



CENTRE FOR QUALITY ASSESSMENT IN HIGHER EDUCATION

EVALUATION REPORT
STUDY FIELD of BUSINESS STUDIES
at “Socialinių mokslų kolegija (SMK)”

Expert panel:

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Study Field Data

Title of the study programme	<i>Transport and Logistics Business</i>	<i>International Trade and Customs Logistics</i>
State code	6531LX060	6531LX057
Type of studies	College studies	College studies
Cycle of studies	First cycle	First cycle
Mode of study and duration (in years)	Full-time (3 years), part-time (4 years)	Full-time (3 years), part-time (4 years)
Credit volume	180	180
Qualification degree and (or) professional qualification	Professional Bachelor of Business and Public Management	Professional Bachelor of Business and Public Management
Language of instruction	Lithuanian	Lithuanian
Minimum education required	Secondary education	Secondary education
Registration date of the study programme	25/11/2010	30/07/2015

Title of the study programme	<i>International Business and Communication</i>	<i>International Business</i>
State code	6531LX059	6531LX058
Type of studies	College studies	College studies
Cycle of studies	First cycle	First cycle
Mode of study and duration (in years)	Full-time (3 years), part-time (4 years)	Full-time (3 years), part-time (4 years)
Credit volume	180	180
Qualification degree and (or) professional qualification	Professional Bachelor of Business and Public Management	Professional Bachelor of Business and Public Management
Language of instruction	Lithuanian	Lithuanian, English
Minimum education required	Secondary education	Secondary education
Registration date of the study programme	15/02/2012	15/02/2016

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I. INTRODUCTION

1.1. BACKGROUND OF THE EVALUATION PROCESS

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

1.2. EXPERT PANEL

The expert panel was assigned according to the Experts Selection Procedure as approved by the Director of Centre for Quality Assessment in Higher Education on 31 December 2019 [Order No. V-149](#). The site visit to the HEI was conducted by the panel online on 29 April, 2022.

Prof. Dr. Eneken Titov (panel chairperson), *Professor of Management, Estonian Entrepreneurship University of Applied Sciences, Estonia;*

Prof. Dr. Joanna Ejdys, *Head of International Department of Logistics and Service Engineering, Faculty of Engineering Management, Bialystok University of Technology, Poland;*

Assoc. Prof. Dr. Rasa Balvočiūtė, *Associate Professor at the Department of Management and Communication, Faculty of Business and Technology, Šiauliai State University of Applied Sciences, Lithuania;*

Assoc. Prof. Dr. Tomi Solakivi, *Associate Professor of Supply Chain Management and Maritime Business, Department of Marketing and International Business, Turku School of Economics at the University of Turku, Finland;*

Mr. Mantas Jonauskis (social partner), *CEO at “ProBaltic Consulting”, Lithuania;*

Mr. Simonas Radzevičius (student representative), *3rd year student of the first cycle study programme “Economics” at Vytautas Magnus University, Lithuania.*

1.3. GENERAL INFORMATION

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

No.	Name of the document
1.	SMK_corrections of SER translation errors (21/04/2022)
2.	Additional information regarding the indicator 2.2. (Assessment of the Linkage between the Content of Studies and the Latest Achievements of Science, Art and Technologies)

1.4. BACKGROUND OF BUSINESS FIELD STUDIES AT SMK

“Socialinių mokslų kolegija” (hereafter – SMK, also the College) is the largest private higher education institution in Lithuania with approx. 4500 students in 2021/2022. The SMK has three locations in Lithuania – Klaipėda (since 1994, incl. main office), Vilnius (since 1999) and Kaunas (since 2018). SMK offers 18 bachelor’s applied study programmes in the fields of IT, arts, social sciences, health sciences, law, business and public management. Two study programmes are conducted in English (*Tourism and Recreation* and *International Business*) and 5 study programmes are offered for students to study in Lithuanian and English (*Transport and Logistics Business, Marketing and Ad Creation, Digital Communication, Video Creation and Media, Programming and Multimedia*). SMK has 5 departments (Business and Management, Finance, Law, Communication and Information Technology) uniting 144 lecturers for the development of the study programmes and applied research activities, as well as for the implementation of the provisions of lifelong learning programme.

There are 4 programmes in the field of Business Studies: Transport and Logistics Business, International Trade and Customs Logistics, International Business, International Business and Communication. In 2021/2022, approx. 1550 students are enrolled in study programmes of Business studies.

During the last external evaluation, the Business study field programmes were accredited followingly:

- Transport and Logistics Business. Last evaluation in 2014, accredited for a 6-year period (21 points out of 24).
- Law and Customs Logistics. Last evaluation 2015, accredited for a 6-year period (20 points out of 24).
- International Business – in 2016, the study programme was accredited by the order of the SKVC director. No external assessment of this study programme has been carried out.
- International Business and Communication. Last evaluation in 2014, accredited for a 3-year period (16 points out of 24).

II. GENERAL ASSESSMENT

Business studies study field and *first cycle* at “Socialinių mokslų kolegija” is given **positive** evaluation.

Study field and cycle assessment in points by evaluation areas

No.	Evaluation Area	Evaluation of an Area in points*
1.	Intended and achieved learning outcomes and curriculum	4
2.	Links between science (art) and studies	4
3.	Student admission and support	5
4.	Teaching and learning, student performance and graduate employment	4
5.	Teaching staff	4
6.	Learning facilities and resources	4
7.	Study quality management and public information	4
	Total:	29

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

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

3 (good) - the area is being developed systematically, without any fundamental shortcomings.

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

5 (excellent) - the area is evaluated exceptionally well in the national context and internationally.

