



CENTRE FOR QUALITY ASSESSMENT IN HIGHER EDUCATION

EVALUATION REPORT
STUDY FIELD of HUMAN GEOGRAPHY
at Klaipėda University

Expert panel:

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Study Field Data

| | | |
|--|-------------------------------|--|
| Title of the study programme | Geography | Human geography and application of geoinformation systems |
| State code | 6121JX066 | 6211JX091 |
| Type of studies | Bachelor | Masters |
| Cycle of studies | 1st Cycle | 2nd Cycle |
| Mode of study and duration (in years) | Full time sessional (4 years) | Full time evening 1.5 years |
| Credit volume | 240 | 90 |
| Qualification degree and (or) professional qualification | Bachelor of Social Science | Masters of Social Science |
| Language of instruction | Lithuanian | Lithuanian |
| Minimum education required | Secondary education | Bachelor's degree or Vocational Bachelors degree |
| Registration date of the study programme | 1997-05-19 | 1997-05-19 |

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I. INTRODUCTION

1.1. BACKGROUND OF THE EVALUATION PROCESS

The evaluations of study fields in Lithuanian Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) are based on the Procedure for the External Evaluation and Accreditation of Studies, Evaluation Areas and Indicators, approved by the Minister of Education, Science and Sport on 17 July 2019, Order No. V-835, and are carried out according to the procedure outlined in the Methodology of External Evaluation of Study Fields approved by the Director of the Centre for Quality Assessment in Higher Education (hereafter – SKVC) on 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 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 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 SKVC on 31 December 2019, [Order No. V-149](#). The site visit to the HEI was conducted by the expert panel on September 25, 2023.

Prof. dr. Sarah Nettleton (panel chairperson) University of York, UK.

Prof. dr. Tommi Inkinen, University of Turku, Finland.

Mr. Algimantas Ramonas, representative of social partners

Ms. Jurgita Novosiolova, students' representative.

1.3. GENERAL INFORMATION

The documentation submitted by the HEI follows the outline recommended by SKVC. Along with the SER 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. | Human Geography SER |
| 2. | Annex 1 Study plans 1st |
| 3. | Annex 2 Methods of studies and evaluation in study subjects in first and second cycle |
| 4. | Annex 3 Title of Final Works |

1.4. BACKGROUND OF HUMAN GEOGRAPHY FIELD STUDIES AT KLAIPĖDA UNIVERSITY

Klaipėda University (KU) was founded in 1991 and serves the Baltic Sea Region. Accordingly, it has developed specialisms in marine sciences and other geographical areas relevant to its location in Western Lithuania. KU is governed by an elected council of 9 members and Senate 35 members of which 7 are students. There are 3 Faculties: Social Sciences & Humanities, Marine Technology & Natural Sciences, and Health Sciences. Reduced from 7 faculties following the reorganisation of the organisational structure during 2018-19. BSc Geography and Masters Soc Sci Human Geography and Application of Geoinformation located in the Social Sciences & Humanities faculty.

Previous international evaluations of first and second cycle took place in December 2013 and May 2014 respectively – and were accredited for 6 years (see SER p.7). Since then the names of the programmes have been changed: 1st cycle Social Economic Geography & Regional Studies was changed to Geography (2020) and the 2nd cycle Human Geography was changed to Human Geography and Application of Geoinformation (2019).

II. GENERAL ASSESSMENT

The **first cycle** of the **Human Geography** study field at **Klaipėda University** is given a **positive** evaluation.

| 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 | 3 |
| 3. | Student admission and support | 4 |
| 4. | Teaching and learning, student performance and graduate employment | 4 |
| 5. | Teaching staff | 3 |
| 6. | Learning facilities and resources | 3 |
| 7. | Study quality management and public information | 3 |
| | Total: | 24 |

The **second cycle** of **Human Geography** study field at **Klaipėda University** is given a **positive** evaluation.

| 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 | 3 |
| 3. | Student admission and support | 4 |
| 4. | Teaching and learning, student performance and graduate employment | 4 |
| 5. | Teaching staff | 3 |
| 6. | Learning facilities and resources | 3 |
| 7. | Study quality management and public information | 3 |
| | Total: | 24 |

*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. AIMS, LEARNING OUTCOMES, AND CURRICULUM

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

The aims and outcomes for 1st and 2nd cycle HG are clearly set out in the SER (pages 9-11). Lithuanian social and labour market needs pertain to a growing demand for geography teachers, territorial and regional socio-economic developments in tourism, logistics, transport, sustainability, economical systems and environmental issues. The labour markets for these are located in public, private sectors e.g. welfare, education, planning departments, regional development agencies, national parks, travel agencies, transport and logistics companies, etc. The SER reports that there is a need for individuals who can work to understand, analyse the global socio-economic issues, maritime economies etc.

The 1st cycle Bachelors is the only one in Lithuania which specialises in Baltic regional geography, having fundamental and interdisciplinary knowledge of HG, general and physical geography and pedagogy, and GIS – and this is a unique selling point (SER page 38).

The 2nd cycle Masters is the only one in Lithuania which specialises in Baltic regional geography (Human Geography focused) and application of GIS in social and regional research and development projects – and this is a unique selling point (SER page 38).

The market requires not only professional geography experts, but also a person who can independently operate modern tools, including GIS tools, databases and hardware. The information provided by the SER (page 6-8) confirms that the use of the tools is significantly integrated into the learning process, responding to the fact of intensive digitalisation of the science of geography, and that this is ensured by the presence of teaching practitioners. The experts draw attention to the fact that the application of training in geographic information systems (GIS) technology in social research is crucial for preparing human geographers – GIS specialists for the labour market.

The first cycle SP prepares graduates to work in fields core the Lithuanian social and geographical needs and accordingly the learning aims and outcomes documented in the SER focus on specialist knowledge and its application of HG, GIS, societal change, research skills, ability to use specialist equipment and data and train in social and personal abilities (SER p. 9-10). There is a strong focus on training students to be teachers.

The second cycle SP seeks to prepare graduates to work in fields core to the Lithuanian social and geographical needs and accordingly the learning aims and outcomes documented in the SER focus on, in addition to those in the first cycle, spatial issues in Lithuania and the Baltic Region and Europe, advanced understanding and application of GIS, theoretical grasp of spatial, management, planning and socio-economic changes, and to work independently. The learning aims and outcomes are clearly set out in the SER (page 11).

During the visit, it was noted that the University staff and lecturers cooperate closely with social partners and potential employers, involving them in analysing labour market needs (SER page 63: annual meetings and discussions, surveys), updating the content of programmes, and supplementing them with subject material and tools needed by the labour market. The most intensive cooperation is with local authorities. ~~The expert panel did not have the opportunity to meet with private business employers.~~ **The expert panel did not have the opportunity to meet**

with many private business employers, only one private business employer (Director of Enterprise of Creative Industries ‘Kintai Arts’) was present at the meeting.

Expert panel took into account that the article “Adaptability of Human Geography Study Program Alumni Competencies in the Job Market” was prepared and published in 2021 and it analyses alumni competences of the Master's study program in Human Geography and compares them to job market demands. Project management and GIS competences were highlighted as the most important competences in the categories, as well as good preparation for practical work. These competences were also confirmed during the visit by social partners and alumni. The social partners stated that the students who graduated from the programme have a broad education, the ability to integrate information from different sources and are therefore good project managers, also they are prepared to do strategic planning and analyse societal processes using spatial analytics, GIS methods, use data and make data-driven decisions. The University is making efforts to understand labour market needs and students' labour market readiness in a methodical and measured way.

