



***SOCIALINIŲ MOKSLŲ KOLEGIJOS
VEIKLOS VERTINIMO IŠVADOS***

***INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW REPORT OF
SOCIALINIŲ MOKSLŲ KOLEGIJA***

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I hereby certify that this is the final text of the institutional review report of College of Social Sciences.



Bastian Baumann

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, the academic community and 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: Ms. Audronė Alijošiūtė-Paulauskienė (social partner), Professor Bastian Baumann (chair), Mr. Mantas Gutauskas (student), Associate Professor Anders Johannes Justenlund (academic), Dr Tara Ryan (review secretary) and Professor Eneken Titov (academic).
4. As a result of external review **College of Social Sciences (Socialinių mokslų kolegija)**¹ is given a **positive evaluation**.
5. Evaluation areas:

Area	Assessment with points*
MANAGEMENT	2
QUALITY ASSURANCE	3
STUDIES AND RESEARCH (ART)	2
IMPACT ON REGIONAL AND NATIONAL DEVELOPMENT	3

*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. **Three** examples of good practice were found; **twenty-seven** recommendations are made.

¹ The new name of College of Social Sciences (Socialinių mokslų kolegija) since 2023 y. ir SMK Aukštoji mokykla.

II. INTRODUCTION

2.1. Background of the review process

7. The external review of **College of Social Sciences (Socialinių mokslų kolegija)** (hereafter referred to as SMK or the College) was organised by the Centre for Quality Assessment in Higher Education and carried out in November 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 the Centre; 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 the Self-Evaluation Report (hereinafter – SER) with forty annexes. SKVC provided to the Panel additional information about the College, as set in the Methodology (Chapter 26), including statistical data on student and staff number; financial data; findings from ex-post study field 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 Work regulations of the Academic Council/Council (as indicated in paragraph 41 of the Statute); teacher performance management and remuneration procedure/guideline; the SMK Labour Regulation (as required under the Statute); a sample annual plan with integrated risk management measures in the annual plan of 2022-2023 (not annual reports which were provided); SMK Order of receiving feedback (2021); SMK Scholarship Provisions; SMK Mentorship Programme; SMK Student Admission Rules; procedure for admission of citizens of foreign countries to the SMK; as well as additional clarity on student and staff numbers – whole numbers and full time equivalents (FTEs).
10. The site visit was undertaken after a training session organized by SKVC staff and preparatory Panel meetings. The Panel *visited* the SMK campuses during the week of November 7th, 2022, visiting the Vilnius campus on November 7th, the Kaunas campus on November 7th and the Klaipeda campus on the 8th, 9th, and 10th of November. The Panel conducted meetings with a variety of internal and external stakeholders. Subsequently, the Panel met 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 analysing the evidence collected, the Panel also gave due consideration to the recommendations of the previous 2014 review:

To improve the strategies of the College, to increase their effectiveness:

- *create a comprehensive system of quantitative indicators for evaluating progress, define clear goals for each year, so that progress is more obvious and easier to assess;*
- *define the most important areas of applied scientific research;*
- *improve data management.*

Create a more formal cooperation mechanism:

- *within the institution (give more autonomy to others by reducing the burden of responsibility on one person (better risk management), establish a study department responsible for student counselling, strengthen student representation, the role of the Academic Council and programme committees);*
- *with external partners.*

Increase the professionalism of the teaching staff;

- *in the field of teaching and learning: to establish a Teaching and Learning Center, where new teaching methods would be introduced, a critical approach would be developed and foreign language knowledge would be improved;*
- *in the field of scientific research and development: to attract more employees with scientific qualifications (i.e. a doctorate degree) in order to increase the volume of scientific production not only at the national level, but also to publish publications in international scientific publications*

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 SMK's comments and considered them. As a result, nine changes were made to the report to correct some minor factual inaccuracies or misinterpretations.
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 respectively 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. SMK was founded in 1994 as a private higher education institution, a College of Social Sciences, as a family business. Initially it was incorporated as the Nijolė Skučienė School of Languages and Business Management, and it became a higher non-university education institution in 2003. The SMK headquarters was established in Klaipėda. A branch of SMK has been operating in Vilnius since 1999, and another one in Kaunas since 2018. Two family members are the sole shareholders, one of whom as of 2019 is the Chancellor of SMK.

20. The stated mission of SMK is *“to unlock and empower an individual’s overall potential for continuous development of a personality, as well as meaningful and value-creating professional activity; to expand scientific knowledge and innovation-based performance in order to contribute to societal well-being and sustainable economic growth; to create an open and inclusive environment that encourages positive changes, collective sense-making and holistic co-evolution.”*

21. The vision is to be *“an acknowledged and valued foundation of private education and science, which gathers the potential of people and organizations and actualizes it to a new level of awareness for the progress of society and the co-creation of value”*.

22. In November 2022 across its three campuses SMK had 278 lecturers, forty-three of whom are full-time, and there is an overall full time equivalent (FTE) of 170. The student population is 4240. SMK provides eighteen programmes in total distributed across the fields of Health Sciences, Law, Art, Computer Sciences, Social Science, and Business and Public Management. The degrees in Media and Video Creation and in International Business are only provided at the Vilnius campus. The Vilnius campus is also host to SMK's cohort of international students; there are no international students currently at Kaunas or Klaipeda. Fourteen of the programmes are offered at all three campuses, and seven are provided in Lithuanian and English.
23. At its Klaipeda campus there are 692 students – full-time and part-time, and it has sixty-two staff, with an FTE of 38.5 across the sixteen study programmes. In Kaunas SMK offers fifteen study programmes to 1069 full-time and part-time students, and it has sixty-nine staff, with an FTE of 44.25; and in Vilnius there are 2479 full-time and part-time students and 146 members of staff with an FTE of 87.25.
24. SMK is noteworthy in that its student numbers, albeit across both part time and full time, remain relatively strong by comparison with other institutions, possibly driven by its part-time, flexible approach to programme participation.
25. As indicated SMK developed a self-evaluation report in preparation for the SKVC evaluation. The College developed a process for the development of the SER which aimed to be inclusive and comprehensive. A thirty-seven-member, working group, drawing representatives from across the various functions and study fields of the College, was established to prepare the SER. The work of the group was coordinated by the College Director who was responsible for overarching planning including the organization of meetings and the coordination of dialogue with the stakeholders. Different heads of function led different focus areas; the Head of Academic Activity coordinated the evaluation of "Management"; the Head of Scientific Activity headed the group that analyzed the area of "Quality Assurance" as well as the area "Study and Science (Art) Activity"; and the Head of Science and Business Centre headed the group that analyzed "Impact on Region and National Development". Other staff also contributed to the discussion of the areas under evaluation in order to identify the advantages and disadvantages of the institution, made comments and suggestions as well as organising the collection of data and the preparation of supporting appendices. The self-evaluation results were shared with students, social partners, lecturers via the intranet and also via email.

III. ANALYSIS BY EVALUATION AREAS

3.1. Management

Management area is analysed in accordance with the following indicators and criteria, established 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.

26. As indicated above, SMK has its origins in the personal vision of the founders who retain a very strong commitment to it. The vision and mission have been well communicated to the staff and stakeholders and there is an organisational culture of shared ownership and commitment. This was exemplified in the loyalty expressed by both full-time and part-time staff, and also by some students and stakeholders. The role of Chancellor was created in 2019 and owner moved from the role of Director/CEO to that of Chancellor. This was a deliberate plan to step back from operational detail and focus on strategic development and the establishment of aligned enterprises.
27. The Chancellor articulated a strong vision and commitment to a family legacy where education is located at the centre of social development. SMK benefits from an owner with energy and goals to grow the College in order to create ‘spaces for people to learn’, and with clear views on the model for growth. The Chancellor stated that there is no vision for SMK to go wholly online, and that learning is best experienced in the face-to-face environment. It was advised that the College’s future lay in collaborations, and from an international perspective that the focus is on Africa and Asia. This is to be complemented with the creation of a digital platform and professional programmes which are described as educational services needed in the country. The shareholders’ plans are that they will develop additional revenue streams through separate businesses but that these products will generate revenue which will offer growth options and develop the educational business, including the ability to offer more scholarships. The Chancellor advised that there is an aim to become a University of Applied Sciences in future when they are able to meet all legislative requirements.
28. In discussing the future, the Chancellor also shared that the shareholders want to ensure that SMK responds effectively to the challenge to keep its founding identity and simultaneously to continue to grow. As part of the Chancellor’s approach to these challenges, it was advised that Chancellor had committed personal time to engage with all permanent staff and full-time teachers to work on the visualisation of goals and the identification of strategic priorities for SMK.
29. The College has had incremental growth, and leaders and managers have been selected from within the organisation with individuals being identified and offered promotional opportunities. This has contributed to a culture of commitment and has added a tone of family to the enterprise.
30. SMK has engaged in comprehensive planning work and has established a detailed strategy, which is composed of three elements; a ten-year long-term strategy, a medium-term strategic action plan, and annual action plans which include a significant number of operational performance indicators. It was evident from both the documents considered, and the dialogue with staff and external stakeholders that the texts reflect national and regional policy perspectives, e.g. *2021–2030 National Progress Plan*, 9 September 2020, No. 998; *Plan for Economic Revitalization and Resilience - New Generation Lithuania; Klaipėda Economic*

Development Strategy 2030; Klaipėda City Municipality 2021-2030 the strategic development plan and specialization strategy of Klaipėda region 2030; *2021-2030 Strategic Development Plan* of Vilnius City; and *Strategic Development Plan 2030* of Kaunas city municipality.