III. STUDY FIELD ANALYSIS

3.1. INTENDED AND ACHIEVED LEARNING OUTCOMES AND CURRICULUM

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

3.1.1. Evaluation of the conformity of the aims and outcomes of the field and cycle study programmes to the needs of the society and/or the labour market

The College runs four modern Business field study programmes, namely, Transport and Logistics Business (state code 6531LX060), International Trade and Customs Logistics (state code 6531LX057), International Business and Communication (state code 6531LX059), and International Business (state code 6531LX058). The objectives and outcomes of all Business field study programmes conform to the needs of the society and the labour market. The Transport and Logistics Business study programme aims at meeting the needs of the international transport and logistics sector. The International Trade and Customs Logistics study programme targets the needs of business entities for customs knowledge, especially in the area of digitisation of customs' procedures. The International Business and Communication and International Business study programmes aim at more general business and communication competences emphasising international character of businesses. The learning outcomes and subjects are methodologically well elaborated, having an international character, and regularly updated based on systemic approach to observation of trends having the largest impact to the market needs, and, accordingly, study programmes. Rich partnerships with stakeholders are extensively used to act as a valuable source for the study programmes' improvement and practical approach fostered by the College.

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

The mission of the College is to serve society by providing it with smart human capital capable of generating new knowledge and innovations and comprehending the responsible commitment to take part in creating a progressive, sustainable and safe future of Europe.

The objectives of the programmes in Business Studies study field also relate to the strategic priorities of SMK for 2021–2025:

- Creation of a networked ecosystem of empirical learning (development of studies, lifelong learning, unleashing human potential, digitalization);
- Creation of a holistic society (infrastructure, sustainability);
- Creation and fostering of an ecosystem of knowledge and innovation (R&D, science, learning organisation);
- Open laboratory of social interactions (connections, networking, community, globality).

The study programmes aim at joint development of students' creative and critical thinking, which allows them to understand the importance of business development in the system of social norms, formulate academic tasks and conclusions, convey knowledge, find information sources, work independently and in a team, be able to reconcile opposite interests and provide compelling arguments founded on available data, communicate and collaborate with clients and professionals of the same and other fields.

The Business field study programmes are in accordance with the main focuses raised in the SMK's strategy. The importance of self development and gaining the soft skills among speciality oriented skills is seen in the aims and learning outcomes of the programmes.

Learning outcomes of the programmes meet the content oriented requirements of EQF level 6 and 1st cycle professional bachelor. Nevertheless, some concerns regarding the study programme level learning outcomes can be raised:

1. some learning outcomes do not form the one comprehensive entity, but consist of different sub-competences expressed in different levels of taxonomy (eg. *By communicating effectively in Lithuanian and foreign languages, will be able to converse constructively and cooperate with specialists in other fields, clients, business partners, apply national and international legal acts responsibly when conducting professional activities (TLB); Will be capable of a responsible and competent operation in the field of international trade, capable of providing logistics services, act as a representative and an intermediary in institutions, constantly assess own professional activity, knowledge and experience, lay out means for self-expression and self-development as well as develop own professionalism by operating in a changing international business environment (ITC). etc*)
2. overlapping of skills in different learning outcomes;
3. some study programme level learning outcomes (or part of learning outcomes) are too detailed and indicate the subject level competence (skill or knowledge) rather than integrated competences supported throughout the studies (eg. *Will be able to apply national legal acts, as well as legal acts of the European Community that regulate the declaration, carriage of goods, customs procedures and other actions approved by the customs, compliance with customs formalities while representing the legitimate interests of persons and entities (ITC); Will be able to manage the sales processes of transport and logistics services and provide proposals for introducing new services, ensuring the company's competitive advantage in the national and international market (TLB) etc*).

According to the SER and feedback from the interviews, the International Business study programme focuses on entrepreneurship skills and enablers. Unfortunately, this does not reflect in study programme outcomes or aims.

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

The volume of study subjects in credits and the consistency of the study organisation meet the requirements of the Law on Higher Education and Research of the Republic of Lithuania and the General Requirements for the Provision of Studies. It can be reasonably stated that study

subjects constituting study programmes allow achieving the intended learning outcomes at the required level and within the designated time. The volume of study programmes is optimal for obtaining a professional bachelor's degree.

The objectives, content and structure of study programmes in Business Studies also correspond to the objectives of the Bologna Process in creating the European Higher Education Area, documents and recommendations of higher education development in the European Union and legal documents of the Republic of Lithuania that regulate academic and professional requirements for business development.

Table: Business study field programme's compliance to general requirements for first cycle study programmes of college level

Criteria	Legal requirements	In the programmes
Scope of the programme in ECTS	180, 210 or 240 ECTS	180
ECTS for the study field	No less than 120 ECTS	152
ECTS for studies specified by College or optional studies	No more than 120 ECTS	28
ECTS for internship	No less than 30 ECTS	33
ECTS for final thesis (project)	No less than 9 ECTS	9
Practical training and other practice placements	No less than one third of the programme	35%
Contact hours	No less than 20 % of learning	53%

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

The specific skills and knowledge are well integrated with the soft-skills in the study programmes level learning outcomes. The same balance also reflects in the study methods (e.g. *discussions, debates, project work, case studies, evidence-based learning, argumentation, self-evaluation, evaluation of team members, role-play, situation analysis, problem-solving*), where equal attention is paid to the development of transferable skills like critical and analytical thinking as well as to the development of subject and specialty specific skills and knowledge.

Based on the interview with the teachers of those study programmes, they put students into the centre of the teaching/learning activity and base them in choosing appropriate study and assessment methods. Whether the learning outcomes base on the students' needs and expectations as well, then the consistency is ensured. Good communication with the other teachers of this field and students allows to constantly improve the teaching practice and to make sense of the achievement of learning outcomes of the programme and particular subject.