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

KU's mission statement is cited in the SER (p11) and it is notable that it focuses on the sustainable, social, cultural, economic advancement “of the region”. Serving the needs of the locality is core to KU's mission. It also seeks to produce creative people and foster community wellbeing. This maps on to the programme outcomes of the first cycle and the second cycle. Both of which specify research and analytic skills, knowledge of geographical theories and social change, ability to creatively identify new problems and work to find solutions, deploy qual and quant research methods, use geo-informational mapping, statistical modelling, communicate effectively both orally and in writing. Both 1st and 2nd cycle study programmes are developed in accordance with the Descriptor of the Field of Study of Human Geography and KU Regulations on Studies which are regularly reviewed.

The expert panel were perused that the first and second cycle study programmes are well-aligned with the KU's mission, objectives of activities, and strategic priorities, as outlined in the SER (p. 11-12). This is formalised as KU's mission statement emphasises its role as a key institution for the sustainable social, cultural, and economic advancement of the region. Both programmes contribute to this mission by focusing on the education of students who possess an academic understanding of Human Geography and in particular, interactions in space and time. The programmes emphasise the spatial differentiation of social phenomena in the Baltic Sea region and Europe, enabling students to understand and contribute to the well-being of the region through their research and expertise.

Strategic priorities at KU, such as "creative people," "value for the region," and "community well-being," are directly addressed by the field and cycle study programmes. The programs aim to improve the synergy and quality of research and studies, aligning with the priority of nurturing creative individuals. They also focus on creating value for the region through open scientific knowledge, digitization, and the application of geographic information systems (GIS) technologies, which contribute to regional development and strengthen the identity and attractiveness of the region's population. Additionally, the programs encourage community involvement and interdisciplinary activities, fostering individual and collective progress.

From the documentation and discussion during the interviews throughout the site visit, the expert panel were convinced that the key program outcomes outlined for both the 1st and 2nd cycle study programmes demonstrate a clear commitment to the creation of value for the region. These outcomes encompass skills and knowledge related to societal changes, spatial analysis, decision-

making on resource use, geoinformation technologies, civic engagement, and critical analysis of social phenomena. These competencies are essential for students to contribute effectively to the well-being and sustainable development of their region, aligning with KU's strategic priorities.

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

As set out in the SER (p13) the 1st and 2nd cycle programmes are regulated by the Descriptor of the Field of Study of Physical and Human Geography which was approved by the Republic of Lithuania Minister of Education, Science, and Sport (2015) with an updated Descriptor in May 2022. Descriptors of the Field of Study of Human Geography were drafted by expert geographers from the Republic of Lithuania. The learning outcomes, the ECTS, the subjects (topics) taught in the programmes map on to the requirements set out in these Descriptors.

There is a good and verifiable commitment to compliance with legal requirements in both the 1st and 2nd cycles. The curricula for the 1st cycle study programme in Geography and the 2nd cycle study programme in Human Geography and Application of Geoinformation have been developed in strict accordance with the requirements outlined in the Descriptor of the Field of Study of Human Geography and KU Regulations on Studies. These regulations are subject to periodic review and approval by the KU Senate, ensuring that the study programmes consistently meet legal standards.

Table No. 1. Human geography study programmes' compliance to general requirements for first cycle study programmes (bachelor)

| Criteria | General* legal requirements | In the Programmes |
|--|-------------------------------|-------------------|
| Scope of the programme in ECTS | 180, 210 or 240 ECTS | 240 ECTS |
| ECTS for the study field | No less than 120 ECTS | 192 / 132* ECTS |
| ECTS for studies specified by University or optional studies | No more than 120 ECTS | 18 / 78* ECTS |
| ECTS for internship | No less than 15 ECTS | 15 / 15* ECTS |
| ECTS for final thesis (project) | No less than 15 ECTS | 15 ECTS |
| Contact hours | No less than 20 % of learning | approx. 61% |
| Individual learning | No less than 30 % of learning | approx. 39% |

*option with selective module of pedagogy studies of 60 ECTS

Table No. 2. Human geography study programmes' compliance to general requirements for second cycle study programmes (master)

| Criteria | General* legal requirements | In the Programmes |
|--|-------------------------------|-------------------|
| Scope of the programme in ECTS | 90 or 120 ECTS | 90 ECTS |
| ECTS for the study field | No less than 60 ECTS | 60 ECTS |
| ECTS for studies specified by University or optional studies | No more than 30 ECTS | 0 |
| ECTS for final thesis (project) | No less than 30 ECTS | 30 ECTS |
| Contact hours | No less than 10 % of learning | 40% |
| Individual learning | No less than 50 % of learning | 60% |

In terms of credit structure, the 1st cycle study programme comprises 240 ECTS credits, including specific allocations for general university subjects, field of study subjects, practices, final thesis, and other subjects such as pedagogical studies. This credit allocation aligns with legal requirements, ensuring that students receive a well-rounded education. Additionally, the 2nd cycle study programme consists of 90 ECTS credits, which includes field of study subjects and a Master's final thesis, adhering to the prescribed credit distribution mandated by the Descriptor of Study Field of Human Geography.

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

In 2010 KU established an Academic Information System which collects information on the implemented study programmes e.g. results etc and course descriptors. Methods of assessment for each cycle are clearly laid in detail in Annex 2 with a Table for each cycle – subject title, study methods and evaluation method. This detail provided the expert panel with information as to how assessment methods map on to each topic.

The first cycle has a mix of assessment methods: report writing, exams, essays, and literature reviews. While all modules are assessed in part by exam they are also assessed in other ways. For example, 'Reporting for Practice' assignments are used in many modules, group work, oral presentations, and colloquium were also listed as modes of assessment. Not all modules assess work using the same method and the expert panel are of the view that this encourages a diversity of skills from the students by which are variously assessed skills across the programme.

The second cycle also has a mix of methods report writing, exams, essays, literature reviews etc but in addition has more examples of group work, problem-based tasks. Social statistics is assessed using a problem based task using appropriate software. Health Geography includes an assignment where students submit video recorded material.

The expert panel were assured that the assessment methods capture the aims and learning objectives of the programmes. During interviews with staff and students from first and second cycle programmes the panel were told about examples of good practice where staff support students in practical problem based learning and tasks.

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

Both study cycles 1 and 2 provide an extensive list of modules and contents in order to prepare students with the skills and tools that are necessary competences for all geography graduates. SER lines 44-52 list a long detailed account on the course contents and study goals/learning outcomes. The totality of the offered courses is extensive and well encompassing. In methodological terms all relevant basics of qualitative and quantitative tools are detailed in the SER (45-46).

The 1st cycle study programme focuses on core knowledge and research and analytic skills which are foundational competencies of Human Geography. For example the first year modules cover Cartography and Topography, the essentials of GIS, geospheres and natural processes and Social Economic Geography. They then move on to global social economic geography, and regional studies and regional research, demography. Field trips ground the training in the first cycle. Building on these foundations, training and assessment seeks to ensure students are competent in understanding biogeography and the use of topographic maps, GPS equipment, sonar, and the planning and conducting through practical training. Field trips throughout Lithuania are used to train competence and application of Physical Geography of Lithuania e.g. Evolution of Geographical Discoveries and Ideas. By semester 4 horizons are expanded through core courses such as the World's Social Economic Geography (Europe and North America), and Ethnogeography is intended to diversify the study process. Professional competencies are developed in for example Professional Ethics and Document Management, Tourism and Leisure Geography and Landscape Management, and particular to KU are courses on Oceans and Maritime Transport. Modules in Research Methods are bespoke and are designed to support the Bachelor's students Final Thesis.

