



CENTRE FOR QUALITY ASSESSMENT IN HIGHER EDUCATION

EVALUATION REPORT
STUDY FIELD of ECOLOGY
at Klaipėda University

Expert panel:

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Study Field Data

Title of the study programme	Ecology and Environmental Science
State code	6211DX014
Type of studies	Master
Cycle of studies	Second
Mode of study and duration (in years)	Full time (2 years)
Credit volume	120
Qualification degree and (or) professional qualification	Master of Life Sciences
Language of instruction	Lithuanian
Minimum education required	Bachelor degree
Registration date of the study programme	19th May 1997

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I. INTRODUCTION

1.1. BACKGROUND OF THE EVALUATION PROCESS

The evaluation of study fields is based on the Methodology of External Evaluation of Study Fields approved by the Director of the Centre for Quality Assessment in Higher Education (hereafter – SKVC) 31 December 2019 Order [No.V-149](#).

The evaluation is intended to help higher education institutions to constantly improve their study process and to inform the public about the quality of studies.

The evaluation process consists of the main following stages: 1) *self-evaluation and self-evaluation report prepared by Higher Education Institution (hereafter – HEI)*; 2) *site visit of the expert panel to the higher education institution*; 3) *production of the external evaluation report (EER) by the expert panel and its publication*; 4) *follow-up activities*.

On the basis of this external evaluation report of the study field SKVC takes a decision to accredit the study field either for 7 years or for 3 years. If the field evaluation is negative then the study field is not accredited.

The study field and cycle are **accredited for 7 years** if all evaluation areas are evaluated as exceptional (5 points), very good (4 points) or good (3 points).

The study field and cycle are **accredited for 3 years** if one of the evaluation areas was evaluated as satisfactory (2 points).

The study field and cycle are **not accredited** if at least one of evaluation areas was evaluated as unsatisfactory (1 point).

1.2. EXPERT PANEL

The expert panel was assigned according to the Experts Selection Procedure (hereinafter referred to as the Procedure) as approved by the Director of Centre for Quality Assessment in Higher Education on 31 December 2019 [Order No. V-149](#). The site visit to the HEI was conducted by the panel on *1st December 2021*.

Prof. Dr. Judit Padisák (panel chairperson), academic;
Assoc. Prof. Dr. Bethan Louise Wood, academic;
Prof. Dr. Edita Baltrėnaitė-Gedienė, academic;
Mr. Kęstutis Skrupskelis, representative of social partners;
Mr. Mindaugas Rutalė, students' representative.

1.3. GENERAL INFORMATION

The documentation submitted by the HEI follows the outline recommended by SKVC. Along with the self-evaluation report and annexes, the following additional documents have been provided by the HEI before, during and/or after the site visit:

No.	Name of the document
1.	Answers of HEI to an expert request for pedagogical degrees (education) of staff members.
2.	
...	

1.4. BACKGROUND OF THE STUDY FIELD/STUDY FIELD POSITION/STATUS AND SIGNIFICANCE IN THE HEI

General information about the significance of the study field

The current threat of climate change and the different kinds of anthropogenic pollution and disturbances mean that the importance of ecological research and education is unquestionable. These threats have impacts on the carrying capacity of our Planet and its biodiversity which in turn have a cascading effect on human well-being at the societal level. Producing as many students as possible with qualifications in Ecology and Environmental Science is a key task to ensure the life support systems of our subsequent generations.

Information about the role of the HEI

The HEI's education in field of Ecology is unique in two aspects:

- 1) This is the only HEI in Lithuania offering a speciality in Aquatic Science; however, this specialism is not evident in the programme title.
- 2) As judged from the information available from independent sources (for example: Web of Science, concerning scientific production of teachers) this is the only HEI that can equip their graduates to successfully complete the third level of HEI education (i.e., PhD) and thereby enter this internationally based, and quite competitive, research area.

I. GENERAL ASSESSMENT

Ecology study field and second cycle at Klaipėda University is given a **positive** evaluation.

Study field and cycle assessment in points by evaluation areas

No.	Evaluation Area	Evaluation of an Area in points*
1.	Intended and achieved learning outcomes and curriculum	3
2.	Links between science (art) and studies	5
3.	Student admission and support	3
4.	Teaching and learning, student performance and graduate employment	4
5.	Teaching staff	4
6.	Learning facilities and resources	4
7.	Study quality management and public information	4
	Total:	27

*1 (unsatisfactory) - there are essential shortcomings that must be eliminated/the area does not meet the minimum requirements, there are fundamental shortcomings that prevent the implementation of the field studies.

2 (satisfactory) - meets the established minimum requirements, needs improvement/the area meets the minimum requirements, and there are fundamental shortcomings that need to be eliminated.

3 (good) - the field is being developed systematically, has distinctive features/the area is being developed systematically, without any fundamental shortcomings.