Although the assessment of the students' achievements meets the formal requirements and

procedure, the more innovative approach could be taken. Assessment methods can be (and are) also the study methods and can be used as a possibility to give more formative feedback for the students to support their development and achievement of intended outcomes. Less formative approach (test, exams, etc.) and more interactive and innovative methods (like cases, creative works, etc.) could be used for the assessment to support the achievement of integrated outcomes and aims even better and at a higher level.

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

All the courses in the study programmes support the achievement of intended learning outcomes and help students to achieve the competences needed in the labour market. The study programmes are comprehensive and the traditional structure of the programmes (general, speciality focused subjects and electives) supports the meaningful achievement of the learning outcomes and intended competences. Both full-time and part-time study plans meet the requirements for the students' workload and reflect the logical order of the courses. Internship learning outcomes and tasks allow students to embed knowledge and skills achieved during the courses.

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

Students of all four Business field study programmes have the opportunity to personalise their studies. For each year of study, students can choose optional subjects they want to study and which would best meet their professional expectations as future specialists. Students are given the opportunity to choose optional study subjects for interdisciplinary studies and the development of general competencies. Optional study subjects are planned to amount to 12 credits. Students also may choose study subjects from alternative subjects that are designed to deepen their knowledge of the field of study.

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

Document *Description of the Procedure for the Preparation, Defence and Storing of Final Theses* regulates the SMK's final theses organisation process from administrative side, while *Methodological Guidelines for Final Theses* describes the main requirements for the thesis itself and their assessment. Thesis preparation process is clearly described and roles of administrators, supervisors, reviewers and defence committees are understandable and reasonable.

The topics of the Final thesis are versatile and reflect the different interests of stakeholders, as well as the broad area of the business field.

Strengths and weaknesses of this evaluation area:

(1) Strengths:

1. The study programmes of the Business study field reflect the College's strategic aims and further development intentions.

2. Good variety of study methods where a good mix of specific and transferable skills is seen.
3. The topics of the Final thesis are versatile and reflect the different interests of stakeholders, as well as the broad area of the business field.

(2) Weaknesses:

1. Some study programme level learning outcomes are not worded and given sense to in programme level and according to the principles of the learning outcomes-based studies.
2. Assessment methods are too traditional and do not support the student-centric and modern study approach.

3.2. LINKS BETWEEN SCIENCE (ART) AND STUDIES

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

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

SMK has a strategic perspective on scientific activities, as research activities are planned for a period of 5 years, with annual checks in the annual plans. This is also underlined by the fact that the College has appointed a Head of Research activities. The strategic approach can also be seen in the setting up of research groups with predetermined research areas.

As part of their research and other professional competencies, teachers are expected to produce research publications, which is perceived as a way of improving the competences of the teachers, as the research is expected to be close to the contents of the subject they teach. In addition to research, the teachers are giving presentations in national and international conferences, as well as engaging in advisory activities.

The College has also organised an international conference (Societal Interactions: Rethinking Modern Issues) in 2021 with an international scientific board, which will be followed by a conference publication. Among 29 teachers of SMK, also the teachers of the business study field presented their research in the areas of Health and Wellness Empowerment; Creative Economy and Tourism; Business Trends and Legal Issues; Educational Trends for Human Development at this conference.

Applied research is also included in the study programmes through participation in projects, promoting events and business challenges which means that also the students of SMK are considered as part of the research community.

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

The content of all four Business field study programmes is systematically updated taking into account the latest scientific and technological achievements and development trends in management science. The SER contains good examples of incorporating the latest developments in science and technology into the curriculum. These examples include the

latest concepts such as Green Logistics, Circular Economy; SMK's teaching staff participation in the trainings and seminars organised by the social partners; doing practical tasks and project tasks; conducting applied research; using subscribed databases and the latest scientific literature; participating in external/guest lectures; using the latest information resources, software; SMK's participation in national associations; expanded cooperation of SMK in international associations. The research topics undertaken by students in projects and final theses concern contemporary concepts and new technologies.

During the online visit, teachers gave examples of how their subject areas were linked to the latest developments in science and technology. Examples included the knowledge of green logistics and the green economy; online communication and the use of digital tools and audiovisual storytelling. The students, during the online visit, also gave examples of modern technologies in the field of logistics, which they learned about during their studies (e.g. e-vehicles). The students confirmed that the knowledge gained at SMK is relevant today in their professional work, is up-to-date and in line with the latest trends. Students also indicated open lectures conducted by business representatives as a source of new and up-to-date knowledge about technologies and solutions. The examples indicated confirm that the SMK incorporates the latest developments in science and technology into its curriculum.

The plans to build a virtual reality lab and use virtual reality tools in the teaching process are also examples of continuous improvement and building links between content of the study programme and the latest technological solutions.

The indicated activities confirm the strong link of the study content to the latest developments in science, art and technology.

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

In addition to the final thesis work, the students are involved in applied research activities through the preparation of articles and participation in conferences. Students with a fitting topic are participating in applied research activities together with the teachers. Since 2021, SMK has been organising a scientific-practical conference for the students to present their research work. In addition to this, students are also encouraged to participate in scientific-practical conferences organised by other higher education institutions. The students are well integrated in scientific activities, as around 37% of them take part in scientific research.

Students are involved in many projects, but are not always motivated to engage in applied research, which could be done not only in the preparation of final theses but also in the study of individual study subjects as well as during internships. To this end, cooperation with the social partners should be strengthened, and opportunities should be found to analyse even small business problems.