31. There was also an organisational awareness of the European Higher Education Area and the European Research Area and their associated policies and vision. The SMK long term development directions to 2030 draws on specific elements of international documents relating to the goals of the European Higher Education Area (EHEA) and the European Research Area (ERA). Additionally, the goals and objectives of the *UN Sustainable Development Agenda 2030* and the goals and aspirations of *Digital Education Action Plan 2021-2027* and Green Education priority under the EHEA, and the *Renewed EU Agenda for Higher Education 2017* are also relevant to SMK's 2030 Strategy. For example, a focus for the EHEA is to improve quality and equity in education and training by ensuring inclusive education and developing key competencies for lifelong learning (LLL). SMK aligns some of its admission approaches, as well as its part-time, flexible approach to study programmes with this focus. Reflecting an awareness of the objectives of the Digital Education Plan and the Green agenda, the SMK Strategy 2030 explicitly identifies “Sustainability and Digitalisation” as one of its horizontal priorities. An associated ‘transformational project for 2030’ is to develop “an open creative innovation platform WeCreators by using it for digitalisation of experiential learning, promotion of science-business networking and academic entrepreneurship. The open platform for creative innovation serves for the creation of experiences by joining the potential of business organisations and creators”.
32. It is noteworthy that the ten-year long-term strategy and the medium-term strategic action plan are for the whole of SMK. The local campuses do not have different strategies; there is only one integrated strategy, and it is not localised. Action plans are established on an annual basis which include activities identified to signify implementation. They are not differentiated by campus. The activities that are used as an implementation checklist are not suitable to measure performance – they are not key performance indicators (KPIs). SMK does not conduct internal benchmarking, though informal ‘competition’ does exist. It was also noted that only the Vilnius campus has international students, and that the goals in the strategy relating to international studies only related to Vilnius.
33. Another feature of the planning approach is that SMK has a methodology which incorporates what it describes as vertical and horizontal priorities which are then mapped to the strategic objectives. This was described as a model where “vertical priorities reflect the main areas of activity” and “horizontal priorities describe “broad, all-encompassing benchmarks for the development of SMK as an organisation”.
34. During meetings at the site visit various staff members demonstrated an awareness of their personal responsibilities in respect of operational implementation, and those with managerial responsibility were satisfied with the resources allocated and the associated resource planning mechanisms. The Panel recognised a deep commitment and passion from the staff to SMK and its vision and mission.
35. In describing the organisational approach to planning, staff across various groups referred to the fact that they use the Deming model of Plan, Do, Check, Act (PDCA). Both full-time and part-time staff referred to the SWOT analysis conducted and identified it as the start of their planning process. The Panel considers the approach taken as a very positive beginning towards

developing an organisation which is scalable and professional. Nevertheless, while there was a strong emphasis on planning, a very detailed approach to identifying actions and actors, a clear understanding from process leaders of how the operational plans should unfold, there was also a disconnect between the macro and micro plans. SMK has established a large list of what it describes as key performance indicators (KPIs), and they are embedded in the annual action plans. However, given the volume of indicators and the level of some of them, they could not necessarily be called ‘key’ measures of performance. The prioritisation associated with the vertical and horizontal model of associating importance with objectives was not clearly comprehensible or visible in the structure of the documentation. The Panel notes the commitment and attempt to have a sophisticated strategy and planning model, but notes that ultimately the priorities were not clear as the strategy is somewhat complicated and with some unnecessary terminology. This does not make it easy for everyone to clearly understand what the entire strategy is about and therefore people may not be able to adequately consider how it influences their work. It is evident that a significant effort and thought has gone into the generation of the three levels of plans and the allocation of responsibility for delivery within SMK, as well as the integration of many strands of local and regional policy, but the Panel **recommends** SMK reflects on the plans and ensure that the main priorities are more obvious and reflected in ‘key’ indicators rather than in detailed checklists.

36. The strategy and associated annual plans are considered twice a year at formal monitoring meetings which involve the heads of campus and other senior leaders. Reports are presented to the shareholders on progress and for final decisions on some matters. Reports are prepared under the various project headings, and the Director prepares the annual report for presentation to the shareholders. While these formal processes take place, it was also evident that there is a strong direct engagement between the Chancellor and the Director on a regular basis. While the Chancellor has undertaken a less direct or operational role, there remains a high degree of informal communication. Despite the articulation of a monitoring and review model in the self-evaluation report and during the meetings at the site visit, the Panel remained unconvinced of its efficacy. The planning and implementation elements of the PDCA cycle do appear to be strong but the approach to monitoring and review needs further strengthening. A sample of an Annual Activity report was provided; it is a list of quantitative data without any evaluation of the effectiveness of work undertaken. The Panel **recommends** that there be reflection of the ‘check’ and ‘act’ elements of the Deming cycle leading to the addition of more formal monitoring and review mechanisms, and better improvement actions.

37. It was noted that each person has an annual appraisal meeting in which goals and performance are discussed, but this is not documented and appears to occur in an informal manner. It was acknowledged during meetings that there needs to be a greater systematic approach in reporting and with a focus on the difference between past and present and focus on improvements. The Panel supports this view and **recommends** that there be a formal structure around annual performance reviews in particular for mid-management and leadership.

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.

38. SMK provided a lot of detail on its management and governance arrangements. Each campus has a Head, and there is a sole SMK Director who reports to the Shareholders/the Board of Directors. There is a Head of Finance, a Head of Studies, and a Head of Academic Activities, but no head of human resources. Heads of study programmes have a reporting relationship with both the Head of Academic Activities and the Head of Branch. The College has a conscious model of having a single management for the whole organisation and not duplicating management arrangements across the three campuses. Each campus has a head of campus and a Studies Department. The Studies Department oversees the provision of programmes at that campus according to the regulations. The Head of the Studies Department reports to the head of campus. The Heads of Study Programmes manage the provision of the programmes and report to the Head of Academic Activities, who has overall academic responsibility for standards across all the programmes and campuses. During an organisational restructure in 2017, academic departments were replaced by the structure described with the objective of ensuring uniformity of programme experience for learners when the same programme is provided at a number of campuses.
39. Throughout a variety of meetings staff demonstrated an awareness of the institutional plans, and the three layers of planning and documentation. Many persons spoke of their involvement in their development, and of the way the strategy was shared with internal and external parties via Google documents both for consultation and for information. Students also had an awareness of the existence of the strategy and associated plans and indicated that they had contributed to the process, though this was not universal. (See paragraph 47.)
40. While there was a clear and well-articulated commitment to there being a single, united organisation distributed across three campuses, with one vision and mission driving all activity, it was not always evident that staff had a deep understanding of the relationships between the different roles. In various meetings with staff in different organisational roles, the distinction between recommending a course of action and having decision-making powers was confused. As prescribed by the management model a lot of decision-making power resides with the Director, though in some instances it was evident that the Shareholders were consulted in advance of decisions. The Statute says that the Director is the decision-maker for a wide variety of issues including educational matters, e.g., 49.22 “quality of studies” and “level of higher education provided”, but it was asserted that the Head of Academic Activities has the final decision-making power regarding academic issues.
41. The Statute provides for the establishment of an Academic Council, as well as an Advisory Council which involves social partners. Various advisory and decision-making committees have been established also under the Work Regulations of the Academic Council. In considering the membership of the Academic Council the Panel struggled to understand how the various constituencies were represented. The Academic Council, a body making academic decisions, has a minority of academics/teachers as members. The numbers of teachers who are members of the Academic Council do not appear to align with the numbers allocated in the Work Regulations of the Academic Council. However, SMK has a number of complicating features; firstly, the appointment of persons who may have for example, two half-time roles – one academic and one administrative. It is not always apparent in what role a person may be acting. Secondly heads of study programmes are deemed administrative staff, which again can

cause confusion. It is **recommended** that care be taken in ensuring that persons making academic decisions are competent to do so and are appropriately designated as ‘academic’ or teaching staff. While it is reasonable that some of the managers or administrators also hold academic or teaching roles, it is important that it is clear in what capacity a person is taking a decision, and that they have the authority to do so. In its absence there may be confusion for students or colleagues, subsequently leading to misunderstandings or mistakes.