4 (very good) - the field is evaluated very well in the national and international context, without any deficiencies/the area is evaluated very well in the national context and internationally, without any shortcomings.;

5 (excellent) - the field is exceptionally good in the national and international context (environment)/ The area is evaluated exceptionally well in the national context and internationally.

II. STUDY FIELD ANALYSIS

3.1. INTENDED AND ACHIEVED LEARNING OUTCOMES AND CURRICULUM

Study aims, outcomes and content shall be assessed in accordance with the following indicators:

3.1.1. Evaluation of the conformity of the aims and outcomes of the field and cycle study programmes to the needs of the society and/or the labour market (not applicable to HEIs operating in exile conditions)

(1) Factual situation

In the SER the unique selling point of the programme, compared with the other ecology degrees in the country, is identified as 'ecology and environmental science of inland waters and the marine environment' – yet this is not apparent in the programme title, Ecology and Environmental Science. In addition, the priorities of the programme include 'with a focus on the marine environment', which further strengthens the case for the consideration of a name change for the programme to better reflect the content and specialism of its graduates.

Nevertheless, the aims and outcomes of the programme are constructed to produce specialists in aquatic ecology and environmental science who will have a key role in addressing environmental impacts. The programme will also meet some of the strategic directions of the European Green Deal e.g., 'development of the innovation ecosystem of the coastal region for effective business, study and science cooperation' and 'a leader in blue economy knowledge in the region and a European Centre of excellence for sustainable urban coastal development'.

(2) Expert judgement/indicator analysis

While the conformity of the aims and outcomes of the programme do meet the needs of society and the labour market (and are very well articulated within the SER and accompanying documentation), the name of the programme would benefit from some further discussion to better reflect its unique selling point i.e., providing a specialism in aquatic or marine ecology.

The previous evaluation recommended the inclusion of more practical skills and competencies, and this is considered to have been achieved, the detailed matrices of aims and learning outcomes, and the availability of core practical skills courses.

3.1.2. Evaluation of the conformity of the field and cycle study programme aims and outcomes with the mission, objectives of activities and strategy of the HEI

(1) Factual situation

The SER is detailed in terms of the mission, objectives of activities and strategy of the University and how it meets these in the aims and outcomes of the programme. This was supported by the information provided during the meetings, e.g., the high-quality research undertaken by staff and the strong collaborations with the social partners.

(2) Expert judgement/indicator analysis

The aims and outcomes meet the objectives of the MRI and the mission of the University.

This information in the SER would be better placed in a separate section as per the templates provided by SKVC in future submissions.

3.1.3. Evaluation of the compliance of the field and cycle study programme with legal requirements

(1) Factual situation

The SER provides links to the relevant legal acts and obligations. These include General study requirements. (Order of the Minister of Education and Science of the Republic of Lithuania. No. V-1168 of 30 December 2016), Description of study cycles (Order of the Minister of Education and Science of the Republic of Lithuania. Order No. V-1012 of 16 November 2016) and

Description of the field of Ecology studies (Order No. V-1863 of the Minister of Education, Science and Sports of the Republic of Lithuania of 30 November 2020). The aims and outcomes provided are clearly linked to the latter, and the credits match that required for a second cycle programme.

(2) Expert judgement/indicator analysis

The programme complies with the applicable legal requirements for the study field and cycle.

3.1.4. Evaluation of compatibility of aims, learning outcomes, teaching/learning and assessment methods of the field and cycle study programmes

(1) Factual situation

The SER provides explicit demonstration of the relationship and compatibility of the aims and learning outcomes with the learning, teaching and assessment methods on the programme. A variety of methods are utilised in teaching, learning and assessment.

(2) Expert judgement/indicator analysis

The mapping out of the subjects, study results and study methods clearly demonstrate the compatibility of aims, learning outcomes, teaching, learning and assessment of the study field and cycle.

3.1.5. Evaluation of the totality of the field and cycle study programme subjects/modules, which ensures consistent development of competences of students

(1) Factual situation

The programme structure contains courses relevant to ecology (and aquatic ecosystems) and environmental science. Field methods covered include statistical analysis specific to marine ecology, GIS and spatial analysis, also specific to marine and coastal areas, and preparatory courses for their project work (MSc thesis). Compulsory courses also include content on risk assessments and management, marine and coastal management, biodiversity, legislation and the blue economy and biotechnology. Optional courses are primarily focused on aquatic systems. During the meetings with staff and evaluation of their research expertise, it is clear that they are research active in their fields and their knowledge is fed into the degree through research-informed content.

The previous evaluation recommended integrating specific content into the programme and this can be considered to be satisfied through the offering of courses on legislation, statistics, research methodology, GIS, and Blue economy.

(2) Expert judgement/indicator analysis

The programme provides its students with a depth of knowledge in aquatic/marine ecology and environmental science. Graduates will have a specialism in the marine and coastal environment and consideration should be given to making this clear in the programme name as this would be unique within the ecology study field in Lithuania.