The second cycle programme comprises specialty courses such as Theory and Methodology of Human Geography, Spatial Statistics, Geography of the European Union, and World Economy and International Relations. Regional uniqueness is achieved through a course on the Preparation of Regional Development Projects. Subsequently courses taught in Qualitative Research Methods in Human Geography, Urbanisation and Urban Geography/Environmental and Societal Process Modelling with GIS, Geography of Recreation and Tourism, Geography of Maritime Economy, and the Geography of Health. In the final semester students independently work on their Master's thesis. Throughout field trips, meetings with local organisations, guest lecturers etc enhance the studies.

The expert panel were impressed by the range of modules and especially how the second cycle programme had been expanded since the previous evaluation to include more research methods both in GIS and qualitative research methods.

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

Opportunities to personalise the structure and content of field study are encouraged and regulated by KU Study Regulations. Students are required to prepare an individualised study plan. They can opt to take electives outside their programme and also language studies. Within the Conexus project, 1st cycle study programme students also have the opportunity to additionally study some of the modules in English.

The main evidence provided on the scope for individual students to modify their studies is set out in the SER line 56 (p. 21). It states that the process follows general KU study regulations and rector's orders in semester-based documentation. The document indicates that: "The following opportunities for the individualisation of studies are offered: development of an individual study plan, when about 9 percent of the ECTS credits in the study programme are chosen by students themselves (through electives), or they can take more (fewer) courses in one semester, for example, to study English, Swedish, Russian, or Norwegian languages. In the 1st cycle study programme, students can choose parallel studies of a pedagogical module (according to KU Study Regulations, a course of parallel studies is formed from the 3rd semester onward for a group of at least 8 students)."

The 1st cycle personalisation is described adequately. However, there is no explicit information regarding the 2nd cycle options and the interviews did not bring clear additional information on this topic. It is suggested in the future that also 2nd cycle options are detailed in the management documentation (or similar).

Bachelors students are given the option to study for an elective module of pedagogy studies 60 ECTS credits which leads to the qualification of Bachelor of Social Sciences and the pedagogical qualification, which allows the graduate to work as a teacher of geography (SER pp7-8). During the interviews the expert panel heard that due to limited resources this is a cohort decision such that all students have to take the pedagogical studies if the majority of students opt to do it. Consequently, some students' choices are overruled. The panel is of the view that this limits students choices and should be reviewed.

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

Field cycle requirements for final theses for both undergraduate and postgraduate students are set out in the SER (pp21-22). Procedures are found in the General Requirements for KU Students' Independent Papers, approved by the Senate Resolution No 11-35 2020. The principles of the Final

Theses' Defence Committee are also regulated by the KU Study Regulations (2018). The Dean of the Faculty approves topics and allocated academic supervisors on the recommendation of the Head of the Centre. Supervisors must hold a research degree.

The Bachelor's Final Thesis Defence Committee must comprise a chairperson of the Committee and two members (teachers of the programme). The Master's Final Thesis Defence Committee a chairperson and four members (teachers of the programme, social partners, or professional practitioners. Criteria of assessment include: the relevance of the problems, aim, objectives, the reliability of and validity of the research methods and results, novelty of conclusions and recommendations and theoretical and practical significance.

A Bachelor's thesis is expected to be approximately 40 to 45 pages, but can extend to 50 pages with additional graphical elements. Master's theses are expected to be around 70 to 80 pages, but can reach up to 90 pages when including high-quality maps, geoinformation data, and extensive critical analysis.

A Master's thesis should encompass a comprehensive literature review, critical analysis, and in-depth exploration of geospatial data, including the use of high-quality maps. These principles ensure that the theses in the field of study maintain a consistent and rigorous structure, meet academic standards, and provide a comprehensive and well-documented exploration of the research topics.

Theses topics and titles are shaped by input from social partners (see list of topics for both first and second cycle thesis in the SER pp 22-23 para 65). Students also represent their conclusions and recommendations to municipal specialties and communities. The topics and contents of the theses are typical for both cycles. Bachelor theses are more practical and their theoretical foundations lighter than in the case of 2nd cycle Masters theses. The SER included information about 15 BSc and 12 MSc theses. Location wise almost all of them are focused on the city of Klaipeda or the immediate surrounding region.

To summarise, the topics, contents, and theses process comply with the study field and cycle requirements.

Strengths and weaknesses of this evaluation area

Strengths

The evaluation panel sees a clear alignment with market needs. The SER provides a thorough evaluation of how the field and cycle study programs align with the needs of the society and labour market in Lithuania. It identifies specific areas of demand such as geography teachers, territorial and regional socio-economic development, GIS specialists, and more.

The second strength is the goal of emphasising modern tools and the importance of equipping students with skills involving GIS technology, databases, and hardware, which are crucial in today's digitalized world. The SER recognizes the integration of these tools into the curriculum. Finally, SER shows a strong commitment to adhering to legal requirements and regulations in terms of program structure and content. This impression was supported by the management interviews of the Faculty. University staff and lecturers cooperate closely with social partners and potential employers, involving them in analysing labour market needs.

Weaknesses

The evaluation panel recognised some lack of Information on Second Cycle Personalization. The document provides detailed information about personalization opportunities for the first cycle but lacks explicit information about personalization options for the second cycle. This could be seen as a gap in the evaluation.

Bachelors students have to select whether or not to opt for the pedagogy, teacher training module on a group basis. This means that while the majority have their preferences honoured, those who do not want to pursue the teaching route have no choice. Consequently, some students' choices are overruled. The panel is of the view that this limits students choices and should be reviewed.

The second point is about rather limited geographic focus: The majority of final theses mentioned in the document appear to be focused on the city of Klaipeda and its surrounding region. While regional and focus is essential, a broader geographical range of topics may enrich the students' learning experiences.

Recommendations

The expert panel recommends that the Bachelor's programme be reviewed to ensure that all students are able to either opt in or opt out of the pedagogical elective and route. Currently this limits the scope for personalisation.

3.2. LINKS BETWEEN SCIENCE (ART) AND STUDIES

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

KU 's research strategy 2020-2030 has 3 themes: marine and coastal environment, resources, and clean technologies; health and technology; and social, economic, and cultural development of the region. Within this it drives research into areas not replicated elsewhere in Lithuania and are areas germane to human geography. These include, for example, “marine environmental studies, maritime transport technology and engineering, hydrology and oceanography, maritime economics, history of Klaipėda Region, East Prussia, and Samogitia in the context of the Baltic Sea Region, archaeology of the Baltic Sea Region and underwater archaeology, languages and cultures, landscape architecture, management of port technologies, port structures, and cultural landscape of the seaside” (SER p.24).

KU hosts a ‘Centre for Social Geography and Regional Studies’ where work clusters around the theme: “Societies and Cultures on the Baltic Coast” which aims to explore social and cultural phenomena in the Baltic coastal areas.

Human Geography research at KU is locality specific for example in the region it focuses on urbanisation processes in the post-Soviet settings, deindustrialisation and transformation of spaces, how transport systems, sustainable mobility, migration, demographic change, spatial segregation, and the symbolic and social transformation of the maritime sector in the context of globalisation and so on.

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

The Centre for Monitoring Analysis of Science and Studies (MOSTA) undertook a comparative expert assessment of research and experimental development (2013-2017) and reported in 2018. The field of human geography was evaluated in the category of sociological sciences see “Lithuania: Comparative Expert Assessment of R&D Activity” 2018. Social Sciences (strata.gov.lt). Feedback was to encourage more research outputs to be published in higher ranking journals and to work to secure more research funding to support projects.

The University is strengthening its technical base and updating its software, and staff are attending conferences and improving their knowledge of the latest tools. Students are provided with the methodologies and knowledge to use modern GIS technologies, using today's spatial data sources, statistical analysis packages, GPS devices (SER page 26 and evidence during the visit). This knowledge and techniques are integrated into the training programmes.

The expert panel were impressed to see evidence in the SER (page 26) that between 2019 to 2022 teaching staff had participated in 6 international projects with foreign partners, 2 of which were ongoing. These are described in some detail in the following paragraphs of the SER.