42. An organogram was provided with different lines indicating different relationships, but there was no explanatory legend. It did not facilitate an understanding of how work was organised. By contrast however the heads of study programmes have clear job descriptions, and it is clear who undertakes what task. In general, however, the very detailed annual action plans seemed to be the only document where goals and actions are written down and where the tasks and responsibilities of individual job holders were evident.
43. In dialogue with social partners and student representatives the Panel was able to triangulate and verify the assertion that some planning work is undertaken in collaboration with partners. It was also evident that SMK does analyse the labour market and look at external strategies of the city and region to guide them on their strategy. The staff shared that there are challenges in adding more study programmes where student numbers are decreasing in general, and the environment is changing. There are changes in market needs and demands and the introduction of the Nursing degree has been a direct response to the needs of the market. It was also stated that SMK wishes to grow international student numbers, but they noted that this can be challenging as there are restrictions within national migration and visa rules.
44. As mentioned in paragraph 41, SMK has an Advisory Council which involves social partners. Notwithstanding the points made in paragraph 41, the Panel did not find the role of the Advisory Council clear, nor how its decisions were made. The appointment of the Council members was not transparent, and the election or selection of members was on the basis of personal nomination. It is **recommended** that SMK carefully follow the terms of reference or constitutions of the respective decision-making bodies to ensure that the relevant groups are appropriately represented.
45. Other forms of stakeholder engagement involve the participation of social partners on programme review panels, project evaluation panels, and work placement provision. The Panel also noted and **commends** the work that SMK has undertaken in establishing a confederation of private HEIs institutions to share experience and needs. The confederation also aims to contribute to student rights for those who want to study in the private sector.
46. Students are members of the key governance committee of SMK, i.e., the Academic Council, and actively participated in the self-evaluation process. Twice a year there are meetings with all the student programme groups to receive feedback. Students indicated that in the first instance they would go to their head of programme or to the head of campus should they have any concern; and they gave examples of issues they had that were responded to in a timely manner and resolved.
47. Notwithstanding this, at the various meetings during the site visit it became clear that some students were not elected by fellow students but rather selected or invited to participate in various groups by the management and administration. It is **recommended** that students receive better information on and communication of the variety of Boards and Committees on which

students can serve, and how the appointments are made. It is also **recommended** that students be elected to positions by their peers. Information on what students serve on which committees should be well communicated.

48. SMK updated its Quality Guide in 2022 to incorporate a section on risk management, which is an important part of the planning and monitoring cycle. The Panel recognises the intention of the College to address this gap through the introduction of the new process which will grade risks into high, medium, and low and categorise them as financial, academic, research, international, impact for regions, service delivery, brand development. It is intended that annual action plans are annotated where actions have associated risks. The examples for this viewed by the Panel did not provide assurance that there was a well-functioning risk assessment and risk mitigation process yet in place. It is **recommended** that a separate risk register be established which is regularly monitored by the Director and her senior team and reported to the Shareholders periodically.

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.

49. SMK provided the Panel, both in advance of the site visit and during the visit, detailed information on student, graduate and staff numbers, financial figures, programme details, and a wide variety of planning tools with the inclusion of performance indicators. Links to information in the public domain, both through SMK's website and government sites were also provided.
50. In dialogue at meetings, there was consistent evidence that every process manager knew their process and the data associated with it, and where it was located either within the intranet or on the internet. Nevertheless, the Panel did not see evidence of there being a clear whole-institution view with single oversight being administered. This was manifested in a variety of ways, not least there being many contradictory numbers provided in the variety of appendices, not all of which could be explained by the data representing different census dates or definitions of terms. As a consequence of this, SMK cannot be confident that it is using the correct or accurate data to inform its decision-making and improvement cycle. The Panel **recommends** that a system be developed to have a single integrated model of data based on clear definitions and dates, shared across the whole organisation and it is used in the annual review processes.
51. Many examples were given of communications to the public using social media as well as website publications, for example the promotion of career days via Facebook. SMK's website provides very comprehensive information on its programmes, strategy, regulations, and quality assurance. There was a very open and engaged approach to communication with stakeholders and the public in general. This attitude may be enhanced by a more structured approach to some communications rather than relying on somewhat ad hoc social media communications.

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.

52. As noted in paragraph 40 many decisions are reserved to the Director, and this is also the case for the appointment of staff. Different arrangements are in place in different campuses for the selection and recommendation of staff for appointment, reflecting the different scales of operation, and the base location of certain senior staff members, e.g., the Head of Academic Studies, being located in Klaipeda.
53. Generally, resource planning is directly aligned to the annual action plans, and heads of study programmes are responsible for advising of additional needs for teaching staff. (See paragraph 32.)
54. In dialogue at the various meetings during the site visit all staff, academic and non-academic, indicated that they were supported in attending a variety of training initiatives. Mentoring was provided to new staff, particularly those in teaching roles. Examples of training provided included persons attending courses on the use of Moodle, participation in Erasmus+ training to persons being supported to undertake Doctoral studies. These continuing professional development opportunities were not directly mapped to annual performance reviews nor to annual goal setting, rather they were general professional development options.
55. Heads of study programmes indicated that they were satisfied that they were supported in seeking the appointment of academic staff when needed. As discussed in paragraphs 40 - 41 there is confusion in the manner in an individual may be appointed to a variety of roles, and therefore it is not always clear in what capacity a person is acting on a particular occasion, and accordingly the balance between full time and part time roles, academic and support roles can be misleading. The SER stated that adequate staff are in place to provide the study programmes and support their provision and Heads of Study programme were satisfied that they had appropriate teaching teams. The Panel noted these factors, but given the confusing nature of the staff data provided it was not verified by the Panel.
56. The qualification requirements for teachers are set nationally and staff were aware of the standards. *The Minister of Education and Science of the Republic of Lithuania the Approval of the Description of the General Requirements for the Conduct of Studies* states that more than half of the teachers must have at least three years of practical work experience in the field of the subject they teach, and in SMK 90% of teachers staff have this experience. It was stated in the SER that 25% of the lecturing staff hold PhDs which is a reasonable ratio where the programmes being taught are professional bachelors. The Panel noted that SMK do not calculate staff FTEs, nor do they use FTE staff/student ratios, but rather headcount staff/student ratios, which in itself is not a good instrument to ensure sufficiency of staff. Whilst there are

legitimate reasons for varying ratios depending on the study programmes, there seems to be a mismatch between some of the programmes. The Panel *recommends* that SMK establishes ranges of FTE staff/student ratios that are deemed acceptable (in terms of efficiency and quality of studies) for each study programme. Given the confusing nature of the staff data provided adequacy of staff was not verified by the Panel.

57. Many teachers obtain roles through personal connections as needs arise for additional part-time teachers. Some teachers moved from involvement with SMK through a previous social partnership to becoming an employee, which indicates a positive relationship and engagement with social partners. However, the Panel *recommends* that the Heads of Study Programmes receive support in undertaking recruitment; detail on employment criteria and remuneration was not fully understood by staff when undertaking recruitment activities. These are important details with consequences both of a legal and equity nature. SMK should protect itself against any potential poor practice or mistakes in this area. The recommendation in paragraph 59 is also relevant.

58. As indicated in paragraph 54 performance reviews are scheduled annually, but it was evident from dialogue at meetings that the model of review was informal, without a written record. Specific goals were not set for the subsequent year, nor were the non-attainment of goals from the previous year addressed in a remedial manner with the member of staff. There were no specific, formal personal development plans established to complement the goals and the person's and SMK's development needs. The annual reviews which are informal do not integrate with the end of semester self-evaluations by teachers, the latter of which are shared and discussed with the respective head of study programme. It is *recommended* that a formal approach to individual professional development plans and goal setting be introduced.

59. The Panel noted that there is no one person with responsibility for human resources (HR). The Director's key role was noted, including the practice of the Director meeting with every employee who leaves the organisation. As SMK grows, the absence of an HR professional may not be sustainable or desirable; legislation around employee management can be complex and additionally the professional recruitment, appointment, training, development, and support of staff may be very time consuming. The Panel *recommends* that as SMK develops further that it professionalises the management of human resource planning and retains a HR specialist to support staff. In this process there may be benefit also in establishing documentary tools to assist in developing a consistency of approach and standard across the organisation in respect of the management and development of all staff.

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.

60. The three campuses viewed by the Panel members are located in modern buildings with high quality ICT infrastructure and online library facilities with good journal access. One less

modern building in Klaipeda is in the process of being replaced by a new building in the coming months. The SWOT analysis undertaken identified a need to grow additional funding streams. A variety of projects were identified by the Chancellor as being ancillary to SMK but offering potential to provide additional development funding to the College, e.g., the acquisition of a private university in Lithuania, the participation in the digital laboratory in Klaipėda. The Panel also received information that SMK has adequate reserves to secure the business as a going concern. The Panel is satisfied that there is an appropriate focus on ensuring the efficiency of the use of financial resources and that investments are made on a sound basis.

61. SMK generates most of its income from student fees. As indicated in the SER in the period 2017-2021, approximately eighty percent of all the income earned by the SMK came from student fees. The College is seeking to diversify its funding streams through the development of educational products, undertaking financial investments as well as seeking external funding for projects. SMK does not have access to State funding other than on the basis of competitive financing or for Scientific Research and Experimental Development (SRED) services. Projects which generated income included the creation of study programmes at Levels 4 and 5, or Erasmus + activities or the SMK network Vibelift and its associated merchandise.
62. SMK described in its SER how it has allocated resources to update its infrastructure. For example, new buildings were opened in Klaipėda and Kaunas respectively in 2020/21. Annually funds are allocated to ensure investment in new ICT hardware and software as well as technical and laboratory equipment for study programmes. The College advised that on average 228K EUR a year is allocated to support the physical infrastructure.
63. The SMK library has also been consistently resourced and since 2009 has been a member of the Lithuanian Research Academy Library. Over time, as with many other libraries there has been a migration towards the use of electronic resources in addition to or in replace of paper publications. SMK subscribes to e-book platforms with Kaunas University of Technology; Vilnius Gediminas Technical University; Vitae Litera, an e-book publisher; a legal database Infoplex; as well as *EBSCO Publishing* - 10 databases; and *Taylor & Francis, Emerald, SpringerLink* with access to 21, 981 journal titles and 213,786 e-books.
64. Heads of units advised that during annual planning activities financial needs were also identified. These are shared with the Director and subject to approval, funding is allocated by the Finance Director. Staff indicated that requests were normally funded as they aligned to the strategic plan. As part of its resource allocation, SMK provides support to teaching and administration staff to ensure both access to e-journals and also participation in relevant training courses.
65. In considering the need to grow research activities (see paragraph 110) the Panel paid particular regard to the availability of funding for research-related training activities, continuing professional development and library resources. There was a consistency in messages from SMK that research is a high priority for the College and funding was allocated accordingly. (See also, paragraph 112.)
66. The Panel also noted the explicit commitment of SMK to paying salaries at the higher end of the market range on an ongoing basis so as to encourage commitment and engagement with the College. It was also noted that in the last evaluation period student fees have increased

twice. These measures, along with those indicated in paragraphs 61-66 inclusive, indicate that the College implements a reasonable model of resource planning.