3.1.6. Evaluation of opportunities for students to personalise the structure of field study programmes according to their personal learning objectives and intended learning outcomes

(1) Factual situation

Students predominantly personalise the structure of their field study programme through optional courses and their master thesis topic. Nine optional courses are available, ranging from Fish biology to marine and Ocean physics. With regard to their master thesis topic, students can specialise in their area of choice and work within a research field in the Institute with the relevant member of staff. In meetings with the students, they confirmed that there were a variety of topics to choose from, or they could choose their own topic if they could source funding. They particularly appreciated the opportunity to work on specific topics with staff prior to joining the programme – usually those who had already worked with staff on their undergraduate programme.

(2) Expert judgement/indicator analysis

The personalisation of the programme to suit the student's interests is comparable with second cycle taught programmes within and outside of Lithuania. The opportunity to carry out the research for their master thesis within a research group in the MRI is excellent, as is the confirmation from staff that students have been authors on papers as a result of their contribution to the project.

3.1.7. Evaluation of compliance of final theses with the field and cycle requirements

(1) Factual situation

Students preparing their thesis for defence are governed by the Description of General Requirements for Independent Written and Artistic Works of KU Students (Senate Resolution No. 11-35 of 6 February 2020). Topics for a thesis can be proposed by the staff, social partners and the students themselves.

(2) Expert judgement/indicator analysis

Only nine thesis titles were available from 2018 – 2020, reflecting the small numbers of students on the programme. However, the topics were relevant to the programme, with 2/3 of them being marine focused.

Strengths and weaknesses of this evaluation area:

(1) Strengths:

1. A strong second cycle programme specialising in the marine environment with excellent articulation of aims and outcomes to those for the ecology study field in general.
2. Strong integration of students with staff research groups for their thesis topic and research; with topics suggested by staff, the social partners and students themselves.

(2) Weaknesses:

1. The programme is very much focused on the ecology and environmental science of the marine/aquatic/coastal environment, and this is not apparent in the current programme name. Consideration should be given to addressing this to ensure that this unique selling point of the degree is explicit.

3.2. LINKS BETWEEN SCIENCE (ART) AND STUDIES

Links between science (art) and study activities shall be assessed in accordance with the following indicators:

3.2.1. Evaluation of the sufficiency of the science (applied science, art) activities implemented by the HEI for the field of research (art) related to the field of study

(1) Factual situation

The teaching staff of the HEI is deeply involved in high quality science in the field of marine and freshwater science that is fully consistent with the content of studies. They regularly publish in high quality journals with target topics of Marine Freshwater Biology, Oceanography, Limnology, Environmental Sciences, Environmental Studies, Ecology, Biodiversity Conservation, Water Resources. Staff members developed a wide array of international collaboration marked by their participation in a number of EU founded, bilateral and Lithianian projects.

(2) Expert judgement/indicator analysis

Scientometric data of most teachers are publicly available in scientific databases (WoS, Scopus, Scholar Google). Research/education projects ensure the infrastructural/material needs of high quality research. Personal records of the teaching staff are sufficiently diversified to conduct the courses at expert level while still sufficiently coherent to work as a team of researchers as indicated by the co-authored, high quality papers, often with foreign co-authors. Competitiveness of the teaching staff is justified by their fundraising success.

3.2.2. Evaluation of the link between the content of studies and the latest developments in science, art and technology

(1) Factual situation

The study programme including the course contents and their timing corresponds to the needs of training graduate students possessing up to date knowledge and competences in various fields of aquatic science. Course contents are regularly updated and summer schools are organised to deepen scope and knowledge.

(2) Expert judgement/indicator analysis

The high number of research/education projects ensures fuelling the infrastructural/material needs of preparing high quality master theses. The obtained knowledge and competences enable students to enter the related job market after graduation or to continue their studies at PhD level.

3.2.3. Evaluation of conditions for students to get involved in scientific (applied science, art) activities consistent with their study cycle

(1) Factual situation

According to the SER, students have good opportunities to participate at events linked to collaborative projects of the teaching staff that includes participation at conferences, preparing master theses, and attending project seminars. Students are involved as co-authors in conference presentations or abstracts. The most motivated, talented students are deeply involved in project tasks and are co-authors of published or „in prep.” publications ranging from conference materials to WoS indexed papers.

(2) Expert judgement/indicator analysis

Active involvement of students in the on-going projects ensures their education at a level that corresponds to the present-day state of aquatic sciences. This is indicated by the tight link of theses to on-going projects and the provided diverse participation opportunities in local and international events.

Strengths and weaknesses of this evaluation area:

(1) Strengths:

1. High quality research and intensive publication activity;
2. Well developed international network;
3. High number of projects;
4. Diverse involvement of students in project activities including scientific dissemination.

(2) Weaknesses:

1. No apparent weakness was detected though the scientific capacity and level of the teaching staff would allow for enrolling more students than are presently involved.