Staff seek to ensure their training is updated in innovative research methods and use these not only in their research but in their teaching. In the SER (page 26) it is documented how in the Bachelor's Human Geography programme, novel methods are used in modules such as Common Cartography and Topography, Regional Studies and Regional Research Methods, World's Social and Economic Geography, Landscape Geography and Landscape Management, Transport and Communication Geography, Basics of GIS, and GIS studies.

Similarly in the Master's programme, new methods integrated into the teaching of Theory and Methodology of Human Geography, Urbanisation and Urban Geography, Spatial Statistics, Regional Development Project Development, Geography of Recreation and Tourism, and Qualitative Research Methods in Human Geography.

Table 3 page 29 summarises publications. The rate of publications in international journals is low and it would be good to see these increased.

Thanks to the close collaboration of the geography community in the region, students are introduced to the most relevant information in the country, to the latest issues, and to the most up-to-date tools and challenges of the time. This is supported by intensive contact with the social partners - the local authorities, where knowledge of the needs of these institutions is gained. The expert evaluation panel was impressed by these collaborations.

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

There are a number of examples of both 1st and 2nd cycle students participating in international research projects. For example, In 2017-2019, the project Development of Joint GIS Trainings for Improvement of Employment in the Region (GISEDU) in collaboration with Klaipėda State College (Lithuania) and Jelgava University of Agriculture (Latvia), funded by the Latvia-Lithuania Cooperation Programme involved 4 undergraduate and 2 graduate in its methodological activities. Nine students (seven undergraduate and two graduate) took part in the Erasmus K 203 project From Overtourism to Innovative Sustainable Solutions (MOTION) project that is funded by the Finnish Erasmus Agency (2020-23). Other examples are listed on SER pp. 29-30.

SER (page 29) indicates that students are also involved in research at national level: “Values of Heritage in Cultural, Social, and Natural Landscape for Spatial Tourism Development in Curonian Lagoon Region”, funded by the Research Council of Lithuania in 2022. Students are encouraged and enabled to attend conferences and seminars and give presentations. 4 students were awarded prizes from Klaipėda City Municipality for their articles in 2017-2021 (SER Table 4).

The expert panel were encouraged to hear during the interviews with both staff and students how students are facilitated and encouraged to participate in international and regional research projects. Both first and second cycle students. The University carries out research relevant to the region, taking into account the needs of social partners, and students are involved in this research.

Despite the regional orientation of the University, given the national distinctiveness of the HG programme, the expert panel are of the view that it is advisable to be more involved in research at national level and to involve students in it.

Strengths and weaknesses of this evaluation area

Strengths

The region's geography community works in close cooperation and keeps HG students up-to-date with the most relevant information, the latest issues, the newest tools and the challenges of the times.

Intensive interaction with the social partners - the local authorities - where knowledge of their needs is gained.

he university is strengthening its technical base and maintaining state-of-the-art software to provide students with the latest technological knowledge.

Students are involved in research and are encouraged to be active in conferences and present papers.

Weaknesses

International publication activity should be improved. Staff have limited time to secure external funding and produce outputs in international journals. Similarly, although involvement in international projects and travel has improved since the evaluation opportunities are still limited. It should be noted that the period of evaluation covers the pandemic.

The HG programme is unique in the country, and the University could carry out more projects at national and international level and involve students in them.

Recommendations

The expert panel recommends that the senior management work to support teaching staff to ensure their workloads factor in time for research, drafting research grant applications and writing papers for international journals.

3.3. STUDENT ADMISSION AND SUPPORT

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

The admission process for the first-cycle study program is centralised and occurs during the national admission period. This process is overseen by LAMA BPO (Association of Lithuanian Higher Education Institutions), authorised by the Minister of Education, Science, and Sport. A competitive score is determined following the procedure for establishing the competition queue for applicants to state-funded 1st cycle programs, as approved by the Minister of Education, Science, and Sport in Lithuania. The minimum competitive score for admission to 1st cycle studies from 2019 to 2022 was 5.4. These admission regulations are subject to annual review by the Faculty or Institute Council, with approval from the University Senate, and are made available on the KU website (www.ku.lt) and the LAMA BPO website (www.lamabpo.lt).

Applicants are required to have a minimum of 12 years of secondary education, and those seeking state-funded positions must pass the following exams: geography, history or mathematics, IT or a foreign language, Lithuanian language and literature. There are no Bachelor's or Master's programs offered in the English language, so international applicants are discouraged from applying. Over the 2019-2022 period, a total of 69 applicants applied for the first-cycle Geography program, but only 18 students finalised contracts with the university. In 2019 and 2021, the program did not receive a sufficient number of applicants, and no contracts were signed during these years.

Admission to second-cycle studies follows KU Admission procedures. There is no requirement to hold a Bachelor's degree in geography science. Before 2021, student admissions were managed through the KU admission system, but starting in 2022, admissions are carried out via the LAMA PO system. Applicants must have completed undergraduate or integral university studies in any field and hold a professional Bachelor's qualification degree. The competitive score for applicants is calculated based on a specified formula, and only individuals with a minimum score of 6.0 points may be admitted to the study program. All pertinent information is annually published and updated on the KU website. Between 2019 and 2022, a total of 21 student contracts were signed for the second-cycle program.

The KU website is highly informative and easily accessible. The admission procedures are transparent and well-founded. Although the number of students is low, it remains quite stable. During a meeting with university management, it was explained that the low student enrollment can be attributed to a couple of reasons:

1. Demographic challenges.
2. Students tend to opt for larger cities, where there is limited availability of state-funded positions in various programs across the country.

In the SER page 32 Table 6 is very helpful setting out the admission figures. A key point to note is that the score/grades of applicants has increased indicating recruitment is strong as are the quality of applicants. In interviews, social partners emphasised that there is a high demand for Geography teachers and specialists in the country. While the number of applicants is increasing, it is suggested that additional efforts could be made to promote the program further. Exploring opportunities for international students to study in English should also be considered.

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 SER indicates on pages 33-34 that KU has established procedures for the academic recognition of education and qualifications obtained in foreign countries and international organisations. Decisions regarding the recognition of foreign qualifications are authorised by the Dean of the Faculty. As per the established procedure, the results must be recorded on the "Card for Recognizing the Results of Studies in Other Higher Education Institutions at KU." Klaipėda University adheres to the European Credit Transfer System (ECTS). Recognition of core or specialty subjects is only granted when the credits account for at least two-thirds of the credits in the study program.

Individuals who have studied in another country or at a higher education institution in Lithuania and wish to have their study results recognized must follow the procedures approved by the Senate of Klaipėda University. All required documents and evidence must be submitted and reviewed by the commission. Subjects and learning outcomes achieved through non-formal activities are acknowledged and integrated into the study programs, as described in the SER. However, during the period from 2019 to 2022, these procedures were not applied in the field of study programs, as there were no students who required such recognition.

The recognition procedure follows KU's approved Senate procedures and is conducted on an individual basis. This ensures that applicants' prior qualifications align with the goals and outcomes of the Geography program at KU. It could be valuable for both the department and the management to explore ways of effectively communicating this information to applicants, as there may be a lack of information reaching students.

3.3.3. Evaluation of conditions for ensuring academic mobility of students

International studies and internships are coordinated and managed by the KU Study Office. Comprehensive information regarding mobility opportunities is accessible on the KU website, and students also receive direct updates twice per academic year. Students planning to study abroad have the option to apply for scholarships. They can select from over 20 Erasmus+ agreements with foreign universities. Additionally, students can engage in various international exchange programs or projects, and they are also required to participate in an internship abroad. Geography students, both at the Bachelor's and Master's levels, have the opportunity to spend a semester or an entire year studying overseas.