Strengths and weaknesses of this evaluation area:

(1) Strengths:

1. Strong links of the study content to the latest developments in science, art and technology, and a wide range of activities to ensure these links.

2. Active engagement of the staff in research.
3. Scientific activities at the College are diverse and well coordinated.

(2) Weaknesses:

1. Students are involved in many projects, but are not always motivated to engage in applied research.
2. The College could be more focused on acquiring or updating subject knowledge in the field of study programmes (such as logistics, international business, etc.). This is important first and foremost for teachers, as well as students.

3.3. STUDENT ADMISSION AND SUPPORT

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

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

Student selection, admission criteria and admission process are suitable and public, as well as meet formal requirements. SMK also assesses applicant's motivation during motivational interviews for which the applicant is awarded additional points to the base of competition score. Additional points are also awarded for victories in Olympiads and competitions, as well as other specific achievements.

The admission procedure is published on the SMK website www.smk.lt, LAMA BPO website www.lamabpo.lt, the information publication "Kur stoti?" ("Where to study?") and in the informational resources published by SMK. Information on admission requirements for enrolling into offered study programmes is also presented in Study Exhibitions of Higher Education Institutions, Career Day events in Lithuanian secondary and vocational schools and gymnasiums, as well as other profession introduction events organised by different organisations or associations, etc.

Applicants are admitted only to non-state-funded (paid) study places as, since 2012, applicants to non-state higher education institutions no longer have the possibility to study in state-funded study places. During the years 2018–2020, applicants to Business field study programmes were being admitted at all three SMK's campuses (Klaipėda, Kaunas, and Vilnius). Admission ratio for one study place increased in all three SMK campuses, showing growing SKM competitiveness in the field.

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

The College has the document to describe and regulate the recognition of prior learning processes: Procedure of Recognition of Foreign Qualifications and Crediting Partial Studies. Study achievements obtained through non-formal education and informal learning at SMK are assessed based on the agreed procedures and meet the legal requirements.

During 2018-2021, there were 3 individuals at SMK who have used the Recognition of Non-Formal and Informally Acquired Competencies (1 student in the study programme *International Business and Communication* and 2 students in *Transport and Logistics Business*).

The recognition of the prior formal learning results is based on the *Description of the Procedure for Crediting Results of Partial Studies at SMK* (which describes the crediting principles of learning outcomes achieved by graduated, former or current students of higher education study programmes). Under these procedures, there are approx. 30 Business study field students whose learning outcomes are credited each academic year (30 in AY 2018-2019, 38 in AY 2019-2020, 31 in AY 2020-2021).

Recognition procedures are well established, parties are well informed about the procedure itself as well as criteria of recognition.

3.3.3. Evaluation of conditions for ensuring academic mobility of students

SMK creates all conditions for students to participate in international exchange programs by having foreign lecturers, organising joint activities with newly arrived Erasmus+ students studying at SMK. As students mentioned during the site visit, SMK creates an atmosphere of internationality.

Students' participation in mobility programs are conducted in accordance with the EU Erasmus+ exchange program in two ways: for studying and/or internships. All information about the Erasmus+ program, participation procedures, Erasmus+ partners by fields of study and by countries as well as SMK Erasmus+ coordinators is available on the smk.lt website in Lithuanian and in English.

During the academic year 2018–2019, there were 13 outgoing students in Business field study programmes, that is 23.5 percent of all SMK students who participated in mobility programs during that year (51 in total). During the academic year 2019–2020, there were 15 outgoing students (38.5 percent of all SMK students who participated in mobility (39 in total) that year. And during the academic year 2020–2021, there were 11 outgoing Business field students - 45.8 percent of all outgoing SMK students (24 in total) that year. As it is seen in percentages, Business study field students are actively engaged in mobility programs.

Seeking to improve the mobility of students going to study abroad, SMK organises Erasmus+ weeks where students communicate and do joint activities with newly arrived Erasmus+ students (e.g. Erasmus+ day at Kaunas SMK; Erasmus+ day at Klaipėda SMK; Things to See, Do and Taste in Lithuania; Understanding Lithuania and its people: “The Other Dream Team” movie screening, etc.).

Students who cannot study abroad due to personal reasons have an opportunity to attend lectures delivered by visiting teachers or online lectures. During the academic year 2020-2021, students had an opportunity to attend online lectures delivered by 20 lecturers from foreign universities. Moreover, as a part of promoting Erasmus+ studies, there is a subject “Global Career Awareness” (taught in English) integrated into the block of optional subjects. One of the goals of this subject is to encourage students to participate more actively in the exchange program. This study subject was chosen by 30% of Business field students during

the academic year 2020–2021.

Within the Business studies field, SMK offers the study programme of International Business in English, and as a result there was the following number of incoming students who came for full-time Business studies during the analysed period: 12 in the academic year 2018-2019, 11 in the academic year 2019-2020; and 10 in the academic year 2020-2021.

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

Academic, financial, social, psychological, and personal support provided to the students of this field is suitable, adequate and effective.

All information on the study system, the course of studies, means of informing and instructing students is provided to the students during the lectures of the Introductory Study Week.

There is a clear scholarship system. Talented students are also awarded prizes/scholarships by social partners or municipalities. The awards are given for exceptional and significant academic achievements in studies, scientific research and social activity. Each year SMK awards students for achievement of the outstanding learning results and exceptional results in applied sciences and arts. During each semester, the most advanced and active SMK students have an opportunity to receive tuition discounts. Not only the academic progress of the student is assessed, but also their participation in social, organisational, creative activities, various extra-curricular initiatives and projects, and the pursuit of athletic results. The students may also receive a reimbursement for the paid tuition fees from the State Studies Foundation. The State Studies Foundation reimbursed the tuition fees paid by the students with non-state-funded study places, who had completed one year of study with the best results.