67. **In summary**, the SMK is very committed to innovative and creative ways of managing its educational activities and has a strong vision to which its staff are dedicated. It remains an organisation that is growing and evolving from an informal operating model which originates from its inception as a family enterprise to a more professionalised and structured operation. Governance bodies are in place, but their membership and functions are either not adequately implemented or not well understood to enable consistent organisational effectiveness. Planning is a strong feature of the College, but the collation of relevant data, or management information, and its subsequent use in a systematic model for monitoring and enhancement needs development. There is insufficient focus on a systematic review and improvement mechanisms, the 'check, act' dimensions of the Deming cycle.

68. **Judgment:** the area is meeting the minimum requirements, and there are drawbacks that must be addressed and is given 2 points.

69. **Recommendations for the area:**

- SMK should reflect on its strategic and action plans and ensure that the main priorities are more obvious and reflected in 'key' indicators rather than in detailed checklists.
- SMK should focus on the 'check' and 'act' elements of the Deming cycle leading to the addition of more formal monitoring and review mechanisms, and better improvement actions.
- SMK should have a greater systematic approach in reporting and with a focus on the difference between past and present and focus on improvements, specifically establishing a formal structure around annual performance reviews in particular for mid-management and leadership.
- SMK should take care to ensure that persons making academic decisions are competent to do so and are appropriately designated as 'academic' or teaching staff.
- SMK should carefully follow the terms of reference or constitutions of the respective decision-making bodies to ensure that the relevant groups are appropriately represented.
- SMK should provide students with better information on and communication of the variety of Boards and Committees on which students can serve, and how the appointments are made.
- SMK should ensure that students are elected to governance and student representation positions by their peers.
- SMK should establish a separate risk register which is regularly monitored by the Director and her senior team and reported to the Shareholders periodically.
- SMK should develop a system so that there is a single integrated model of data based on clear definitions and dates, shared across the whole organisation and it is used in the annual review processes.
- SMK should provide the Heads of Study Programmes with specific receive support in undertaking recruitment. The management of human resource planning should be further professionalised and a HR specialist should be retained to support staff.
- SMK should establish a formal approach to individual professional development plans and goal setting.

70. Good practice examples

- The work that SMK has undertaken in establishing a confederation of private HEIs institutions to share experience and needs.

3.2. Quality Assurance

Quality Assurance area is analysed in accordance with 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.

71. SMK provided the review Panel with a comprehensive self-evaluation report accompanied by detailed appendices, as ‘evidence’ of each element of the SKVC evaluation criteria.
72. The development of the SER was managed by a working group established by the Director who assigned persons to the group based on their organisational role. The head of the SMK quality working group, the Head of Research was a key member of the group. The members participated in data collection and analysis and attended regular meetings. Several subgroups were formed to focus on different areas and there was some overlap of activities. Work was also conducted online. The coordinators from all the work groups met monthly or more frequently where necessary and they managed the progress including seeking any resources required from the Director. Student survey feedback was included in the analysis and the student member of the working group worked on the SER parts related to students.
73. On completion of the self-evaluation report it was distributed to all stakeholders, Academic Council/Council, Council, Social Partners, Teachers, Administrators, Student representatives. It was sent to social partners by email but shared on the intranet to student representatives and staff.
74. The SER which, while very detailed and systematic in citing ‘evidence’, fundamentally lacked any depth of analysis of the ‘evidence’. It would have significantly benefited from a more discursive approach. The mapping of SMK’s quality processes to the ESG is another example of the provision of detailed information. While it is a useful exercise and does demonstrate an appreciation of the ESG, there is an omission of any critical analysis. One of the key weaknesses identified during the SWOT, which was undertaken as part of the

preparation of the strategy, was a need to provide accommodation for students and also a need to provide new programmes explicitly addressing contemporary labour market needs. While useful insights, the Panel would also have expected deeper and broader insights into the operations of SMK also. The Panel also noted that areas for improvement identified in the SWOT undertaken as part of the strategy process had no connection with what was written in the SER itself.

75. SMK has a developed quality assurance system which all staff are aware of and to which importance is given. There are documented policies and procedures, and those which are student facing and/or of interest to stakeholders and the public are easily available on the College website. The Director has appointed a working group to review and update the quality assurance policies and procedures on an annual basis and it is currently led by the Head of Research. An example of how this has resulted in improvement is the 2022 introduction of a new section SMK into its Quality Guide on Risk Management. Notwithstanding the recommendation in paragraph 48, this is positive evidence of the College identifying gaps and improving its suite of policies and procedures.
76. Staff advised that the quality assurance model is based on communication, cooperation, creativity, on stakeholder inclusion and on accountability, but fundamentally on a system of feedback by which improvements are to be driven. The model adopted has been based on SMK's experience over a period of time. In 2015, the College had a bespoke model of internal quality assurance, but after the SKVC 2014 evaluation SMK sought to improve its systems and adopted an ISO approach and obtained ISO 9001 certification. As part of this exercise SMK reported that KPIs were established, and a lot of detailed information was captured. However, the College determined over time that the ISO model did not sufficiently support the needs of the organisation and a local model for internal quality assurance (IQA) evolved. It may be that the ISO style influenced the development of the SER which, as stated above is both detailed and has a large volume of evidentiary documents linked or referenced.
77. In developing a local IQA model, the College has established documented processes for all work, each of which are based on the stages of planning, implementation, monitoring, improvement. Each process has a specified process owner and SMK advises that the system provides a results-focused approach and enables improvement. A measure of improvement cited was student satisfaction metrics. The Panel notes SMK's intellectual engagement, autonomy, and commitment in moving away from ISO to establish a model it determined to better suit its needs.
78. In dialogue at various meetings, as indicated in paragraph 42, some staff members were very clear and confident in articulating who owned which processes and in describing the conceptual model on which processes are based, though this was not universal. There is a strong commitment to growing a quality culture amongst staff. The stages of the quality model or the PDCA model were referenced frequently by various members of staff during meetings. Several persons also referred to the model as allowing an organisational 'sense-making' approach to improvement, and that it assisted in creating a single voice across the College.
79. As mentioned in paragraph 48 a risk management model is being introduced. The Panel noted that one of the risk categories specified is academic risk. An example of academic risk pertains to ensuring that there are no unethical practices across the whole organisation and that in the context of studies and research good practice is monitored and maintained through an

effective quality assurance process. The Panel further noted that during 2021 that a case involving alleged plagiarism at SMK had been considered by the Ethical Standards body. While the particular instance had been adjudicated upon and concluded, it was noteworthy that the matter was not known by some members of the academic community, nor indeed was it referred to in the SER. The Librarian indicated that she had received financial support for the purchase of text matching software to assist in the detection of potential plagiarism, but few others were conscious of a need to provide training, support and to implement effective monitoring mechanisms to ensure that poor practice can be identified, managed, or preferably prevented. The Panel recommends that there be a review of its monitoring and communication models to ensure that the academic community is fully aware of its obligations and of any weaknesses that require a response.

80. It is noteworthy that one of the challenges identified by the College is how to ensure consistency in the implementation of processes. This is a well identified risk particularly considering the preceding paragraph. SMK argues that it mitigates this risk by relying on the individual process owners to take responsibility for and accountability for their respective processes and report annually on them. The Panel noted the commitment of individuals to their roles and responsibilities. Nevertheless, the Panel cautions the College on relying solely on the good practice of individuals, however meritorious it is, and recommends that SMK continues on its path of evolving its quality system by putting a particular focus on their more systematic assessment to critically understand their effectiveness and impact. If the focus shifted to a clearer and more systematic process of monitoring or checking, it may assist the College in better identifying areas for improvement.

81. A focus on collecting and responding to student feedback is one of the ways in which SMK ensures that it supports its student body, and it is a key quality assurance monitoring tool. Students are surveyed and the heads of study programmes also conduct class group meetings at the end of each semester. As referenced in paragraph 58, teachers also conduct a self-evaluation at the end of each semester, submitting it to the head of the study programme and meeting thereafter to discuss. Student feedback on teachers is shared with teachers and areas for improvement are discussed. The students with whom the Panel met were clear on their opportunities to provide feedback through different forums and were able to give examples of feedback given to the College which had been acted upon to their satisfaction. They also indicated that they receive information from SMK via email and that they had easy access to heads of study programmes, the head of campus and the administrative staff.

82. It is the responsibility of the head of the study programme to respond to feedback received and it is intended that the head of academic activities has oversight of this and is the key decision-maker. On the ground, at campus level, the respective heads of campus must ensure delivery. This may also include the head of campus to meet with lecturers to address any problems which arise where there is a recommendation to do so from the head of academic activities. The heads of study programmes indicated that they were aware of this responsibility and both students and staff gave examples of its implementation.