However, in the 2019-2022 period, the number of outgoing students was quite limited, with only one student taking advantage of the academic mobility opportunity. Interestingly, there was a higher influx of incoming students who enrolled in the Human Geography module specifically designed for Erasmus students. During discussions with the expert panel, students mentioned their active involvement in other international projects outside the Erasmus+ program. They participate in online conferences, field trips, and internships.

Second-cycle students, often juggling their studies with paid employment, may face constraints in terms of travelling abroad. Furthermore, the Covid-19 pandemic had a detrimental impact on mobility opportunities for students. Nonetheless, teachers and management made efforts to organise several international projects online to mitigate the effects of the pandemic.

1st and 2nd cycle students are encouraged to make use of, and are informed about, scope for participation in the Erasmus+ programme which has been running for a number of years and the procedures are well established. While there are a small number of incoming students each year of

the first cycle HG programme only one has studied abroad in 2019 (see Table 8 SER p.35). Students are also free to choose electives in other areas. Reasons given highlight that 1st cycle students are working, which is a common feature in both study cycles.

In the 1st cycle the field and Bachelor study programme demonstrate a strong commitment to academic mobility and student support in line with the mission and objectives of the institution. KU follows national laws for recognizing foreign study results, ensuring the transferability of credits earned abroad. The European Credit Transfer System (ECTS) is employed to facilitate student mobility. Before embarking on partial studies or practices abroad, students sign Erasmus+ Learning Agreements to ensure credit recognition upon successful completion. This aligns with KU's goal of promoting student mobility and internationalisation. KU actively informs its 1st and 2nd cycle students about academic mobility opportunities, with specialised offices providing information, thus ensuring students are well-informed and supported in their mobility endeavours. Data indicates that KU has experienced a higher influx of incoming students compared to outgoing students in recent years, reflecting a successful implementation of mobility programs despite challenges posed by the pandemic.

In the case of the 2nd cycle the Masters programme is well-aligned with the institution's mission and objectives, particularly in the areas of academic mobility and student support. Adherence to national and European guidelines for recognizing study results from foreign institutions demonstrates a commitment to facilitating student mobility. The use of Erasmus+ Learning Agreements and the subsequent recognition of credits earned during partial studies or practices abroad exemplify dedication to providing students with opportunities for international experiences. KU's recognition of competences acquired through non-formal and informal learning aligns with the institution's inclusivity goals, as up to 50% of credits can be recognised based on such achievements. This approach reflects KU's commitment to acknowledging diverse learning pathways and promoting equal access to education.

The institution's proactive approach to informing students about academic mobility opportunities, even in the face of challenges posed by the pandemic, demonstrates KU's commitment to supporting its 1st and 2nd cycle students in their academic journeys. The institution's efforts to accommodate students with special needs, both in terms of physical accessibility and academic support, further emphasise its commitment to diversity and inclusivity. In summary, both programmes align effectively with the institution's mission, objectives, and strategies, particularly in promoting academic mobility and providing comprehensive support to its students.

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

The University has a network of support procedures in place for students. Comprehensive information about this support is available on the KU website, presented in an informative manner. Support covers various aspects of student life, including financial, personal, social, psychological, religious, and spiritual needs. KU abides by a Code of Academic Conduct that mandates the provision of suitable accommodations for students with special requirements, including those with visual, hearing, mobility, or other disabilities, to facilitate their completion of assignments. The university is also equipped to cater to students with individualised learning needs.

The expert panel concluded that there is a need for improvement in supporting students with physical health requirements, and additional recreational and study areas should be created. Students at all academic levels reported excellent support from the teaching staff. Furthermore, all crucial information related to student support is readily available on the KU website and is also communicated directly to the students.

The SER underscores the importance of ensuring that students with disabilities have the right to appropriate accommodations, support, and accessible studies. However, during the evaluation period, the Faculty of Social Science and the Faculty of Humanities merged and relocated to a new building. During the expert panel visit, the university's management explained that renovations are ongoing, and at the moment, students with mobility disabilities cannot be accommodated adequately. Furthermore, during the tour, it was observed that there is a shortage of recreational and study spaces for students, and the library lacks sufficient room.

Financial assistance can be sought through various means, including reductions in the cost of studies (for fee-paying students), various scholarship programs, and funding for internships abroad through dedicated funds. Taking into consideration the relatively small number of students, the expert panel heard positive feedback from both students and teachers. They noted that teachers can allocate more quality time to individual students. Moreover, KU offers career consultations, cultural activities for students, all of which are treated with utmost confidentiality. Academic support is provided on a one-on-one basis by tutors, addressing matters such as program selection, financial concerns, academic leaves, internships, extracurricular activities, and other related issues. Psychological support is also offered by psychologists and pastoral counsellors.

3.3.5 Evaluation of the sufficiency of study information and student counselling

The University provides clear information to students about study procedures during their first week of study, and 1st-year students are assigned curators to guide them. This information is also available on the KU website. Teachers and heads of studies regularly update students on administrative and organisational matters.

Each semester, consultation hours are posted, allowing students to know the specific days and times they can seek assistance. During discussions with students, it was noted that both teachers and administration are highly supportive, providing consultations tailored to individual needs. The university actively values student feedback, offering designated evaluation periods during which students can express their opinions on teaching methods, organisational processes, and more. All surveys are conducted anonymously, and the results are shared with teachers and other staff. Plans for improvement are formulated based on these results.

The University offers a satisfactory level of information for students. The KU website is highly informative and easily navigable. Both teachers and the administration are readily accessible, and students are equipped with e-learning tools, which serve as a means to reach out to teachers when necessary.

In the SER page 36 para 126 states that “Students who are experiencing psychological difficulties may seek psychological or pastoral support”. The SER also states that students in financial difficulty can apply for support but little detail is provided. This notion was also listed in the KU website, providing proof of information and support availability.

Strengths and weaknesses of this evaluation area

Strengths

There are several strengths including informative, clear and accessible webpages for both current and prospective students. There are also transparent and clear admission procedures for first and second cycles.

The evaluation panel were impressed by the levels of field trip activities and student participation in the international and local projects, and conferences.

Relations between students and teachers are respectful with the former being well supported by teaching staff.

Weaknesses

The evaluation panel first considers that the numbers of students recruited on to both the first and second cycle programmes should be increased.

Recommendations

The expert panel recommends that the University finds ways to increase the quota of students enrolled to both the first and second cycle programmes.

3.4. TEACHING AND LEARNING, STUDENT PERFORMANCE AND GRADUATE EMPLOYMENT

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 SER identifies the learning outcomes for 1st and 2nd cycle HG students as follows: to ensure the completeness and complexity of knowledge, to develop intellectual and practical skills and communication, to foster strategic and critical thinking, ethical and social values. Students are taught to formulate a geographical approach to problem analysis, to assess problems using spatial analysis principles, to make recommendations to improve the situation, to solve problems based on research, to convey a geographical mentality to different stakeholder groups, and to systematically solve public problems (SER page 39).

A variety of teaching methods are used to achieve the learning outcomes: lectures, seminars, case studies, individual and group work projects, discussions, literature analysis, practical exercises, field trips, works visits, modelling and designing of real-life situations, problem-solving in debates (SER Annex 2). Students have access to consultations with lecturers, either live or remotely, according to their timetables (SER page 37). Students can also seek consultation at any time, if available. Students can also give feedback, comment on field trips with lecturers to discuss their studies, their quality and the content of the course.

The university offers interactive learning opportunities (incl. virtual classes). For independent work and in case of greater interest, GIS software licences are available to students. Students were given the opportunity to take part in internships in national institutions and abroad (SER page 54).