At SMK, students are provided with psychological support as well. Students can consult with psychology teachers if they have a need. Information on psychological counselling is provided on the SMK website. Moreover, lectures/seminars on psychological topics (e.g. “Self-help following negative (post-traumatic) emotional experiences”; “Technology addiction”; “Psychology of positive habits”; “Sexual harassment: how it occurs, how to recognize and who to contact?” etc.) are also organised for SMK students. These open lectures/seminars were attended by 96 students of Business field studies from all cities.

SMK also has a mentoring program (peer-to-peer) aimed at helping first-year students to adapt and socialise in the new academic environment, to understand and adapt to changes, to comprehensively develop general competencies during the first year, and to improve academic and personal achievements.

3.3.5 Evaluation of the sufficiency of study information and student counselling

Study information and student counselling is excellent. SMK study departments are working to improve study quality which leads to keeping in close touch with the students. That way both sides benefit, since administration gets information about the study quality and students get relevant information and counselling.

Information for students on studies, the study programme, its changes, teaching staff and their consultations, SMK publications and socio-cultural events, as well as documents that regulate the study process, are all available on the SMK website www.smk.lt, and in the virtual e-learning environment “E-mokymas”. Schedules of studies and lectures are provided prior to the start of the semester in the “E-mokymas” system and the Unimetis software.

SMK is also currently developing a mobile app HeyApp which should help to get information for both sides even faster.

The survey results state that the teaching staff provide consultations during lectures and in the E-learning environment willingly and comprehensively, and that SMK administration always helps with study issues, etc. These feedback surveys are conducted during each semester, i.e. during both autumn and spring semesters. Moreover, qualitative meetings with each group of students are organised every semester, during which questions are asked not only about the content and quality of the study subjects but also about the sufficiency of the information on the organisation of the study process, clarity of processes, academic and other consultations. If certain questions related to lack of information or its clarity arise, they are promptly answered, explained and commented on during the meeting. After the meeting, the meeting reports are prepared, which are discussed during the joint meetings of the teaching staff.

Strengths and weaknesses of this evaluation area:

(1) Strengths:

1. The good atmosphere of internationality because of foreign students and lecturers.
2. Increasing admission ratio for one study place shows growing SMK competitiveness in the field.
3. Students are well informed about the studies and study organisation, the variety of communication channels supports the final target.
4. The College offers different support services for the students to cope better with their studies.

(2) Weaknesses:

Not identified.

3.4. TEACHING AND LEARNING, STUDENT PERFORMANCE AND GRADUATE EMPLOYMENT

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

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

The teaching and learning process carried out at SMK provides the possibility to take into account the needs of students and to enable them to achieve the intended learning outcomes (eg. in each study program, students can choose from 2 to 3 study subjects to study in English, cumulative assessment system, experiential learning methodology, virtual learning

environment etc).

It should be noted, however, that only 4 credits are awarded for the business study area traditional subjects such as Social Research Methodology, Human Resource Management, Business Process Management, International Trade, and International Business Law. These subjects are broad in scope and students are unlikely to acquire sufficient basic knowledge and skills.

The College is involved in many R&D activities, but the list of R&D activities lacks training, projects or other business events related to logistics, warehousing and transportation. Therefore, opportunities should be explored to involve students in R&D activities that are more closely related to the field of study in such a rapidly changing field as logistics, especially international logistics.

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

The College has put in place adequate technical, informational, financial and other study support tools for socially vulnerable groups and students with special needs.

By participating in the project “Increasing Access to Higher Education” the College has the opportunity to improve and adapt the information and physical environment. SMK acquired the following equipment: an alternative computer mouse Traxsys Roller II (3 units), a specialised desk; handicap table (2 units), adjustable slide-out keyboard tray, stationary desktop video magnifier Topaz XL HD 24, a mobile stairclimber with additional battery Liftkar PT Uni 130, text (screen) magnification software SuperNova Magnifier. Administrative staff and lecturers participated in training on the concept of disability and higher education based on human rights.

The SMK is in the process of redesigning its website to comply with WCAG 2.1 requirements (Web Content Accessibility Guidelines).

There are good conditions for studying for students with special needs, but more attention should be paid to socially vulnerable groups (single parents, low-income students or orphans). Such assistance was not highlighted in the report or stated during the visit.

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

The SMK has created a systematic process to monitor and support the students' study progress and all the necessary parties are involved in the process with the aim to give on-time and useful feedback for the students to improve their study efforts.

Main tools to support students are intermediate assessment tests, everyday monitoring of participation in lectures, consultations in different study issues etc. Those tools are used by the every teacher and additionally the students are supported by the administrative staff: study department are responsible for the administration of studies, study progress monitoring, student surveys, and monitoring of students' learning achievements; heads of the study programmes are responsible for planning and organising of studies, monthly meetings

with students on the quality of studies, and more comprehensive monitoring of study progress. As is appropriate for the modern HEI, the students themselves should be more encouraged to take responsibility for their study progress and results. Nurturing the students, especially international and/or working ones, is one of the main responsibilities of the HEI, but they should also be encouraged to take an initiative, find solutions, analyse their own coping and plan their activities/studies.

Systematic monitoring of students' study progress provides feedback, improves students' progress, promotes study motivation and continuous improvement. The aggregated results of the feedback surveys are used for self-evaluation of study programmes and improvement of the quality of studies.

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

The College is connected to the Career Management Information System which is tracking the employability and career of the students and graduates of Lithuanian higher education institutions. It also runs the Career Monitoring Programme for Graduates aimed at providing employability and career counselling activities for students, guiding the College towards improvement of the study programmes or developing new ones, as well as helping to improve the quality of studies.

The College maintains close relationships with the alumni, thereby having a close touch with realities of the market and labour demands. The association SMK Alumni Club, operating since 2014, makes Alumni part of the College life, especially through various events. Based on data provided in the SER and supplemented during the site visit, the graduates of the College value the outcomes of their studies, and are well received by the employers.

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

At SMK there is a document entitled Code of Academic Ethics, which is made public and regulates academic integrity, tolerance, and non-discrimination as an essential norm in the study process and forms universally accepted provisions in this regard.

SMK has indicated the following forms of activities increasing students' and teachers' knowledge in the field of integrity, tolerance and non-discrimination:

- student participation in various events that discuss ethics, non-discrimination;
- SMK teachers and administration representative participation in training/seminars in order to properly carry out and develop academic, scientific activities and research;
- SMK teachers participation in training organised by the Office of the Ombudsperson for Academic Ethics and Procedures of the Republic of Lithuania.

Examples of violations of the principles of integrity and academic honesty include: plagiarism, cheating during the assignment of the subject or part of it, falsification of results, assistance to others in performing an unfair academic act, offering or giving remuneration for academic services.

Students' final theses that are uploaded to the eLABa (repository of the Lithuanian Academic Electronic Library) are verified by the Electronic Plagiarism Recognition System EPAS (ESAS) (p. 47, SER).

Since 2017, SMK has been conducting research among students on academic honesty in the SMK. The systematised survey results show a tendency that students use written works of others less and less and they do not face a lack of tolerance during lectures. This is the result of the implementation of academic ethics culture into all levels of the SMK community as well as consistent work with the academic community, ongoing training, and discussions (SER, p. 47).

During the assessment period, 2 teachers applied for non-compliance with the academic honesty of students in the field of Business studies when preparing independent works. During the period 2018–2021, the Academic Ethics Commission considered 1 violation of the Code of Academic Ethics made by the members of the SMK community, and a disciplinary sanction was imposed.

During the site visit, students indicated that the policy of ethics and academic honesty refers to not cheating and not committing plagiarism.

To sum up, SMK has a clear policy of ensuring academic honesty, tolerance, and non-discrimination, and its procedures are clear, systematic, and focused on the prevention of academic dishonesty.

The documents regulating the code of ethics are available within the internal system on the Moodle platform. Taking into account the interests of all external stakeholders, it would be advisable to make the main documents relating to ethics and equal opportunities policy publicly available.

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

The procedure for appeals and complaints regarding the study process at SMK is formalised. The SMK document called *The Regulations of the Board of Appeal* (2018) regulates the procedure for the formation of the Board of Appeal, its work, as well as the submission and examination of appeals (p. 48, SER). The document states that appeals and complaints may be filed for procedural violations during examinations, for the final assessment of the achievements in a subject, for the final thesis defence procedures, admission results and/or admission rules. Procedure for submitting and examining the appeal is very clearly presented and described, responsibilities are well defined.

Based on information given in the SER (p. 48), in 2018-2021, the Board of Appeal received 1 complaint from a student of the field of Business studies regarding the final assessment of achievements in the subject of Social Research Methodology.

During the online site visit, students indicated that they know two ways to make comments and complaints about the teaching process. The first possibility is to have a discussion on the Moodle platform with the staff of the College administration, the second possibility is to meet with the managers of the study programme and to communicate complaints to them. At the

same time, students indicated that they had not heard of any major complaints about the teaching process.

Overall, SMK has a clear procedure for dealing with student complaints and appeals. The example described in the SER of reporting 1 complaint from a student and the action taken in this regard indicates that the procedure is effective and correct.

Strengths and weaknesses of this evaluation area:

(1) Strengths:

1. SMK has a clear policy of ensuring academic honesty, tolerance, and non-discrimination, and its procedures are clear, systematic, and focused on the prevention of academic dishonesty.
2. A clear procedure for dealing with student complaints and appeals. The example of a complaint indicated in the SER confirms that the procedure is effective.

(2) Weaknesses:

1. Basic subjects such as Social Research Methodology, Human Resource Management, Business Process Management, International Trade, International Business Law receive less credit than other advanced courses.

3.5. TEACHING STAFF

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

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

The teaching staff of the SMK fulfil the formal requirements as set out in the Law on Higher Education and Research and the Description of the General Requirements for the Provision of Studies. 36% of teachers in Klaipėda, 29% in Vilnius and 22% in Kaunas have a scientific degree. All teachers teaching in the field of Business studies have sufficient professional experience (at least 3 years) relevant to the subjects taught. They implement approximately 90% of the study programme scope in Klaipėda SMK, as well as in Vilnius SMK and Kaunas SMK. The teachers have diverse language skills, as 60 out of 79 teachers in the Business studies field speak English, 35 out of 79 – Russian, 10 out of 79 – German, and 2 out of 79 speak French.

The teacher-student ratio has been developing in an unfavourable direction, as the number of students per teacher has been increasing. While this might not be a problem at the moment, it might create a challenge in the future by limiting teaching methods to the ones that are suitable for larger groups.

3.5.2. Evaluation of conditions for ensuring teaching staff's academic mobility

International academic mobility of SMK teachers is well organised. There are formal support mechanisms provided by a project manager of the Department of International Relations. The

department assists in finding and coordinating mobility locations both for competence development and training as well as teaching exchange. In addition, the department provides advice on practical issues such as visas and travel and accommodation, lowering the bar for the staff to engage in academic mobility.