3.3. STUDENT ADMISSION AND SUPPORT

Student admission and support shall be evaluated according to the following indicators:

3.3.1. Evaluation of the suitability and publicity of student selection and admission criteria and process

(1) Factual situation

The admission requirements to the study programme in 2018-2019 were a completed bachelors in biomedicine, technology or physical sciences, or an undergraduate degree in another field of science and a minimum of two years' experience in the field of ecology;

additional studies completed were also considered. In 2020, admission to the programme also included a bachelor's degree in natural sciences, medicine, health or technology. The admission requirements to the study programme are therefore well established, and the students enter the study programme after successfully applying through the centralised Lithuanian system. A problem in respect to student admission is the small number of students entering the programme.

(2) Expert judgement/indicator analysis

The department should become more active in advertising the programme to potential students.

3.3.2. Evaluation of the procedure of recognition of foreign qualifications, partial studies and prior non-formal and informal learning and its application

(1) Factual situation

Study results obtained in other higher education institutions are recognized in accordance with the procedure approved by the KU Senate, which is described in the KU study regulations (wording of 2018). The results of studies, including part-time ones, obtained in an international higher education institution are credited if this school is recognized in accordance with the procedure established by that state.

(2) Expert judgement/indicator analysis

The crediting of study results complies with the European Credit Transfer System (ECTS) and the internal rules for the crediting of university study subjects.

3.3.3. Evaluation of conditions for ensuring academic mobility of students.

(1) Factual situation

The University provides the opportunity to study and/or do internships abroad under the Erasmus program. The University publicises the opportunity to admit international students. On completion of internships, lecturers and international students actively share study and/or internship opportunities at foreign universities.

(2) Expert judgement/indicator analysis

Dissemination of information about study and internship opportunities in international universities is sufficient. The University provides suitable conditions for internships and studies under the Erasmus program. Greater encouragement is required to support more outgoing students since there were only 2 students in 2017-2018 and 2019-2020, while there were 11 incoming students in 2018-2019.

3.3.4. Assessment of the suitability, adequacy and effectiveness of the academic, financial, social, psychological and personal support provided to the students of the field

(1) Factual situation

The financial support network for students in the programme is well developed. Students are motivated by good scholarships of different values for good study results. Socially vulnerable and disabled students are supported with scholarships for special needs and to pay part of the tuition fee. During the meeting with the students, it was clarified that the psychological and emotional environment is suitable for studying.

(2) Expert judgement/indicator analysis

Students of the programme are motivated to study and develop research activities. Motivational measures - Scholarships of various types and values are justified and appropriate, taking into account the needs of socially vulnerable students and students with disabilities.

3.3.5 Evaluation of the sufficiency of study information and student counselling

(1) Factual situation

First-year students are integrated into their studies during the introductory week. Direct active communication between students and teachers of the programme is encouraged in formal and informal settings, and students do not shy away from expressing remarks and concerns about the subject being taught. During the meeting, the students appreciated the information provided by the teachers about the discipline, its content, assessment methods and terms, required information sources and literature. Motivated students have the opportunity to prepare their master theses from the first semester.

(2) Expert judgement/indicator analysis

The existing close communication between students and lecturers, informing students about the activities of other university departments required for successful studies is sufficient.

Strengths and weaknesses of this evaluation area:

(1) Strengths:

1. Formal and informal communication between teachers and students promotes openness, exchange and development of research activities.
2. First-year students are provided with good conditions to integrate into the university community and adapt to the changed environment.

(2) Weaknesses:

1. This is a unique study programme in Lithuania. Students from other Lithuanian and international universities need to be more actively attracted.
2. Possibly due to the small number of students in the programme, a small number of outgoing students under the ERASMUS exchange programme has been observed.

3.4. TEACHING AND LEARNING, STUDENT PERFORMANCE AND GRADUATE EMPLOYMENT

Studying, student performance and graduate employment shall be evaluated according to the following indicators:

3.4.1. Evaluation of the teaching and learning process that enables to take into account the needs of the students and enable them to achieve the intended learning outcomes

(1) Factual situation

Master study students' learning processes are based on self-study and independent learning abilities, however full theoretical and practical support is available from their supervisors. Assessment, and the structure of the cumulative score, are provided for almost all subjects, however a significant number of students continue to their doctoral studies, which shows the intended learning outcomes are achieved..

(2) Expert judgement/indicator analysis

Well balanced and independent based learning processes seem to be an attractive and effective way to reach a high value of studies; however better „supervision“ of students „specialised skills“ may lead to an even higher level in their master thesis. Specialised practical skills might be attractive for the labour market also.

3.4.2. Evaluation of conditions ensuring access to study for socially vulnerable groups and students with special needs

(1) Factual situation

Students with special needs have all opportunities to use the learning materials using remote up to date video tools, etc. The KU campus – Business Incubator, New Dormitory, Studland Building - are adapted for people with special needs.

(2) Expert judgement/indicator analysis

Meeting the needs for socially vulnerable groups are fully satisfactory and satisfies the personal requirements of special needs students. Therefore, the infrastructure of the university is adequate to meet the special needs of the students.

3.4.3. Evaluation of the systematic nature of the monitoring of student study progress and feedback to students to promote self-assessment and subsequent planning of study progress

(1) Factual situation

New students are introduced to the study procedures, infrastructure, and people responsible for studies; it also identifies students with specific learning and other support needs.

Annual study quality feedback reflects student's needs (from surveys), and meetings with graduates ensures an effective system for monitoring study progress.

Some students who continue their studies after the first cycle have already chosen a topic with supervision from their teachers. Students coming from other departments or universities may be attracted to the programme if knowledge is disseminated about funding opportunities for research.

(2) Expert judgement/indicator analysis

Monitoring of student study progress and feedback to students is adequate and relevant to ensure progress e.g., annual surveys, anonymous online polls etc. Students actively take part in surveys as they feel able to influence the study process and affect processes or evaluation systems.

3.4.4. Evaluation of employability of graduates and graduate career tracking in the study field.

(1) Factual situation

Graduates of KU continued contact with their "Alma mater" even if they were not working in fields related to studies from which they graduated. Graduates identified the general and specific skills they obtained during their studies which helped them to continue their studies, find a job or find relevance to their professional activities. Most graduates continue their studies or get a job in a study related field.

(2) Expert judgement/indicator analysis

According to graduate surveys and the independent magazine "Reitingai", graduates of the KU Ecology and Environmental Science programme stated that the social and general skills obtained through the programme was very good, however competences for "specialized skills" needed to be improved.

3.4.5. Evaluation of the implementation of policies to ensure academic integrity, tolerance and non-discrimination

(1) Factual situation

The principles and measures for ensuring academic integrity, tolerance and non-discrimination are defined in the KU Code of Academic Ethics. The lecturers' relationship with students is based on the principles of academic cooperation and transparency that makes studies on the „top level“ of the system in Lithuanian higher education.

(2) Expert judgement/indicator analysis

Transparency of studies are ensured by various programmes, but the real implementation of policies for academic integrity, tolerance and non-discrimination shown by students' satisfaction with their studies is higher than average in the same field.

3.4.6. Evaluation of the effectiveness of the application of procedures for the submission and examination of appeals and complaints regarding the study process within the field studies

(1) Factual situation

The right of students to appeal against the assessment of study results is defined in the KU study regulations. Students have the right to contact the Director of the Institute within 2 working days after receiving the assessment and to receive an answer within 3 working days.

(2) Expert judgement/indicator analysis

There have been no appeals or complaints in the last 3 years, however the opportunity to appeal is simple and “friendly” for students.

Strengths and weaknesses of this evaluation area:

(1) Strengths:

1. The lecturers' relationship with students is on top level according to cooperation with students reflecting their needs during the study programme.
2. Students and employers of graduates satisfaction with quality of studies is higher than average in the same field.

(2) Weaknesses:

1. Self independent based learning processes should be more closely monitored to ensure access to specialised knowledge and skills.

3.5. TEACHING STAFF

Study field teaching staff shall be evaluated in accordance with the following indicators:

3.5.1. Evaluation of the adequacy of the number, qualification and competence (scientific, didactic, professional) of teaching staff within a field study programme(s) at the HEI in order to achieve the learning outcomes

(1) Factual situation

Fifteen teaching staff members contribute to the study programme Ecology and Environmental Science. Twelve are part-time employees at Klaipėda University (KU) and three are visiting teachers from other research or state institutions (Lithuanian and international). The majority of the teaching staff (92%) are active researchers in the field marine ecology.

The structure of the teaching staff complies with the requirements of the Lithuanian legal acts. The majority of the teaching staff (58%) fall into the age group of 38–50. Teachers older than 60 years account for 17%. The qualification degree of professor is held by three members of the teaching staff while the qualification degree of associate professor is held by four of them. Laboratory staff and teaching staff for the practical classes all have a Masters degree. The teaching and research performance of the teaching staff is evaluated by rules approved by KU Senate Resolution No. 11-46. The proficiency level of the English language of the teaching staff is upper intermediate (B2).

Subject knowledge is shared among several members of the teaching staff, therefore, a person leaving the teaching team can be replaced by another. Teaching staff at KU are consistently adding to their knowledge and experience in their field of research.

(2) Expert judgement/indicator analysis

Moving from the KU faculty to the KU institute was beneficial for teachers as it enabled them to build on their research activities and improve knowledge transfer to students.

The biggest share of the teaching staff falls into the age group of higher experience and skills. The ratio of teachers to students (1.25:1) indicates a sufficient number of teachers. There are only three teachers who are professors and only four who are associate professors which indicates a need to motivate other teaching staff to work towards a higher level.

High research activity and performance of the teaching staff encourages more active participation of students in the research, e.g. 2–3 students take part in EU COST action network activities; students are encouraged to contribute to scientific papers at an early study stage. However, supervision of only two students from eight master theses (as provided in Annex 3 of Self-Evaluation Report (SER)) was undertaken by the programme teaching staff (Prof. dr. Gerald Schernewski and Assoc. Prof. Artūras Razinkovas-Baziukas - according to the SER). Therefore, more of the programme teachers should be involved in pedagogical supervision activities.

Research and teaching activity of the teachers is regularly observed and discussed. At the Institute level, presentation and discussion of the 5-year plan of each teacher encourages the teaching staff to improve their research activities.

During the meeting with the teaching staff it was apparent that the teachers have a good supporting system, the monitoring system for their feedback works well, and any suggestions are included during regular meetings of the Study programme committee.

A best teacher award or sharing of effective teaching methods in a seminar could be organised to motivate teachers to improve their pedagogical/didactic competencies.

3.5.2. Evaluation of conditions for ensuring teaching staffs' academic mobility (not applicable to studies carried out by HEIs operating under the conditions of exile)

(1) Factual situation

The academic mobility of KU teachers is regulated by the Rector's Order No. 1-029 (approved on 15.10.2019) "Description of the Procedure for the Participation of Academic and Administrative Staff of Klaipėda University in the Erasmus + Mobility Program". A visit of 2–3 working days to higher educational institutions abroad with whom KU has signed an Erasmus+ cooperation agreement is encouraged. Priority is given to teachers who take part in the mobility program for the first time. During the period of 2017–2020, about a half of the teaching staff took part in an academic mobility program.

(2) Expert judgement/indicator analysis

The Erasmus + mobility program is the main basis for ensuring the mobility of the teaching staff and it benefits the teachers; however, only 3 teachers were the most active in research and academic mobility programs during 2017–2020. Other teachers (especially the less experienced ones) should be encouraged to take part in the mobility programs in the future.

During the visit the evidence which the expert panel obtained was that the mobility programs do not lead to better pedagogical/didactic competences.

3.5.3. Evaluation of the conditions to improve the competences of the teaching staff

(1) Factual situation

The ratio of teachers to students (1.25:1) ensures the high individual attention of the teacher to a student, especially in the preparation of research work and master thesis, and enables students to be involved in their own research. The workload for the teaching staff in average is distributed as follows: 60 % for research, 25 % for teaching and 15 % for administrative work which indicates good conditions for research.

KU has all three levels of study and doctoral students are involved in the study process, giving them the opportunity to cooperate with more experienced teachers in the field, internships,

assisting in lectures, co-teaching laboratory work, organising seminars, developing teaching material. Early career teachers are especially encouraged to develop competencies in the field of teaching by taking part in internships in foreign laboratories, or by being involved in international research groups in research projects. Social partners or business enterprises provide guest lectures, supervise research works, and give specialist lectures for full-time study subjects.

Teaching staff competence improvement conditions are regulated by KU Senate Resolution No. 11-60 "On the Approval of the Regulations on the Qualification Improvement of Lecturers and Researchers of Klaipėda University". Once every five years teachers can benefit from one of the following forms of continuing professional development (CPD) training: scientific internship (long-term or short-term); professional training events, such as specialised courses; creative vacation etc. Sources of funding for this CPD are the University's Funds for Science, Studies and International Relations, internal funds of the unit, external support, subsidies of the Ministry of Education and Science, the State Commission for International Studies, other Lithuanian and international funds, and their funded programs and projects. For example, in the period of 2019-2021, KU was implementing a project titled "Improving the quality of studies at Klaipėda University and improving university management in response to city and regional needs", during which various training related to pedagogical competence development was organised, to which KU teachers were invited. In the period of 2017–2020, seven competency gaining activities were reported in SER.

The recommendation of the experts from the previous evaluation period was that KU should encourage the teaching staff to increase their pedagogical skills by taking courses. KU's response was to provide pedagogical competence development in implementing a project "Improving the quality of studies at KU and improving university management in response to city and regional needs" as well as to encourage teachers to participate in 160-hours training course for a qualification as a teacher at the KU Centre for Continuing Studies.

(2) Expert judgement/indicator analysis

Research-focused work load distribution and comparatively low teacher-to-student ratio supports the conditions for competency improvement, especially in the pedagogic/didactic field.

Four (out of 15) teachers of the study programme took part in the competence gaining activities within the evaluation period. The competence gained mainly include obtaining research knowledge and practice (e.g. the course on eukaryotic metabarcoding, CMAS Marine biology instructor course, summer school on "Does human health and well-being depend on a healthy ocean") or supporting research skills (e.g. training on intellectual property management, new product creation and development). Only one activity was directly linked to pedagogy/didactic purposes, i.e. English language course. More training courses for

pedagogic/didactic purposes (e.g. pedagogical communication, study subject advertising ways, etc.) should be taken.

Strengths and weaknesses of this evaluation area:

(1) Strengths:

1. The strong focus on research, and high activity and performance of teachers supports a potential for high research activity of the students; however this does not appear to increase recruitment to the programme.
2. Teachers have good opportunities for CPD (scientific internship (long-term or short-term); professional training events, like specialised courses; creative vacation etc.) and also access to mobility programs. Sources of funding are provided by the institution.

(2) Weaknesses:

1. Early career teaching staff should be more active in gaining higher qualification degrees as this increases their experience in pedagogy/didactics. An award of the best teacher or sharing of effective teaching methods through seminars could be organised to provide more motivation for teachers in improving their pedagogical/didactic competencies.
2. More teachers should be more motivated to take an active part in pedagogic/didactic competence gaining activities and mobility programs, to increase their competence in practical pedagogical/didactic activities (for example, more teachers should be involved in the supervision of master theses).

3.6. LEARNING FACILITIES AND RESOURCES

Study field learning facilities and resources should be evaluated according to the following criteria:

3.6.1. Evaluation of the suitability and adequacy of the physical, informational and financial resources of the field studies to ensure an effective learning process

(1) Factual situation

Facilities and learning resources are adequate in their size and quality for this study programme. Free access to subscribed scientific databases from home computers and use of “open-source” learning programmes during studies is an additional advantage. New, modern, well equipped classes and laboratories are easily accessible for students in faculty even during pandemic “season”. Students have opportunities to take part on expensive international expeditions (e.g. Svalbard) to do their own research free of charge. Three

recirculating aquaculture systems (RAS) for full-scale fish cultivation is unique in Lithuania for aquaculture interest students.

(2) Expert judgement/indicator analysis

Resources of joint KU and MRI infrastructure makes the programme exclusive over the Baltic region - Mesocosmos, recirculating aquaculture systems, underwater research equipment, genetic laboratory etc. easily accessible for students, with the opportunity to plan and implement their own study, with supervision of top level teachers.

3.6.2. Evaluation of the planning and upgrading of resources needed to carry out the field studies

(1) Factual situation

Some innovative learning/experimental resources such as „mesocosm systems” are not in use (or not working); they should be fixed and launched ASAP and used to attract students to this study programme.

(2) Expert judgement/indicator analysis

The equipment used for studies and scientific activities is constantly updated within the framework of MRI scientific activities and projects.

The need for consumables and materials for studies (laboratory works) are planned, collected and managed internally by the study committee of the institute, but information on how it is going to be managed should be given for students before they plan their master themes.

Strengths and weaknesses of this evaluation area:

(1) Strengths:

1. Modern equipped laboratories;
2. Wide range of research fields for students.

(2) Weaknesses:

1. Some of the „advertised“ equipment (mesocosms system) is still not in use.

3.7. STUDY QUALITY MANAGEMENT AND PUBLIC INFORMATION

Study quality management and publicity shall be evaluated according to the following indicators:

3.7.1. Evaluation of the effectiveness of the internal quality assurance system of the studies

(1) Factual situation

The SER was detailed in its internal quality assurance systems and indicated that it complied with the ISO 9001:2015 and other EU specific Higher Education policies. A list of documents utilised in the Quality Assurance (QA) was provided with internal evaluations taking place usually once a year. The QA of the study programme is overseen by the University's Committee of Physical and Life Sciences Study Fields, and at the Institute level, comes under the MRI Internal Study Organisation Group for Biology and Ecology. Five MRI scientists are members of the Study Organisation Group. Clear information was provided on the process of programme and course approval and the new system being adopted to streamline procedures i.e., the Academic Information System.

(2) Expert judgement/indicator analysis

The internal quality assurance systems of the studies are fit for purpose and are effective in assuring the quality of the programmes.

3.7.2. Evaluation of the effectiveness of the involvement of stakeholders (students and other stakeholders) in internal quality assurance

(1) Factual situation

The University has a robust system in place for the involvement of all stakeholders in the processes of internal quality assurance. Social partners are invited to contribute to all aspects of the programme from teaching through to thesis defence, from being representatives on committees to being partners in cooperation agreements – all of which benefits the students in terms of improving their potential employability. Contributions from staff, students and graduates are predominantly as members of committees, representing the views of colleagues, or through consultations.

(2) Expert judgement/indicator analysis

The involvement of all stakeholders in internal quality assurance is extensive with the social partners invited to contribute to all aspects of the programme.

3.7.3. Evaluation of the collection, use and publication of information on studies, their evaluation and improvement processes and outcomes

(1) Factual situation

Students, staff, and graduates have input into the internal evaluations of the programme and individual course content through surveys; the results for which are discussed with the social partners and included in the final reports for the specific unit at the University. Annual indicators and evaluations are shared in detail within the institution, with a summarised version (including any feedback from the social partners) being released to the public through

the University's website. Relevant information regarding the programme is also available on the website e.g., admission requirements, programme specifications, career opportunities, etc.

(2) Expert judgement/indicator analysis

The information provided about the programme, its evaluation and associated processes and procedures for improvements, and any outcomes are available internally and externally to interested parties.

3.7.4. Evaluation of the opinion of the field students (collected in the ways and by the means chosen by the SKVC or the HEI) about the quality of the studies at the HEI

(1) Factual situation

Students are consulted on their experience of each course they take through student evaluations. The proportion of students completing an evaluation ranges from 33-100% and this is similar to completion rates in other institutions. Average outcomes are overwhelmingly positive, being consistently within the 4 out of 5 category.

(2) Expert judgement/indicator analysis

The establishment of the Internal Study Organisation Group for Biology and Ecology has met the recommendation from the previous evaluation and a more robust system of student input is now in place. Students are routinely consulted on their experiences of the courses contributing to the programme which in turn will improve the student experience and the programme.

Strengths and weaknesses of this evaluation area:

(1) Strengths:

1. The internal Quality Assurance system has been strengthened since the last evaluation and its processes are now at the required standard;
2. Stakeholders are involved extensively in the internal Quality Assurance system and their input is incorporated into final reports and summarised for public information on the University's website.

(2) Weaknesses:

1. Although input from the social partners is invited to various aspects of Quality Assurance of the programme, proactive encouragement to engage and include these organisations routinely in programme events would further strengthen their relationship with the University which would in turn benefit the students.

IV. EXAMPLES OF EXCELLENCE

Core definition: Excellence means exhibiting exceptional characteristics that are, implicitly, not achievable by all.

If, according to the expert panel, there are no such exceptional characteristics demonstrated by the HEI in this particular study field, this section should be skipped / left empty.

1. Detailed and extensive quality assurance processes within the study field, which involves all stakeholders. Social partners are invited to contribute to all aspects of the programme from teaching through to thesis defence, from being representatives on committees to being partners in cooperation agreements – all of which benefits the students in terms of improving their potential employability.
2. From the first year, students are invited to actively participate in research activities and participate in joint projects with researchers and lecturers. Active interest in science improves students' research skills and the quality of master theses.

V. RECOMMENDATIONS*

Evaluation Area	Recommendations for the Evaluation Area (study cycle)
Intended and achieved learning outcomes and curriculum	The programme is very much focused on the ecology and environmental science of the marine/aquatic/coastal environment, and this is not apparent in the current programme name. Consideration should be given to addressing this to ensure that this unique selling point of the degree is explicit.
Links between science (art) and studies	None.
Student admission and support	The uniqueness of studies and professional opportunities should be more widely disseminated at both national and international levels. The opportunity to study some subjects at a distance would also contribute to the attractiveness of studies and a higher number of entrants.
Teaching and learning, student performance and graduate employment	Experts from local RAS business companies may be useful partners in the study programme/ field.
Teaching staff	<p>More teachers should be more motivated to take an active part in pedagogic/didactic competence gaining activities and mobility programmes.</p> <p>Early career teaching staff should be more active in gaining higher qualification degrees as this increases their experience in pedagogy/didactics.</p> <p>An award of the best teacher or sharing of effective teaching methods through seminars could be organised to provide more motivation for teachers in improving their pedagogical/didactic competencies.</p>
Learning facilities and resources	Mesocosmos system should be fixed and launched ASAP if you use it to attract students to this study programme. Advertising about the RAS system “training” may attract students from the local market.

<p>Study quality management and public information</p>	<p>Although input from the social partners is invited to various aspects of Quality Assurance of the programme, proactive encouragement to engage and include these organisations routinely in programme events would further strengthen their relationship with the University which would in turn benefit the students.</p>
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VI. SUMMARY

Main positive and negative quality aspects of each evaluation area of the study field ECOLOGY at Klaipėda University

The programme is unique at the national level, focusing on the development of ecological, environmental and environmental management skills in the field of the marine and coastal environment. However, this is not apparent in the current programme name. Both the number and the quality of staff members is excellent and is supported by a wide array of international collaboration and participation in a number of EU founded, bilateral and Lithianian projects. Active involvement of students in the on-going projects ensures their education at a level that corresponds to the present-day state of aquatic sciences. The personalisation of the programme to suit the student's interests is comparable with second cycle taught programmes within and outside of Lithuania. The lecturers' relationship with students is based on the principles of academic cooperation and transparency that makes studies on „top level " in the system of Lithuanian higher education. Moving the programme from the KU faculty to the KU institute was beneficial for teachers and improved knowledge transfer to students. The Erasmus+ programme ensures the mobility of the teaching staff, however, only 3 teachers were the most active in research and academic mobility programmes during 2017–2020. Teachers, especially in the early career stages should be actively motivated to take an active part in pedagogic/didactic competence gaining activities and mobility programmes. Facilities and learning resources are adequate in their size and quality for this study programme including access to subscribed scientific databases from home computers. Well equipped classes and laboratories are easily accessible for students in faculty though some equipment (e.g. mesocosms) are not in use. The internal quality assurance systems of the studies are fit for purpose and are effective in assuring the quality of the programmes. The involvement of stakeholders in internal quality assurance is extensive; social partners are invited to contribute to all aspects of the programme. Compared to infrastructural and personal capacities of the programme, the number of enrolled students is quite low. Therefore more active advertisement of the programme is needed.

Expert panel chairperson signature:

Prof. Dr Judit Padisák (panel chairperson), academic;