The 1st cycle geography programme is a full-time sessional programme. The second cycle programme is a full-time evening programme. Most of the students in the 2nd cycle are working, so the evening programme offers opportunities to combine study and work.

The expert panel found that content, level and structure of the learning outcomes are comprehensive and detailed, they are well presented in SER. The programmes are arranged in a way that facilitates the progression from basic knowledge to a specific, more knowledge-intensive level of understanding and skills. The University strives to responsibly and systematically ensure its declared learning outcomes, as evidenced in SER Tables 1 and Table 2.

KU carries out student surveys to canvas feedback and this is done anonymously. The most recent was carried out in 2021. Para 137 in SER states: “If necessary, the results of the feedback shall be analysed by the KU Students' Union, the Study Office, the Office of Research and Innovation, the Communication and Marketing Office, and/or other divisions of the University.” In the SER para 133 it is described how students are offered scope for “consulting” which indicates that they are given the opportunity to provide feedback and ask questions.

During the visit, students and alumni confirmed that the organisational and methodological conditions for participating in the study process and achieving learning outcomes were good. The learning methods and resources used are sufficient to meet the needs of students and enable them to achieve the intended learning outcomes.

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

The studies take place in historic university buildings that are not adapted to the needs of people with reduced mobility. They can only stay on the ground floors of these buildings with the help of people around them. New buildings (SER page 40), e.g. the buildings of the Business Incubator, the Marine Research Institute buildings, Aula Magna, the new Steam Methodology Centre all of which are accessible to people with visual or mobility impairments (e.g. lifts and toilets for people with special mobility needs). The University has developed a plan to improve the mobility of students with special needs in all of the University's study buildings, according to the SER page 37. The expert panel could see that renovation work is currently underway and infrastructure is being built for students with mobility or visual impairments.

No students with special needs have been admitted to the HG study programme in 2019-2022. However, there are procedures in place to support the enrollment of a student with special needs. The University has a Disability Coordinator and the students with disabilities can apply for support. The University's Code of Academic Conduct states that a lecturer should be able to provide appropriate facilities during lectures for students with special needs, visual, hearing, mobility or other disabilities to enable them to complete their tasks (SER page 36). The University has purchased special equipment and the FSSH Library division provides readers with special needs with access to special programmes in the reading room - for students with visual impairment, dyslexia, dysgraphia, dyspraxia and other disabilities may use the equipment in the KU library (SER page 36 and confirmed during the visit).

Students facing a difficult financial situation can apply for financial support. Students who are unable to study due to illness, pregnancy or parental leave may temporarily interrupt their studies (academic leave) for up to one year, or for a longer period according to the law. A student may also take an academic leave of absence for other personal reasons once during the study period. Conditions are in place for individualised examinations.

The University states that it encourages the academic environment (SER page 36) that should be flexible and welcoming to the diversity of the academic community: members of different backgrounds, races, health, faiths, beliefs, genders, sexual orientations, social status, etc.

The expert panel found that the conditions for access to study for students with special needs and students from disadvantaged groups are defined and established and are described in the SER (pages 36, 40). No students with special needs have been admitted to the HG study programme in 2019-2022. However, there are procedures in place to support the enrollment of a student with special needs. The University's historic buildings are not well adapted for students with reduced mobility, but the University is making efforts to address this through renovations.

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 SER reports that student surveys are organised by the Faculty and carried out by staff. Feedback is anonymous where students completed evaluations or through a written questionnaire. Procedures for the administration, data analysis, use, and publicising the results of surveys on study programmes, course teaching, study process organisation, and the quality of assessment of student competences is set out in the KU Descriptor of the Procedure of Study Feedback Organisation approved by KU Rector in 2019.

KU uses “AIS”, which provides students with detailed information about study programs and individual subjects. It includes information about study content, independent work, assignments, completion dates, examination requirements, and more. This system ensures that students have access to essential information about their courses, which is crucial for systematic progress monitoring. The AIS also supports teaching and learning methods that cater to students' needs and help them achieve their learning outcomes. This suggests that the university has taken measures to align its instructional methods with the intended learning objectives. Timely feedback enables students to identify areas where they need improvement and make necessary adjustments. The SER also mentions that the criteria for assessing student knowledge and skills are well-defined and are based on specific regulations and principles. This ensures that the assessment process is consistent and transparent, which is important for students to understand how their performance is being evaluated.

Semester study achievements are evaluated according to a plan that includes various assessment methods (e.g., colloquia, tests, essays) with defined weightings. This allows students to understand the relative importance of each assessment component in determining their final grades. Students receive regular feedback on their achievements, including results of sessions, assignment quality, progress throughout the semester, and acquired competences. Regular feedback is a key factor in promoting self-assessment and helping students track their progress. SER also mentions a minimum grade requirement for intermediate and final reporting. This requirement encourages responsible planning of the study process and influences individual study progress. It also serves as a mechanism to ensure that students are meeting minimum standards.

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

In the SER (p.42) Table 9 represents teachers' data and state monitoring data on graduate employment for first and second cycles. The differences are considerable. In any case, a higher proportion of graduates are working in fields related to their subject of study, which is confirmed by Table 9 and the information received during the visit. Most of them are working in various municipalities of Western Lithuania (SER pages 42-43). The majority of 2nd cycle students are actually already working in a professional field (confirmed by a meeting with the social partners) and alumni.

Graduates have good employability thanks to their broad education on the study programmes and the skills they have acquired in integrating information and managing the tools they need. During the interviews the social partners informed the expert panel that 2nd cycle students are good and desirable project managers. Participation in internships with social partners also increases their employability. Demand for 1st cycle students is high due to a shortage of geography teachers in the market.

The data and analysis on student employment presented in the SER could be better developed. It could be more clearly explained how the different sources of information complement each other

and how the information gathered is used to improve the quality of studies. ~~SER Table 9 summarises data for first and second cycle employment in HG. It is not clear what these data represent.~~

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

KU has a Code of Academic Ethics (2019) which states that all the members of the KU community must adhere to the “values of academic ethics: academic integrity, responsibility, equality, justice, non-discrimination, accountability, transparency, sustainable use of resources, academic freedom, impartiality in the evaluation of research and study results, trust, and respect.” Thus, it is verified that KU has established a comprehensive Code of Academic Ethics that affirms fundamental values such as academic integrity, responsibility, equality, justice, non-discrimination, and more. The inclusion of these values in the code is a positive step in promoting a culture of academic integrity and inclusivity.

Chapter XVII of the KU Study Regulation clearly states that students may be expelled from the university for violations in academic ethics, such as cribbing and plagiarism. Having clear consequences for such violations reinforces the seriousness with which the institution treats academic misconduct.

Tools are in place to mitigate plagiarism and assessment tasks are designed to be problem based rather than reliance on exams only. Students are required to sign a contract upon starting their studies in which they commit to abiding by the requirements of academic discipline and student ethics as outlined in KU documents. This demonstrates a proactive approach to instilling a sense of responsibility and ethical behaviour among students from the beginning of their academic journey. The Descriptor of General Requirements for Independent Papers outlines the principle of academic integrity, emphasising the importance of originality in academic work and proper citation practices. It also mentions the use of plagiarism prevention tools, encouraging students to check their work independently. These measures are essential for preventing plagiarism and maintaining academic integrity.

The university community is recommended to use the plagiarism prevention tool Oxsico, which helps detect plagiarism by comparing submitted work with publicly available online content and scientific articles. This proactive approach to preventing plagiarism is appreciated. SER (para 169) mentions that there are procedures for submission and handling appeals and complaints regarding the study process. This demonstrates transparency and fairness in dealing with academic-related issues. There have been no cases of violation of academic integrity, tolerance, and non-discrimination in the last three academic years. While this is a positive indicator, it's important for the university to remain vigilant and continue to promote these values actively.