Erasmus+ program is used as an opportunity for SMK teachers to go to higher education institutions abroad. In 2018–2021, teachers in the field of business studies implemented 39 teaching and learning visits (teaching – 18, learning – 21) in 23 countries, in 29 partner institutions. To enrich the studies and support the collaboration and network internationally, also the incoming exchange is valued – in 2018-2021 in total 27 teachers from 8 institutions visited the SMK to give lectures for the business field students.

In addition to this, SMK has 94 international cooperation agreements with partner higher education institutions in 28 European countries (of which more than 25 partners implement business studies), which indicates that there are abundant possibilities for academic mobility also outside the Erasmus+ programme.

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

Based on information given in the SER (p. 53), opportunities for systematic development of SMK teachers' various competencies are provided. The SMK offers different training of general competence development and seminars of teaching/learning and research competences, which are focusing on the development of the necessary skills and knowledge needed for the quality of teaching. Due to the information given in SER (p.54) the 86 - 95% of the business field full-time teachers take part in such possibilities. The professional development is composed of the participation in courses, seminars and work placements, adoption of best practices from other Lithuanian and foreign higher education bodies, doctoral studies, etc.

Teachers are required to develop their subject-specific as well as their pedagogic or didactic competences, and their development is monitored with annual evaluation interviews. These interviews are also used as development discussions, where improvement areas and plans and priorities for the next year can be identified.

So it seems that SMK has a rather well-developed system for the competence development of their teaching staff, with a balanced approach to include teaching, research as well as general skills. Finally, SMK encourages their teachers to participate in doctoral studies, which is an indication that the College values also more theoretical skills in addition to competences related directly to the current curriculum.

Strengths and weaknesses of this evaluation area:

(1) Strengths:

1. Well-developed system for academic staff competences development.
2. International academic mobility is well-organised and with a good collaborative network.

(2) Weaknesses:

1. Based on the provided information the students are passive in taking responsibility of their studies and should be more actively involved and encouraged to take initiative and responsibility of their own studies.
2. If the teacher-student ratio is developing in the unfavourable direction, it might create a challenge in the future by limiting teaching methods to the ones that are suitable for larger groups.

3.6. LEARNING FACILITIES AND RESOURCES

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

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

The College's physical, informational, and financial resources of the field studies ensure an effective learning process. SMK possesses well equipped (with hardware and software) study facilities in Vilnius, Klaipėda and Kaunas, adapted to students with reduced mobility and hearing disabilities. Students have access to a variety of sources for research and study activities. Sufficient financial resources are allocated for investments into learning tools.

SMK Administration tries to take into account and respond to everyone who expresses a wish to live in the dormitory. SMK does not own a dormitory; however, by cooperating with other higher education institutions and vocational schools of the cities that do own their own dormitories, SMK is able to satisfy almost 99% of students' requests to stay in a dormitory.

The College is also currently developing a mobile app HeyApp which should help to get information for both sides (the College and students) even faster.

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

The College has a good system in tact to regularly monitor the needs of the teachers and students in terms of the upgrade of resources (e.g., literature, software, computer equipment etc). Based on the students and teachers suggestions/expectations, the Study Programme Committee makes the decisions to purchase or not. Although the parties can order the resources, then the future resource improvement plans could benefit from more focus on clear priorities leading to enrichment of the learning resources.

Strengths and weaknesses of this evaluation area:

(1) Strengths:

1. The College has at its disposal suitable and adequate physical, informational and financial resources for implementation of the Business field studies.

(2) Weaknesses:

1. The future resource improvement plans could benefit from more focus on clear priorities leading to enrichment of the learning resources.

3.7. STUDY QUALITY MANAGEMENT AND PUBLIC INFORMATION

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

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

The SMK quality assurance system is well documented and structured with well defined responsibilities. It is based on the involvement of the entire academic community including the social partners. The following units and positions at SMK are involved in quality assurance: Study Department, Project Manager, Student Representative Council, heads of the study programmes, Head of Academic Activities, The Study Programme Committees, SMK's social stakeholders. The responsibilities of individual units and people have been defined precisely and in detail.

During the online site visit, the teachers confirmed that they are familiar with the procedure for making changes to course content and the study programme. They confirmed that the dynamics of the environment, the development of science and technology, and new teaching methods are the basic rationale for changing the subject content. The procedure in their opinion is simple and allows teachers enough academic freedom.

The quality assurance system described in the self-evaluation report shows that SMK attaches great importance to ensuring the quality of teaching by involving all social partners in the assessment process. A clearly defined system and the structure of responsibilities ensure that the quality of teaching is continuously monitored and improved, based on feedback from students, teachers and social partners.

However, in the student surveys, it is not possible to assess a particular teacher/subject individually. The questionnaire is about the teaching process in general (as it was clarified in the students' interview during the meeting).

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

The College has a well functioning internal quality assurance system with effective formal and informal involvement of the stakeholders (social partners, teachers, students, graduates). It attaches great importance to ensuring the quality of study programme by involving all social partners in the assessment and evaluation process. Feedback from students, teachers and social partners forms the basis for ongoing corrective and improvement activities (eg. The teachers proposed to encourage students to use the latest scientific articles and now the scientific articles are included in the list of compulsory literature.)

The College is highly networked with market players and business associations. It is open for feedback from all stakeholders. The data provided in the SER and collected during the site visit show great value put on the inputs from the stakeholders, especially in the area of the supervision and improvement of the study programmes.

One important element of the process of “Evaluation and Improvement Processes and Outcomes” is the feedback from students, teachers, employers and other social partners and the implementation of this feedback is supported (e.g. a student-recommended subject (International Business Negotiations in English) was included into the curriculum).

The participation of employers in the defence of the final thesis is a good opportunity to point out proposals for changes relating to the educational process. SMK regularly organises round table discussions in which employers, social partners, alumni, lecturers, and students can participate.

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

The main channel and tool for Publication of Information on Evaluation and Improvement Processes include Moodle platform. In order to ensure the quality of the study process and to continuously improve it, occupational demand surveys, social stakeholder meetings, discussions, surveys, and joint projects are also carried out, and the results of the feedback are actively responded to by discussing them in meetings and by publicising them in the Moodle platform (E-learning environment) (p. 60, SER). The SMK also publishes aggregated reports presenting the results of evaluations of study programmes, process of teaching, etc.

It should be noticed that the aggregated results of evaluations and undertaken improvement activities are not published for external stakeholders on the SMK website but are discussed in regular meetings with different stakeholder groups: students, teachers and social partners.

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

Students are satisfied with studies at SMK, which is confirmed by the survey results (during the evaluation period, the general student satisfaction with studies range from 4.3 to 4.6 out of 5) as well as by the students’ answers given during the online site visit. Only one detail occurred which may need to be taken into attention - student friendly atmosphere (informal relationship with teachers and students) should be taken carefully, because sometimes it could go too far and can have some negative impact on the study quality.

Strengths and weaknesses of this evaluation area:

(1) Strengths:

1. SMK attaches great importance to ensuring the quality of teaching by involving all social partners in the assessment and evaluation process.
2. A clearly defined system and responsibility structure of quality assurance system ensures that the quality of study programmes is continuously monitored and improved, based on the feedback from students, teachers and social partners.
3. Feedback from students, teachers and social partners forms the basis for ongoing corrective and improvement activities.

(2) Weaknesses:

1. Lack of possibility to evaluate individual teachers and subjects within the quality assurance system and student survey system.

IV. RECOMMENDATIONS

Evaluation Area	Recommendations for the Evaluation Area (study cycle)
Intended and achieved learning outcomes and curriculum	<p>Study programme level learning outcomes could be revised and updated according to the principles of the learning outcomes-based studies.</p> <p>Study assessment methods should be diversified so that a more student-centric and modern study approach can be achieved.</p>
Links between science (art) and studies	<p>Cooperation with the social partners should be strengthened, and opportunities should be found to let students analyse even small business problems to involve and motivate more students in applied research.</p> <p>The College could be more focused on acquiring or updating subject knowledge in the field of study programmes (such as logistics, international business, etc.).</p>
Student admission and support	-
Teaching and learning, student performance and graduate employment	<p>Business study area traditional subjects such as Social Research Methodology, Human Resource Management, Business Process Management, International Trade, and International Business Law should receive sufficient credits to enable students to acquire basic knowledge and skills.</p> <p>Opportunities should be explored to involve students in R&D activities that are more closely related to the field of study in such a rapidly changing field as logistics, especially international logistics.</p> <p>Taking into account the interests of all external stakeholders, it would be advisable to make the main documents relating to ethics and equal opportunities policy publicly available.</p>
Teaching staff	<p>Keep a critical eye on the teacher-student ratio as it might create a challenge in the future by limiting teaching methods to the ones that are suitable for larger groups only.”</p> <p>Students are passive in taking responsibility for their studies and should be more actively involved and encouraged to take initiative and responsibility for their own studies.</p>

<p>Learning facilities and resources</p>	<p>The future resource improvement plans could benefit from more focus with clear priorities leading to enrichment of the learning resources.</p>
<p>Study quality management and public information</p>	<p>Although the quality assurance system currently is in place and allows for a general evaluation of the curricula and teaching conditions, then as a part of the curriculum evaluation, it would be advisable to implement a questionnaire for the evaluation of individual teachers and subjects.</p> <p>Aggregated results of evaluations and undertaken improvement activities could be made public on the SMK website.</p>

V. SUMMARY

SMK is a fast developing higher education institution, taking the leading role in business study area study developments. Business study field programmes not only meet the legal requirements but are truly focused on offering students-centric study environment and studies. The College's strategy also reflects the intention to be innovative and follow the trends in the economy and the world, and those intentions/directions are skillfully linked to the study programmes to allow students to be successful in the labour market also in the longer run. The study programmes of the Business field are diverse, express the strong links between study content to the latest developments in science and technology, and the teachers are motivated to develop their study areas and participate in different activities to get more competencies and bring the newest trends and knowledge directly into their study materials and studies.

It is worth noting that SMK pays attention to the motivation and well-being of their staff, highly emphasises their participation in research activities offering possibilities for academic mobility, participation in domestic and international conferences and trainings, publishing in their own journal as well as supporting the teachers and students collaboration to present their researches results in their own scientific and student conferences. The teachers consider resources and support for professional development, international mobility and research very good.

SMK has been successful in creating the study atmosphere and environment where the student-centric study approach is valued, but also the other parties of the ecosystem are paid attention, are highly valued and integrated to the everyday activities and quality management system. Social partners are involved in the assessment and evaluation processes, feedback from students, teachers and social partners forms the basis for ongoing corrective and improvements, good networking with market players and associations are just some examples. The SMK has enabled a high sense of international community, including alumni, which widens the parties horizons and gives all of them a bigger picture about the world outside.

To be even more successful, there are still some areas which need to be reviewed. A more comprehensive plan for the future developments concerning the learning and teaching resources could bring more innovation to the studies, and to meet the expectations and prior competences of the students, they need to use different digital platforms and software and to learn through those. Despite the quickly changing world and the fact that the equipment or software could become obsolete, there are still some investments needed to meet the changing needs of the students and the market.

Expert panel chairperson signature:

Prof. Dr. Eneken Titov