83. As discussed in paragraphs 40, 41 and 55, the inter-relationship between the different roles is not sufficiently clear, and the distribution of authority for educational and operational matters between those with academic roles and administrative roles can be confusing, and therefore potentially undermine improvement.

84. The Panel also noted that the Director has direct involvement with students and has a quarterly meeting with the students' representatives. Additionally, there are formal meetings with the leaders of the student groups in each branch with every year group. There was a clear commitment to being available to students, and a recognition that the structures in place should ensure that normally problems can be solved without recourse to the Director.
85. Each programme has a single study committee to support its provision at all campuses and the committee has representatives of each city, all lecturers, all students, and all social partners from the three locations. This is also the practice for the international business programme which is taught in two languages; there is one committee as it is one programme but there are two heads for the two different language instances. This approach represents good practice in ensuring equivalence of experience and the maintenance of academic standards for the programme, though it is provided in a number of different locations. It was also noted that student feedback and responses to it is shared at programme committee meetings and that survey results are shared internally to all students and staff via Google drive.
86. In describing the monitoring processes staff advised that there are monthly meetings with all heads of study programmes with the Director in which "indicators" are discussed. The Director also has "an annual review" meeting with every head of study programme. This was discussed in paragraph 58. The Panel learnt that SMK does not assign numerical/quantitative goals for each programme, as quality is understood to be more organic or represented by partner engagement in programmes, e.g. when social partners engage in study activities, career days, business cases, in institution wide projects, conferences, the defence panels for final theses, programme design and marketing campaigns for particular programmes. "Good" is also perceived as positive feedback from the shareholders. Other indicators of quality provided included the production of self-evaluation reports for programmes leading to their approval by SKVC.
87. Data is collected from each branch annually and depending on the particular item is aggregated or disaggregated for reporting internally or externally. Staff indicated that they conduct comparative benchmarking by looking at admission across all other Lithuanian higher education institutions. Research has also been conducted on fees. SMK indicated that the maximum and minimum student numbers are identified at the time of recruitment.
88. As indicated in paragraph 50 there is a need to have a more institutional approach to the storage and use of data collected, rather than merely relying on each process owner to manage their own data points exclusively. The Panel notes that the 2014 review also made a recommendation around data management. It is evident that the College has struggled to find an effective model to drive organisational approval to date. While accepting SMK's caution in establishing simplistic numerical indicators, the Panel nevertheless recommends institutional reflection on how data can be better used to drive improvement. The Panel recognises and supports SMK in its articulated weakness that there is insufficient use of digital tools to analyse data, and acknowledges the introduction of a new system from September 2022.
89. One specific area on which the Panel recommends SMK focus is the monitoring of drop-out. This consideration should involve a clear definition of drop-out, and a clear model to assign responsibility for students at risk, along with allocation of appropriate supports. Completion rates can be influenced by the level of educational attainment at entry, and a low entrance score frequently indicates a need for enhanced supports to ensure that the offering of a place is

undertaken in good faith, and that the student has a reasonable chance of success in their studies. In 2021/2022 67% of entrants to SMK had an entrance score of less than 4.3 which suggests that a significant number of students may be at risk of drop out or failure. The Panel noted that at the end of each semester, reports are made on the student achievement including attendance, and comparisons are made with previous years based on study fields and study programmes. Information was also provided in the SER stating that 60% of students graduate on time, and a table indicated a range of reasons that persons offered for dropping out. However, there was insufficient information on what happens in respect of students who do not attend or the supports provided. SMK has not investigated this well and as a consequence has a very limited understanding of what happens in respect of students who do not attend. A further area for future focus is graduate surveys which are not being distributed at all the time points specified, i.e., both every six and twelve months.

90. As indicated in paragraphs 54-57 staff, academic and non-academic are supported in through the allocation of funding for training opportunities and through a commitment to fair salaries. Needs identified through the annual reviews and various surveys are responded to, but as stated in paragraph 58 some improvements in formalisation and professionalisation of these activities is merited.

91. SMK has a student association which operates across all three branches. Online meeting platforms are provided. A positive example of student engagement across the institution was the operation of a first-year student camp to which students from the three branches came, including international students. Students indicated that they were able to access staff easily to discuss any issues and that documentation, such as application forms for scholarship or appeals were easily accessible on a Google Drive or Moodle, SMK's Virtual Learning Environment (VLE).

92. **In summary**, SMK is advancing along a positive journey in respect of quality assurance and quality enhancement. The Panel encourages the College to continue its progress and in particular to focus both on its model of monitoring and also the focus of monitoring. A more systematic approach on the check/act elements of the PDCA cycle when looking at the student journey will ensure that the College is more deeply aware of how students are experiencing their learning experience, and therefore a more thorough response to student needs or difficulties can be implemented. The data that will assist in decision-making needs to be better identified, collected and analysed systematically.

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

94. **Recommendations for the area**:

- SMK should review its monitoring and communication models to ensure that the academic community is fully aware of its obligations and of any weaknesses that require a response.
- SMK should continue on its path of evolving its quality system by putting a particular focus on their more systematic assessment to critically understand their effectiveness and impact; a shift to a clearer and more systematic process of monitoring or checking, may assist the College in better identifying areas for improvement.

- SMK should reflect as a whole institution on how data can be better used to drive improvement.
- SMK should take “drop out” as a particular focus in the monitoring.

3.3. Studies and Research (Art)

Studies and Research (Art) area is analysed in accordance with 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.

95. When considering SMK’s portfolio of study programmes and research, the Panel noted that the institutional focus has to date been on its practice-based bachelor qualifications, and that research activity has been underdeveloped. As stated in paragraph 22 SMK’s eighteen professional bachelor programmes are offered across the fields of Health Sciences, Law, Art, Computer Sciences, Social Science, and Business and Public Management. The degrees in Media and Video Creation and in International Business are only provided at the Vilnius campus. International Business is provided through the medium of Lithuanian and a separate parallel cohort undertakes the programme through the medium of English. Since the last Institutional Review, the College has introduced a degree in Nursing, which has been approved, has commenced but which has not yet had a cohort graduate. A further seven new study programmes have also been approved in the fields, Aesthetic Cosmetology; Fashion and Style Management; Restaurant and Hotel Business Management; International Trade and Customs Logistics; Computer Games and Animation; and Design. As indicated in paragraph 85 each programme has a single study committee to support its provision at all campuses. Assessment of students is the same across the campuses for the same programmes.

96. The institutional commitment to providing opportunities for professional education and societal development is articulated in its mission and this is embraced in the professional bachelor portfolio. It was noteworthy that all students spoke positively about the practice-based approach to education at SMK and they also valued very highly that many of the staff are or were practitioners in the fields in which they teach. This was a frequent theme across a variety of stakeholder meetings, including those with graduates – the graduates with whom the Panel met were persons who completed programmes in the last four years. Students also valued the fact that SMK has a large cohort of part-time lecturers who work in a variety of other Lithuanian higher education institutions, and that the students get great exposure to different ideas and approaches.

97. Students also viewed the work placement element of the programmes as a strength as well as the project-based approach to assessment. All programmes are assessed through a 50/50 combination of examination and continuous assessment, the latter of which includes work-based projects. Students expressed happiness with the in-class learning approach where they said they experienced a very practical approach where they had to engage in a lot of presentations, debates, and simulations.
98. Teachers advised that in addition to summative feedback, formative feedback is provided to students on their work. Moodle is used as a tool and comments are inserted online on assessments explaining why a grade is given. Grading criteria are provided at the same time as assignments are issued. All assignments are uploaded onto Moodle at the start of the year. Students also gave examples of having a class meeting after an exam where the lecturer explains what the general pattern in the group was and what are the things to do to improve.
99. Students indicated that guest lecturers from industry were a very positive feature of their programmes. They referred to the opportunities to spend time in a workplace as very attractive and that the students are sometimes offered employment with the organisation where they were on placement. Programmes are aligned to local and regional employer needs and all of the programme committees have employer representatives from each region in which SMK is based as stated previously. The Panel recognises that these are positive elements and that SMK has a strength in the practice-based, professional focus of the programmes it provides.
100. There is an average completion on time rate of 60% but looking at the figures by programme the rates are very variable, e.g. in financial accounting 100% graduate on time in 2019 and 76% in 2020; in creative and entertainment industries the graduation on time percentages between 2018 and 2022 were 48.9%, 37.2%, 60.2%, 44.85% and 76.27% respectively. The College also provided detailed information on the level of first years' entry qualifications. This information is also available on the national information portal. The practitioner focus of the SMK programmes is part of the College's 2030 strategy, as articulated in the goal around studies and research which states an aim to "develop formal education by creating a value chain of learning at different levels, based on experiential learning and knowledge of applied research". The Panel recommends that SMK ensures its future practices incorporate a way to systematically ensure teaching is research inspired.
101. The Panel also had a pedagogical discussion with teachers and students around the explicit articulation of programme learning outcomes and their assessment. Teachers did not seem to have an in-depth understanding of how student assessment should be directly mapped to learning outcomes which should align to the Bachelor level on the National Qualifications Framework. Considering these interrelated factors – assessment of learning outcomes explicitly mapped to Bachelor level on the National Framework; a focus on practical work and practical assessment; variable 'on time' completion rates, the Panel recommends that SMK provide additional training to staff on the constructive alignment of assessment to learning outcomes which are appropriately aligned to the National Qualifications Framework. It is important that learners are both supported to reach the intended programme outcomes and complete the programme; and are also given transparent opportunities to demonstrate that they have achieved Bachelor level learning in their discipline including in theoretical dimensions by the time they graduate. As a key dimension in the learning experience the Panel also recommends that the College reflects carefully on the workload associated with the programmes to ensure that credit

is accurately assigned and that a systematic approach to its assignment be developed. The study committee is the body where these considerations can be made in the first instance. It should be noted that the employer representatives with whom the Panel met indicated satisfaction with the graduates that they had taken on placement or into full-time employment, and that SMK was sensitive to local and regional needs, and the policy positions of the regions.