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

This right of students to appeal decisions or to lodge complaints that they have been assessed unfairly are publicly available on the website of Klaipėda University <https://www.ku.lt/studijos/stojantiesiems/studiju-abc/studentu-teises-ir-pareigos/>

The SER describes these rights and procedures for first and second cycle – they are clear and unambiguous. The procedures stipulate specific timeframes for handling appeals and complaints, such as responding to student requests within 3 working days. This commitment to timely

resolution is commendable as it ensures that students receive a quick response to their concerns, which can be crucial, especially in cases of grading disputes.

The procedures establish a clear hierarchy for addressing appeals, with students initially contacting the head of the centre or the Dean, depending on the situation. This hierarchy helps streamline the process and ensures that appeals are addressed at the appropriate level of authority. Additionally, the involvement of faculty members in the appeals process, including having teachers participate in reassessment boards, enhances the fairness of the process. This involvement ensures that subject matter experts are reviewing and assessing the disputed work.

The evaluation panel considers that the procedures are transparent and accessible to students, with information about their rights and obligations made publicly available on the university's website. This transparency helps students understand how the appeals process works and where to turn when they have concerns. This specificity clarifies the scope of the appeals process. Finally, the procedures provide a route for students to appeal to the University's Administration and Student Dispute Settlement Committee if they believe their interests have been violated or if they are dissatisfied with the conclusion of the appeal hearing. This external appeal option offers students an additional layer of recourse.

Strengths and weaknesses of this evaluation area

Strengths

The evaluation area related to teaching and learning processes has clear and comprehensive policies and procedures for ensuring that students' needs are taken into account, and intended learning outcomes are achieved. This includes well-defined learning outcomes and a variety of teaching methods.

Procedures for monitoring student study progress and providing feedback to students are designed to be timely, ensuring that students can make necessary adjustments in their learning journey promptly. In addition, the university utilises technology, such as the Academic Information System (AIS) and virtual classes, to enhance the teaching and learning process, providing students with additional resources and opportunities for learning. This is supported by engagement with social partners to enhance the employability of graduates, offering internships and preparing students for real-world applications of their knowledge and skills.

Weaknesses

While efforts are being made to improve accessibility for students with mobility or visual impairments, some historic university buildings are not yet fully adapted, potentially limiting access for these students.

The data and analysis on graduate employment could be more developed and clearly explained, providing a more comprehensive picture of graduate outcomes. Some data tables in SER could be more clearly explained, particularly in the section related to employability, to provide a better understanding of the information presented.

Recommendations

The expert panel recommends that the data on graduate employment be clarified and transparent. Currently the presentation of these data is confusing.

3.5. TEACHING STAFF

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 in the field of study all have over 20 years of experience. There 10 core staff see Table 11. Data on the teaching staff in the field of study programmes. (46-47). They are at variable levels of seniority, but the only one Professor is listed (SER, p. 45). Of the listed staff members, seven have a PhD in Geography, 1 is a PhD student in Geography, and 2 are lecturers. Five of the teachers are graduates from the KU Masters in Human Geography. In addition to the core teaching staff there have been some changes in the staff resulting that the SER includes 10 persons in total (Table 12 in SER).

With the exception of three lectures all staff members have PhDs. The doctoral degree level among the staff is therefore good. During the evaluation period the 1st cycle (Bachelor) teaching has included 10 teachers and the 2nd cycle (Masters) 7 teachers. During the evaluation period there have been 52 students in total (both cycles) making the teacher/student ratio (2018-2023) 5.2 (SER, p. 47) that is a reasonable level. Annually one year class thus has approx. 10 students. The trend in admissions is declining, and this is something that the expert panel are concerned about.

ased on the staff education, numbers and qualifications the evaluation panel considers that all basic requirements are in order. All teachers who work in either or both the 1st and 2nd study cycles are involved in research activities, and national and international collaborations and/or projects. From Table 14. Significant published research works of the teachers in the field of study programmes (p49) we can see that all have published at least one research paper in a relevant journal or a report between 2015-2021. In para 179 it is stated: "In 2023, new research papers will be published" and the collaboration with Springer is acknowledged. This is a good direction that can be further developed in the future.

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

All staff can apply for participation in Erasmus+ teaching and learning mobility activities. The period which is being assessed covers the covid pandemic and so this would impact on mobility. From 2018 to 2022, the teachers took part in academic mobility programmes 12 times (3 in 2018, 4 in 2019, 1 in 2020 (remote visit), 2 in 2021, 2 in 2022). Two teachers participated in the Erasmus 107 programme visiting universities in Russia).

Staff mobility is related to the teacher's activity to apply and receive funding. SER also indicates that (p. 52) that "Participation in Erasmus mobility programmes also depends on ongoing cooperation agreements with universities/institutes abroad... destinations for academic mobility include the University of Trieste in Italy, the University of Le Havre in France, the Universities of Torun and Gdansk in Poland, the University of Regional Development in Plovdiv in Bulgaria, the University of Latvia in Riga, Latvia."

The conclusion is that there are mobility options available but the actual mobility levels are low in a big picture. Further development for international collaboration and project activity is encouraged. In addition, the evaluation group recommends considering how to increase the incoming international visits of researchers and visiting professors. Beyond the opportunity to

apply for participation in Erasmus there is limited information on conditions which support mobility and which hinders it.

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

KU has a Descriptor of Professional Development of Klaipėda University Teaching and Research Staff (2022). This commits the University to cover the full cost of one long-term research visit (14 days or more) every five years for individual staff. Data suggests that support is improving and the SER (p.52 para 181) reports that in 2016 circa 59% of teaching and research staff and 19% of other staff were improving their competences, in 2020, this was 85% of academic staff and 36% of non-academic staff.

Funded research e.g. the Erasmus+ programme, supports international research visits abroad. While 14% of all staff went on research visits abroad in 2016, 34% in 2019, in academic year 2021/2022, it was 62.6%. The SER sections (p.52-53) provide a concise description of staff development and competence improvement as detailed above in the Factual Assessment. KU has also centrally funded staff training for core skills in teaching e.g. use of VLEs and research methods as well as languages. In 2019, KU established a Research and Study Promotion Fund, to support participation in scientific conferences and publishing fees for scientific papers.

The program is clearly reliant on the KU opportunities both in professional development as well as doctoral studies. There are exact figures in the SER such as: "...for this purpose, including for short-term professional development. For example, while in 2016 about 59% of teaching and research staff and 19% of other staff were improving their competences, in 2020, this was 85% of academic staff and 36% of non-academic staff... All external and project sources, including the Erasmus+ programme, are used for research visits abroad. While 14% of all staff went on research visits abroad in 2016, 34% in 2019, in academic year 2021/2022, it was 62.6%..." These figures indicate improvement and increase in overall staff improvement including mobility that is essentially connected to professional development. KU also provides opportunities for professional improvement in research methodologies, academic writing, languages, and didactics. There is evidence that the staff has participated and benefitted from these opportunities.

Strengths and weaknesses of this evaluation area

Strengths

The staff has a good number of people in order to give personal level teaching (small student ratio). The staff are very motivated and the relations with students are evidently good creating a sense of community within the programs. The staff is highly motivated and they all have proven efforts particularly in teaching and also in national publishing.

Weaknesses

The last evaluation recommended focusing on publishing internationally. The SER provided a response and an indication that this has improved. However, the total number of international publications is still low, focusing mainly on books. In addition, international publication activities remain limited to only a few members of the staff. In detail, the publishing also focuses on Springer books and journal publication efforts are further encouraged (also to include other publishers and outlets).

The number of teaching hours are also still relatively high (in comparison to some other European universities) giving doubts about the time allocation for research activities. However, these are individual and work contract dependent issues.

There are few opportunities for international mobility and it would be useful to explore opportunities to support staff to study abroad and also to attract international visiting scholars to extend their international networks. The evaluation panel recognises that the staff has participated to projects in Erasmus programme and that there are bilateral agreements with international institutions as ongoing internationalisation activities currently in preparation. **It is important to extend these to the wider staff group. It would also be valuable to host visiting scholars for longer research stays.**

Recommendations

The expert panel recommends teaching staff develop their research activity in terms of publishing, grant capture and works to ensure regional based research has international relevance.

The expert panel recommends that teaching staff are supported to take advantage of exchange programs to study abroad and to attend international conferences to improve networking and raise the profile of their research.

3.6. LEARNING FACILITIES AND RESOURCES

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 description of factual resources is long, covering SER lines 184-210. These parts cover exact numbers including the following (taken from the SER in concise form):

Location: Faculty of Social Sciences and Humanities of KU (FSSH) at S. Neries Str. 5. The FSSH was established in 2019. The FSSH currently has 29 well-equipped classrooms with 780 workstations. Two classrooms of the Faculty are available for large groups of students: 208 (116 seats) and 204 (80 seats). The other classrooms are designed for groups of 10-30 students.

The FSSH has a library, 2 gyms, and premises for the Faculty's Student Union. Faculty students also use the Aula Magna premises of the KU Classroom Building (H. Manto Str. 92-2), which has two contemporary (250-seat) lecture halls and a 100-seat conference hall with teleconferencing and reception facilities. All FSSH classrooms have internet access and are equipped with fixed multimedia. Four classrooms (112, 114, 204, 213) are equipped with interactive boards/Promethean ActivBoard with Internet connection.

here are two 12-workstation (205) and 12-workstation (304) computer labs. In Classroom 304, an interactive table /SMART table ST442i is used for classes. We subscribe to ManoApklausa.lt [MySurvey.lt], a professional version of the survey software. Wi-Fi is available to students in the Faculty premises, and Eduroam roaming service facilitates access to wireless network resources in academic institutions. Virtual learning environments (using the open source Moodle software) are available. Software licences include ArcInfo Desktop 10.8 with all extensions, ArcGIS Pro, ArcGIS online, and IBM SPSS 21.0.

The evaluation expert panel considers that physical resources and facilities are adequate for students. However, the panel is worried about the facilities (space) available for staff, especially teacher working spaces, are very small. In addition, student library spaces are limited, even though they are still under development.

The facilities have improved since the last evaluation but the expert panel recommends further considerations on space adequacy for teachers and in students particularly in studying outside class hours.

Library resourcing is described in Tables 17, 18 and 19. The overall trend is maintaining and increasing that is good development. However, the financial resourcing indicated in Table 17 shows that absolute Euros are limited if compared to other European HEi library resources. It is recommended that the KU should try to improve the overall resourcing that is a broader question for the Faculty and the University as a whole, and tightly connected to overall financing of tertiary education in Lithuania.

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

As indicated in section 3.6.1. of this report, Human Geography is located in the FSSH. The SER report that the FSSH has 29 “well-equipped” classrooms, 780 workstations, “2 of which can cater for large groups of students: 208 (116 seats) and 204 (80 seats) (SER para 184)”. Since 2019 a Geography Library was established, and a specialised computer lab, the Lab of Human Geography, was set up with the necessary software installed – which is available for 1st and 2nd cycle students. However, for the 1st cycle Geography and and 2nd cycle Human Geography and Application of Geoinformation, literature is mainly found and updated in the library of the Faculty of Social Sciences and Humanities

The Centre for Social Geography and Regional Studies, houses a bespoke library, has two stationary computers, two laptops, document copying and scanning equipment, two laser printers, two multimedia devices, and an LG flat-screen TV. Equipment acquired with funding from European projects and is regularly updated. A Garmin GPS device is available for Training Practices and Deeper Pro sonar for terrain scanning in 2022. The Study Centre has 2 bicycles and 2 kayaks for the Training Practice activities. ArcGIS Pro, ArcGIS online, and SPSS 21.0 licenses are subscribed to by KU and updated annually. The library subscribes to and provides user support a good range of scholarly information (these are listed in the SER para 204)

The SER (p. 61, line 211) indicates that the resource planning and implementation is done by the Faculty dean and the head of the program (study centre). There is a formal process described briefly here indicating the role of the procurement officer. The planning is continuous and is carried out twice a year. The SER is very brief in this section and does not provide extensive information about the actual amount of funds. Considering the small number of admitted students, the panel recommends critical discussions about securing university funding as well as support staff to participate in projects in order to gain additional funding in order to secure the program needs.

Strengths and weaknesses of this evaluation area

Strengths

The faculty has 29 well-equipped classrooms with 780 workstations, including two large classrooms accommodating 116 and 80 students, respectively. Additionally, there are modern lecture halls and facilities with teleconferencing capabilities. All classrooms have internet access

and multimedia equipment, with some featuring interactive boards. Computer labs are available, and the institution subscribes to professional GIS software. Wi-Fi and virtual learning environments are accessible to students. Furthermore, the availability of software licences, including ArcInfo Desktop, ArcGIS Pro, ArcGIS online, and IBM SPSS, adds to the strengths of the resources. The resources for library and equipment seem to be improving (in small amounts) over time.

Weaknesses

Despite adequate resources for students, there is concern about the limited space available for staff, especially teachers; their shared office spaces are small and provide limited scope for private study.

Although the library has been much improved there are still limitations in student library spaces. The financial resources, when compared to other European higher education institutions, appear limited. There are barely no recreational spaces for students to relax, debate and share ideas.

Office space of staff is poor with teaching staff sharing limited rooms for their own preparation and study. Facilities for students to meet, hold social and academic debate outside formal teaching hours are virtually nonexistent.

Recommendations

The expert panel recommends that the University continues to improve buildings to ensure that students with disabilities and special needs have full access.

The expert panel recommends funding is sustained and continually reviewed to ensure updates of equipment, learning materials, and resources.

The expert panel recommends addressing these issues to improve space adequacy for both teachers and students, particularly for studying outside class hours.

3.7. STUDY QUALITY MANAGEMENT AND PUBLIC INFORMATION

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

The KU quality assurance of study programmes is overseen by the Field of Study Committee formed by the KU Rector's order. The 1st and 2nd cycle programmes in the field of Human Geography belong to the Committee in the Field of Study of Social Sciences. The SER notes that over the evaluation period internal quality assurance systems have been reviewed and updated, work that is ongoing. For example, Quality, Environmental Protection, and Occupational Health and Safety Policies have been drafted. The Quality Manual, Management of Non-conformities and Corrective Actions as well as Environmental Protection and Occupational Health and Safety Management have been updated (p. 62 para 216)

A Facebook account was established in 2018 - "Klaipėda Geographers". It is recommended that the use and impact of this account is monitored in order to find out its importance for the geographers community in Klaipėda.

Notably, in 2021, staff from the Department of Geography at University of Tübingen, in Germany worked with KU colleagues to compare the structure of their 1st and 2nd cycle study programmes.

This benchmarking exercise found that there were similarities across the content of teaching the geography canon and also similarities in the organisation of geography practices, especially the practices abroad. Geographers at Tübingen, impressed by KU's module Theory and Methodology of Human Geography, are planning to introduce a similar subject in their Master's programme.

The SER reports that internal surveys are conducted annually with students to canvas their evaluation of teaching quality and course content, with alumni to garner views on study processes, with administrators and teachings to gain views on the delivery of the study programmes. The summarised results of the surveys are discussed with the social partners and reflected in departmental reports.

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

Table 20 in SER (p. 63-64) gives only indication of stakeholders in this section. