Studies, Training Programmes and Qualifications of the Republic of Lithuania and should be approved by the Center for Quality Assessment in Higher Education. Only approved LLL formal measures are implemented by KMAIK.
105. KMAIK offers a wide range of formal and non-formal LLL education activities such as qualification courses, training cycles, conferences, seminars for lecturers and professionals, field days, consultations, etc. In the period from 2017 to 2020 on average KMAIK has offered 95 LLL activities per year (mainly non-formal education activities 76% of total) that attracted almost 1.8 thousand participants annually. The number of LLL activities significantly increased since 2017 with except for 2020 when pandemic restricted physical meetings. The number of participants in

LLL activities has also increased significantly from 1300 in 2017 to 2500 in 2020. The quality of LLL activities is monitored by the KMAIK Information Centre and the responsible KMAIK's structural department. Feedback from participants is collected through the questionnaire after LLL activities. The questionnaire results are discussed with lecturers, content creators and, if necessary, the course material is improved, updated, additional lecturers and experts are sought. However, in strategic planning KMAIK uses quantitative indicators (number of participants, measure No. 7.2.1.1) that does not reflect the quality of LLL activities, therefore, its recommended instead of quantitative indicators in strategic planning use qualitative indicator, for example, average score.

106. **In summary**, the effort of relating the study results to the needs of the state and society is evident and correspond with the aims set in the Programme of the Government of the Republic of Lithuania, such as implementation of a „green course“ and sustainable water policy, creation and development of sustainable agriculture, aquaculture and production systems, development of circular economy, strengthening of rural vitality, renewal and rejuvenation, sustainable regional development, managing climate change in agriculture.
107. Study programmes offered at KMAIK are unique, with a strong focus on the development of theoretical and practical knowledge, skills and competencies in the fields of forestry, agriculture and environmental and surveying engineering. The number and total value of implemented applied research in the last evaluation period are very high for a niche College with limited resources (human and material). The Panel learned that the number of papers and articles in relevant publications as a result of successfully implemented applied research projects is increasing each year.
108. The positive trend of monitoring and meeting national needs can be seen in a number of successful and implemented projects and newly established organizations in individual fields and disciplines developed by KMAIK. One recent example of this is KMAIK's cooperation with the Lithuanian Arborist Association and VMU Kaunas Botanical Garden, the Landscape and Green Areas Expert Group (KŽEG) established at KMAIK in 2020, which in 2021 has been transformed into a separate organization and is currently one of the main national institutions providing practical and consultancy services of arboristics in Lithuania.
109. The Panel concludes that KMAIK is successfully pursuing its strategic goals in the field of developing and providing quality and market-oriented LLL services. As it also implements VET programmes, many of the activities and events it organizes also apply to pupils and stakeholders not related directly to higher education, but great progress can be seen in both areas (including higher education). The Panel recognizes the effort and enthusiasm of KMAIK and its staff to provide diverse and market-oriented education and training services, which are often also based on the results of applied research.
110. **Judgment:** the area is rated very well in the national context, and internationally without any drawbacks and is given 4 points (very good).
111. **Recommendations for the area:**
- In the assessment of lifelong learning activities in strategic planning KMAIK uses quantitative indicators (number of participants), which do not reflect the quality of these

activities, so it is recommended to include more qualitative indicators that will ensure quality assessment of the offered LLL, not only numerically.

112. **Good practice examples:**

- Flexible study routes offered by KMAIK are tailored for part-time students.
- College's involvement at the regional and national level in the subject areas is recognized and appreciated by its external social partners. KMAIK is very active in the field, not only in unique study programmes, but also in LLL programmes and commissioned research which have nationally recognizable impact.

IV. EXAMPLES OF GOOD PRACTICE

The Panel identifies the following examples of good practice in:

Management:

- In KMAIK the proportion of academic staff with a scientific degree increased significantly from 25% in 2017 to 46% in 2021. This might be an effect of promotion system applied in KMAIK where every five years lecturers can suspend teaching up to a period of one year in order to conduct scientific research and develop their qualification (for instance, to pursue doctoral studies). During this period the average salary is paid for a lecturer. This seen as a good practice to motivate academic staff and increase proportion of academic staff with a scientific degree.

Quality assurance:

- The College successfully collects information from a wide range of stakeholders in formal and informal ways and effectively implements it in quality improvement processes and activities.
- The Panel identified the strong moral and organizational culture and dedication of all internal and external stakeholders.

Studies and research (art):

- In the period 2017-2021, KMAIK recorded a significant increase of published scientific articles in peer-reviewed journals (180), which is a very good achievement considering the size and potential impact of the College.
- A large and increasing number of cooperation agreements with other Lithuanian institutions and organizations demonstrates close and high-quality cooperation of the College in research and development activities with the external environment.

Impact on regional and national development:

- Flexible study routes offered by KMAIK are tailored for part-time students.
- College's involvement at the regional and national level in the subject areas is recognized and appreciated by its external social partners.

V. RECOMMENDATIONS FOR ENHANCEMENT

The Panel's recommendations for further enhancement are:

Management:

- The current aims, objectives and indicators, and the aggregation algorithm of the monitoring system should be re-evaluated and, if necessary, supplemented by more informative ones.
- When developing the next strategy, a further effort should be placed on the internationalization of KMAIK.
- To effectively follow strategic development and stimulate flexibility in responding to emerging national and international issues it is recommended to review the strategic monitoring system and, where appropriate, simplify and improve. This includes planning and developing a fundraising strategy and investment plan in parallel to the research plan. A part of the budget shall be allocated to support financing of strategic actions.
- The person responsible for internalization affairs should be placed in a more prominent position within the College structure.
- In order to further promote the internationalization of KMAIK and to strengthen the College's international focus, it is recommended that relevant foreign experts should be included in the College's management and/or advisory bodies.
- It is recommended that the academic and non-academic staff evaluation system linked with Work Payment and Promotion systems is reviewed to ensure a periodical, fair and structured evaluation of staff members.
- It is recommended that KMAIK undertakes thorough succession planning for teaching and research staff in order to attract young specialists and foreign lecturers.

Quality assurance:

- Continue to investigate the reasons for students dropping out, develop measures and mechanisms for early detection and consider the introduction of an exit survey to help analyze the reasons for this.
- Student representatives' feedback mechanism needs to be strengthened to provide adequate information to students about the results of surveys.
- Continue to properly inform the academic community about the importance of respecting academic integrity and academic values also by engaging the Ethics Committee in communication activities and promotion of academic values.

Studies and research (art):

- Take further steps to develop international scientific cooperation and scientific research activities in cooperation with foreign institutions.
- Analyze the potential cooperation with other international study programmes across Europe, aiming to establish joint study programmes.
- Explore the possibilities to attract more international students to KMAIK's study programmes.
- Develop a strategy that also favours the part-time students' mobility.

- Prepare programmes that have a more international focus whilst also considering the interests of Lithuanian students.
- The policy of favouring the international networking of the academic staff, as a way to increase the KMAIK's internationalization, should be further developed and explored.

Impact on regional and national development:

- In the assessment of lifelong learning activities in strategic planning KMAIK uses quantitative indicators (number of participants), which do not reflect the quality of these activities, so it is recommended to include more qualitative indicators that will ensure quality assessment of the offered LLL, not only numerically.

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