102. The group of recent graduates with whom the Panel met indicated their broad satisfaction with their learning experience at SMK. Each graduate was in employment related to their studies and they said that their studies were directly relevant to their work. Some of the group said that they also received invitations from SMK to speak to current students about their work and career. Participants in the graduate group stated that they would be happy to attend SMK in the future for any continuing professional development programmes if they were available.
103. As with the student group the graduates indicated that their experience during work placement experience, and the experience of undertaking projects as part of their final year studies which were related to the workplace were significant contributors to their employability.
104. The Panel discussed with staff the model in place in SMK for the recognition of prior experiential learning and also of international qualifications. The College staff were clear that those presenting qualifications from abroad need approval by SKVC, and international students also referred to providing documentation to enable recognition of their qualifications. There was clear understanding that applicants need to present details of their previous study plans with details on the programme's learning outcomes.
105. The College shared documentation that provided detail on how they consider applications from persons for exemption based on the recognition of prior experiential learning. The procedure requires prospective students to apply to the Studies Office and submit a portfolio which includes a job description and work activities undertaken. The Head of the Study Programme along with colleagues decides if it covers the same intended learning as on a portion of the programmes and credits are assigned accordingly. An interview to assess learning can also be conducted. Depending on the nature of the student's application, the College may require the person to demonstrate practical skills prior to the granting of an exemption. As stated in the SER during the last time period five persons used this process. The described process is equivalent to that in many higher education institutions and is a reasonable methodology to assess prior learning.
106. At time of the 2014 SKVC Institutional Review, SMK received a recommendation to strengthen the College's approach to research. There has been some progress in addressing the organisational challenges in this area, though there remains very significant work to be undertaken.
107. Students indicated that they were being encouraged to undertake some elements of applied research as part of their final year projects. Examples were given of preparing a research proposal for a final thesis and that a conference was also being organised by SMK where students will present their proposals to companies. They also indicated that they were going to write an article on the final year project. All programmes have a main project which includes a lot of company/business related engagement which provides students opportunities to practice with clients.

108. Both staff and students indicated that library resources are excellent, and that there are a variety of online libraries depending on one's field. Students receive induction on the library and how to access the online resources and indicated that they are encouraged to use the library. They also advised that they have access to other institutional libraries. Lecturers provide references for independent study and give links to online resources and encourage use of articles from the databases in assignments. Staff indicated that there is increased use of literature by students in their work and that teachers are now setting particular work for students in respect of undertaking literature reviews.
109. The library team received frequent praise from both students and staff during meetings at the site visit. There has been a deliberate decision to allocate additional resources to the library which has enabled the library to add to both its paper and online collections. Examples given included EBSCO, as well as peer reviewed Lithuanian journals, Baltic region journals and Polish journals.
110. In the period covered by the review the Panel observed there has been a very significant increase in publications attributed to SMK staff. Of the approximate 150 publications presented to the Panel by the College, which were published in a variety of locations, from peer reviewed journal to local bulletins, the vast majority were from 2021 and 2022. On exploration there was a clear and credible explanation for the improvement, and it represents the implementation of a SMK objective to improve the research profile of the institution and its staff. A formal decision embedded in the strategy has been to establish five scientific research groups and create a scientific culture and act on this. As part of the operationalisation of this strategy, every head of study programme meets with each lecturer and speaks about the options to join a research group – and what research opportunities there are.
111. Each of the five committees - health, sustainable development, technology, business, IT– is led by a PhD holder. The Head of Scientific Studies coordinates between the five groups. The overarching Research committee oversees the work of each potential scholar and meets twice a month to consider articles to be submitted for publication. Teachers who have ideas are encouraged to liaise with the committee and seek guidance and support to initiate a piece of research. Early-stage researchers are encouraged to submit papers for conferences as this is a good start for non-PhD researchers to engage in a research community. Those who are more advanced in their career are encouraged to choose as high-level journals as possible as they report to the scientific council. It is recognised that a research culture must be grown over a period of time.
112. The College has established a financial model to incentivise research and publications and depending on the ranking of the journal there is different financial recognition. The initiative applies to both part-time and full-time staff. It was noted that staff could part credit a number of employing institutions for research undertaken, and that part-time staff who work in a number of institutions were anxious to provide credit to SMK in recognition of the support they are given.
113. Targets for numbers of publications have been set for the College as whole and then they have been cascaded down by field and programme, but not to individual staff level. The Director has proposed three publications per programme per year. The head of the study programme could propose more, but equally if three is not feasible due to capacity that is acceptable. Each teacher was aware of the model and it was viewed positively as it provided

for a balance between flexibility and an incentivised target. This model may merit further reflection as the College develops its research capacity and profile. The Panel recommends that SMK should analyse the impact of the incentivisation to see whether it is adequate and appropriate to meet their research objectives. Additionally in order to grow a research culture the Panel recommends that establish specific research targets and systematise research expectations from staff members.

114. In meetings with the SMK research staff explained that as part of the encouragement and guidance to undertake research they meet with the head of branch and study programme manager on an individual basis. Researchers have complete freedom in the research they wish to pursue and liaise with the study committee lead who can give support and guidance. Programme leaders prompt target setting for each year, and the clear motivational financial system is a real incentive. Staff indicated that they are not pressurised to publish but stated that they know the SMK research strategy and the need to meet it. They stated they are motivated to fulfil the strategy but that there is also a personal benefit. Researchers indicated that they had supportive weekly meetings and that in addition workload was reduced to assist individuals to undertake research. Financial support for studies, conferences abroad, and training courses is available.
115. Developing applied research with social partners is initiated in the first instance by setting projects for final year students in their Bachelor thesis. Social partners share problems and projects for student proposals. On completion of projects faculty decide what can be published, and they act as supervisors during the project process. Both teachers and students offered examples of this arrangement.
116. The Panel noted a variety of conferences, consultancies and services provided by SMK which were listed in the SER, e.g. a seminar of Public Institution Rural Business and Markets Development Agency on Advertising national heritage and its presentation to the society in social networks; VIII international forum Advertising Matrix – 2019; EMA forum Inclusive economic growth: no one left behind!; National scientific seminar Visual social advertising: can it be effective?
117. These activities provide valid opportunities for both students and staff to apply their disciplinary knowledge to national or regional problems, or international challenges, and to publish results thereafter. Conscious development of these types of projects with social partners can be very fruitful learning opportunities for all involved and be an opportunity to develop depth and strength in particular applied research fields. Paragraph 137 in Impact on Regional and National Development describes a particular project for the Fire and Rescue Department. The approach taken by SMK could be a model for future applied research projects.
118. SMK is also conscious of its need to have a system to provide ethical review of research proposals for both students and staff. While there is a bioethical committee for the whole country that for example addresses research for nursing and other health sciences, the College is in the process of establishing a committee for the ethical approval for staff and student research in other fields.
119. The Panel noted the good work being undertaken. Whilst research is relatively low as it is in its infancy, it is a good beginning. In recent times there has been an increase in publications and some of the publications are based on developmental projects with the social partners. The

model for crediting one's institution with a publication was well understood. The Panel encourages SMK to continue in its work and recommends that researchers present more of their initial work externally in subject specialist forums rather than internal conferences and engage in more peer reviewed publications. It is suggested that a more formal structure or process be established to enhance consistency in the development of a research profile. The Panel further recommends that the College devise a more specific research strategy which is more carefully in line with the ambitions of the College, and that its approach to lifelong learning aligns with research development too.

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.

120. International development is conceived of broadly by SMK, and there is a post to manage internationalisation, Head of International, which is based in Klaipeda. As indicated in paragraphs 33 and 35 SMK has a model of vertical and horizontal priorities and internationalisation has been identified as a horizontal priority, requiring integration across all the activities of the College. Internationalisation has many dimensions, the horizontal elements are represented by curriculum and participation in international projects and exchanges, and the vertical through the direct recruitment of international students.
121. In order to internationalise the curriculum, there is a programme with a dedicated international focus - International Business which is available in two languages, all SMK students have the possibility to study a foreign language as an additional option. Additionally, students may undertake an optional module through the medium of English, such as Global Career Management. In total four programmes are provided through the medium of English. Students spoke positively of the opportunity to undertake English classes.
122. As part of its capacity building approach to engaging in international environments the College has established English language standards as part of the role requirements for all posts CEFR B2. For posts where the lecturer must also teach through the medium of English, there is a higher standard – CEFR C1.
123. SMK is an active participant in the Erasmus + programme with both staff and students undertaking mobility opportunities as well as participating in funded projects such as research and development funded projects such as Picture your Story or Sharpen. The Panel also noted that the College has been ambitious in its pursuit of EU funding and has been a partner in three Horizon funding applications, and the coordinator of a further one application, for a project Narratives on Migration. The Panel notes the focus of this project and the potential strengths the College can bring to it given the current geopolitical position of Lithuania, which has been the locus of both emigration and immigration.
124. The College has 87 signed Erasmus + partnership agreements, and during the period 2017/18 to 2021/2022, 222 students have undertaken either a study mobility or an Erasmus+ funded internship. Mobility occurred across ten study fields Business Studies; Tourism and Leisure;

Communication; Marketing; Software Engineering; Cosmetology; Management; Media Art; Finance; and Law. Some individual staff members also participated in training undertaken abroad under the Erasmus+ programme. The Panel recommends that there be a more focussed approach to international partnerships and targeted collaborations.

125. Students referred positively to mobility opportunities undertaken, for example in Greece, Poland, and Spain. Information about partnerships in place and potential semesters or years abroad was easily accessible, and students referred to the friendliness and approachability of the Erasmus + coordinator. The SER stated that outgoing students varied from 61 in 2017-2018 to 33 in 2021-2022.
126. SMK also has a dedicated international marketing department and a small but focussed approach to international recruitment focussing on recruitment from Nigeria; Uzbekistan; Georgia; Ghana; Cameroon; Brazil. The College works with agents; references are required directly from them, but also directly from another university directly. There is careful monitoring of dropout rates of students processed via agents to ensure good practice. Currently international students are only based at the Vilnius campus.
127. In meetings with the international students and support staff for them, it was evident that there is a strong commitment to integration and participation in student life across the College. Some of the international students have been asked to visit the Kaunas and Klaipeda campuses to speak about their country and culture. They spoke positively of the communications they receive(d) before and during their studies, and of their satisfaction in having chosen SMK. The Panel noted the College's ambition to grow the numbers of international students.
128. SMK suggested that having a campus abroad would be easier than enticing students to Lithuania and the Chancellor suggested that SMK could open branches in other countries. The Panel suggests that in advance of any such plans careful and comprehensive due diligence be undertaken.
129. International students indicated that they found integration easy and that they had very good communications with the international office. Accommodation was organised for students on arrival and all information is provided in English. Nevertheless, help with accommodation on an ongoing basis was identified as a need by international students. This need was also incorporated into the SWOT undertaken to assist in the strategy development and is reflected in the College's plans for the future. It was evident in discussions with both students and staff that internationalisation through the recruitment of international students and participation in Erasmus + exchanges is a focus of the College. Additionally, Strategy 2030 identifies the development of study programmes with foreign higher education institutions as a priority. All of these elements can be effective ways of creating a more international and diverse learning experience, but they are projects which require careful management and oversight.
130. **In summary**, SMK has a sustained history of providing practice-based programmes which are well received by students and employers alike. These programmes address local and regional needs and are sensitive to national and regional policy. Nevertheless, SMK needs to take care to ensure that the theoretical framework and associated NQF Bachelor standards are explicitly considered when designing and teaching programmes and that the credit allocation is more carefully aligned to workload. The work that the College is doing to strengthen its research profile at institutional and teacher level is appropriate for an institution at the very

early stages of research development, but it is important that there is a deepening understanding and appreciation of the impact of theory on practice. The work that SMK is undertaking around internationalisation, the recruitment of international students, the strengthening of language skills, the promotion of Erasmus+ both from mobility and project opportunities over time will assist in strengthening the programme provision and the research portfolio, but it requires greater focus.

131. **Judgment:** the area is meeting the minimum requirements, and there are drawbacks that must be addressed and is given 2 points.

132. **Recommendations for the area:**

- SMK should ensure that its future practices incorporate a way to systematically ensure teaching is research inspired.
- SMK should provide additional training to staff on the constructive alignment of assessment to learning outcomes which are appropriately aligned to the National Qualifications Framework.
- SMK should reflect carefully on the workload associated with the programmes to ensure that credit is accurately assigned and that a systematic approach to its assignment be developed
- SMK should analyse the impact of the incentivisation to see whether it is adequate and appropriate to meet their research objectives.
- SMK should establish specific research targets and systematise research expectations from staff members.
- SMK should support researchers to present more of their initial work externally in subject specialist forums rather than internal conferences and engage in more peer reviewed publications. It is suggested that a more formal structure or process be established to enhance consistency in the development of a research profile.
- SMK should devise a more specific research strategy which is more carefully in line with the ambitions of the College, and that its approach to lifelong learning aligns with research development too.
- SMK should have a more focussed approach to international partnerships and targeted collaborations.

3.4. Impact on Regional and National Development

Impact on Regional and National Development area is analysed in accordance with 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.

133. In the presentation of its self-evaluation SMK identified a very wide range of national and regional documents which it stated influenced its strategy and approach to education provision. The College listed texts at each level and stated which of its own actions or strategies address its measures (e.g. the 2021-2023 National Progress Plan, the Culture and Creativity Development Programme of the Ministry of Culture of the Republic of Lithuania, 2021–2030 Education Development Programme of the Ministry of Education, Science and Sport of the Republic of Lithuania and 2022-2030 Science Development Programme, the respective development and activity plans of Vilnius, Kaunas and Klaipėda. In conversations with social partners, it was affirmed that SMK was cognisant of and responsive to the local, regional, and national needs.
134. A key differentiator of SMK is its presence in all three key Lithuanian cities, and accordingly its engagement with the respective municipalities of Vilnius, Kaunas, and Klaipėda. At a high level, each area seeks socio-economic development and articulates a need for the provision of education and training courses. SMK's programmes such as International Business and Communication, International Trade and Customs Logistics, Finances and Investment Management, Transport and Logistics Business, Marketing and Advertising, Programming and Multimedia are directly relevant to the needs of each region. The College has also just commenced the provision of a nursing degree, which aims to address the shortage of nurses within Lithuania. The detail provided was very informative, even if it lacked depth of analysis.
135. Many examples of innovations and projects were shared with the Panel as mentioned in paragraph 123. SMK provided information on over two hundred contracts for services with local business and public bodies. As with the internationalisation strategy, the College is attempting to consider impact on and engagement with regional and national needs in both a horizontal and vertical model. However, a deeper assessment of impact is required as discussed in paragraph 142.
136. The Panel noted the particularly strong relationships and impact in the Klaipėda area acknowledging that SMK was founded in Klaipėda and has its deepest roots in this city. The campus location in the co-working centre, Light House, and its adjacency to the Baltic Digital Innovation Hub are positive opportunities for staff and students to develop relationships for projects, as well as work placements and graduate employment opportunities, which can benefit all parties. The additional business activities of the Chancellor also provide opportunities for synergies with SMK. For example, the Chancellor is on the Board of the Baltic Digital Innovation Hub and is an investor in the initiative. The Chancellor's diverse business and social interests provide a local network which the College leverages to establish effective partnerships.
137. One specific project which was particularly successful and offers insight into SMK's recent approach to social engagement relates to work with the Fire and Rescue Department under the Ministry of Interior. The College won a tender to undertake research and make a proposal On Choosing an Effective Fire Prevention Organisation Model, "the aims of which was to analyse the current fire prevention situation, identify the current fire prevention issues, propose modern solutions based on good practice to improve the current situation and propose a conceptual model for the fire prevention system". The recommendations of SMK have been implemented by the Department, and SMK researchers and students have been invited to present on this to various forums. The teaching staff are also working with students to prepare articles for

publication on this work. In this way an exercise can be seen to have an opportunity for integrated impact and could be used by SMK as a model for other contracts obtained.

138. The Panel recognises the volunteering culture that is also being promoted by SMK particularly in Klaipėda. In addition to specific initiatives, from student participation in the provision of soup kitchens to local community cemetery cleaning, SMK actively worked with the city on running Klaipėda – European Youth Capital 2021. SMK coordinated a team of two hundred volunteers for the event and students and stakeholders spoke positively of the experience.
139. Engagement in the Kaunas area is at a more nascent stage which is reasonable given that the campus there opened in 2018. Relationships in Vilnius are more advanced. An example of a recent tender won to provide seminars to 4,650 schoolchildren (“Vilnius Healthier”) also offers SMK to build relationships with schools and potential students. The Panel recommends that the College continues to broaden and deepen its relationships in Kaunas and Vilnius establishing partnerships in areas aligned to its study programme competencies.
140. SMK also provided information on its membership of seventeen national associations such as “Infobalt, the Lithuanian Biotechnology Association, Lithuanian Apparel and Textile Industry Association, Lithuanian Business Confederation, Lithuanian Hotel and Restaurant Association, Lithuanian Association of Customs Brokers, Lithuanian Marketing Association, etc.” which offer the College strong opportunities to keep abreast of national and regional needs and also seek to establish new partnerships.
141. As mentioned in paragraphs 96 and 99 SMK’s approach to education is very practice orientated and based on the model of the professional bachelor. In ensuring that the programmes are very practitioner focussed the College ensures that all programmes are undertaken in what they describe as a partnership model, i.e., there are social partners involved in all programmes. As stated elsewhere in this report this involves social partners being on all programme committees, social partners participating in guest lectures, the provision of work placements, participating on panels for the defence of bachelor theses, as well as participating in the governance bodies of the College. Very comprehensive information was provided to the panel listing each social partner, the type of partnership along with the contract number for each cooperation agreement, and also a short description of the importance of the cooperation. For example in the area of health, sport and wellness SMK has cooperation agreements with the following partners: Mykolas Marcinkevičius hospital; Gemma Health Centre; National Transplant Bureau Under the Ministry of Health; Vilkpėdė Hospital; Klaipėda City Care Home; Abromiškės Rehabilitation Hospital; Health Centre "Energetikas"; Lithuanian Electronic Sport Association; Žaliakalnis Clinic; Klaipėda City Athletics School; Klaipėda City Handball Club "Dragūnas"; Grožio evoliucija; The National Association of Medical Spa and Rehabilitation centers; InMedica; Lithuanian Biotechnology Association; Balsiai Family Medicine Centre; Baltupiai Family Medicine Centre; Kaunas Panemunė Social Care House; Vilnius City Mental Health Centre; Dotnuva Nursing Home; Vilnius University Hospital; Centric Care; SK Impeks Medical Diagnostic Centre; Klaipėda Hospital; Klaipėda Children's Home for Developmentally Impaired Babies; Vilkpėdė Hospital; Klaipėda Seamen's Hospital; Gargždai Social Service Centre; Šilutė Social Service Centre; Kaunas City Emergency Help Station; Klaipėda City Social Support Centre; Medikana Diagnostic and Treatment Centre.

142. In developing its relationships the panel recommends that SMK should induct its partners well on the academic dimensions of the programmes ensuring that there is awareness of the NQF levels and associated academic standards as well as the practise dimensions.

143. Staff proposed that they apply a partnership model on all programmes and that the relationships with and impact upon the region and country as a whole ripples out from the primary relationship established around each programme. During the site visit the Panel could see evidence of these relationships and how they could bring a variety of opportunities for both 'partners'. However, in the SER there was no deep analysis of how impact could be measured. The volume of information on the existence of relationships and high-level descriptions of their nature did not sufficiently evaluate impact. The Panel recommends that SMK undertake a more critical analysis of their social relationships in the future and identify factors which indicate meaningful impact.

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.

144. SMK also provided information in the SER and at the site visit on their work in the field of Lifelong Learning (LLL). The Panel noted that this information is also provided to the Ministry annually.

145. Like many higher education institutions across the world SMK experienced an unanticipated consequence of the Covid pandemic – a growth in online provision specifically in the context of short courses targeted as specific cohorts. During the pandemic SMK enhanced their physical infrastructure to enable more online and hybrid educational delivery. Teaching staff too developed additional skills to teach in this environment. These improvements provide the College with additional capacity to capitalise on opportunities to provide additional lifelong learning programmes. The Panel recommends that SMK explore this area more deeply and identify sectors they can support through the provision of lifelong learning.

146. As with the bachelor programmes feedback is collected on all short courses provided and SMK advised that this is used to inform future programme provision. During the site visit staff shared that they provided a course to the Lithuanian Employment Service. Arising from feedback from this cohort an additional programme was created specifically for the upskilling of IT specialists.

147. The College identified in its SWOT that it needs to strengthen its promotion and sale of LLL programmes and that it needs to better exploit opportunities that may arise through applied research projects or engagement with local partners. During the site visit meetings stakeholders advised that they would be interested in any LLL offerings SMK may have. This supports the recommendation made in paragraph 145. This is an underdeveloped area of the College's provision.

148. As mentioned in paragraph 140 SMK is a member of the Lithuanian Association of Customs Brokers. Through this engagement SMK developed a programme, “Persons Wishing to Provide Customs Brokerage Services on the Territory of the Republic of Lithuania” in collaboration with the association. This programme was also certified by the Customs Training Centre as appropriate continuing professional development for workers in this field. This is a good example of LLL developed and its certification may also provide SMK with a model for the future.

149. The Panel noted in particular the significant volume of LLL work undertaken to support teacher education. The College has provided a variety of programmes of continuing professional development for teachers which were very well received. This engagement led to SMK seeking and obtaining accreditation to provide education programmes for teachers which carry nationally recognised certification. This is a very good example of how an area of need can be responded to and built upon over time, creating a potential strength area for the College.

150. **In summary**, SMK has demonstrated a deep commitment, originating in its founding mission, to the provision of education and training directly responding to the needs and context of the country and the regions in which its campuses are based. It has many strong relationships, particularly in the Klaipeda area, and has demonstrated an ability to draw on potential synergies and opportunities that arise. Its engagement with Lifelong Learning has yet to be analysed deeply and is as yet underdeveloped across all three branches, though there is potential for growth in this area. There is also potential to deepen and broaden relationships and social partnerships in Vilnius and in Kaunas.

151. **Judgment:** the area is being developed systematically, without any major drawbacks and is given 3 points.

152. **Recommendations for the area:**

- SMK should continue to broaden and deepen its relationships in Kaunas and Vilnius establishing partnerships in areas aligned to its study programme competencies.
- SMK should induct its partners well on the academic dimensions of the programmes ensuring that there is awareness of the NQF levels and associated academic standards.
- SMK should undertake a more critical analysis of their social relationships in the future and identify factors which indicate meaningful impact.
- SMK should explore the area of lifelong learning more deeply and identify sectors they can support through programme provision.

153. **Good practice examples:**

- SMK sought and obtained accreditation to provide education programmes for teachers which carry nationally recognised certification. This is a **very good example** of how an area of need can be responded to and built upon over time, creating a potential strength area for the College.
- SMK’s programme, “Persons Wishing to Provide Customs Brokerage Services on the Territory of the Republic of Lithuania” was certified by the Customs Training Centre as appropriate continuing professional development for workers in this field and it is **good example** of LLL developed and its certification may also provide SMK with a model for the future.

IV. EXAMPLES OF GOOD PRACTICE

The Panel identifies the following examples of good practice in:

Management:

- The work that SMK has undertaken in establishing a confederation of private HEIs.

Impact on Regional and National development:

- SMK sought and obtained accreditation to provide education programmes for teachers which carry nationally recognised certification. This is a *very good example* of how an area of need can be responded to and built upon over time, creating a potential strength area for the College.
- SMK's programme, "Persons Wishing to Provide Customs Brokerage Services on the Territory of the Republic of Lithuania" was certified by the Customs Training Centre as appropriate continuing professional development for workers in this field and it is *good example* of LLL developed and its certification may also provide SMK with a model for the future.

V. RECOMMENDATIONS

The Panel's recommendations for further enhancement are:

Management:

- SMK should reflect on its strategic and action plans and ensure that the main priorities are more obvious and reflected in 'key' indicators rather than in detailed checklists
- SMK should focus on the 'check' and 'act' elements of the Deming cycle leading to the addition of more formal monitoring and review mechanisms, and better improvement actions.
- SMK should have a greater systematic approach in reporting and with a focus on the difference between past and present and focus on improvements, specifically establishing a formal structure around annual performance reviews in particular for mid-management and leadership.
- SMK should take care to ensure that persons making academic decisions are competent to do so and are appropriately designated as 'academic' or teaching staff.
- SMK should carefully follow the terms of reference or constitutions of the respective decision-making bodies to ensure that the relevant groups are appropriately represented.
- SMK should provide students with better information on and communication of the variety of Boards and Committees on which students can serve, and how the appointments are made.

- SMK should ensure that students are elected to governance and student representation positions by their peers.
- SMK should establish a separate risk register which is regularly monitored by the Director and her senior team and reported to the Shareholders periodically.
- SMK should develop a system so that there is a single integrated model of data based on clear definitions and dates, shared across the whole organisation and it is used in the annual review processes.
- SMK should provide the Heads of Study Programmes with specific receive support in undertaking recruitment. The management of human resource planning should be further professionalised and a HR specialist should be retained to support staff.
- SMK should establish a formal approach to individual professional development plans and goal setting.

Quality Assurance:

- SMK should review its monitoring and communication models to ensure that the academic community is fully aware of its obligations and of any weaknesses that require a response.
- SMK should continue on its path of evolving its quality system by putting a particular focus on their more systematic assessment to critically understand their effectiveness and impact; a shift to a clearer and more systematic process of monitoring or checking, may assist the College in better identifying areas for improvement.
- SMK should reflect as a whole institution on how data can be better used to drive improvement.
- SMK should take “drop out” as a particular focus is the monitoring.

Studies and Research (Art):

- SMK should ensure that its future practices incorporate a way to systematically ensure teaching is research inspired.
- SMK should provide additional training to staff on the constructive alignment of assessment to learning outcomes which are appropriately aligned to the National Qualifications Framework.
- SMK should reflect carefully on the workload associated with the programmes to ensure that credit is accurately assigned and that a systematic approach to its assignment be developed
- SMK should analyse the impact of the incentivisation to see whether it is adequate and appropriate to meet their research objectives.
- SMK should establish specific research targets and systematise research expectations from staff members.
- SMK should support researchers to present more of their initial work externally in subject specialist forums rather than internal conferences and engage in more peer reviewed publications. It is suggested that a more formal structure or process be established to enhance consistency in the development of a research profile.
- SMK should devise a more specific research strategy which is more carefully in line with the ambitions of the College, and that its approach to lifelong learning aligns with research development too.

- SMK should have a more focussed approach to international partnerships and targeted collaborations.

Impact on Regional and National Development:

- SMK should continue to broaden and deepen its relationships in Kaunas and Vilnius establishing partnerships in areas aligned to its study programme competencies.
- SMK should induct its partners well on the academic dimensions of the programmes ensuring that there is awareness of the NQF levels and associated academic standards.
- SMK should undertake a more critical analysis of their social relationships in the future and identify factors which indicate meaningful impact.
- SMK should explore the area of lifelong learning more deeply and identify sectors they can support through programme provision.

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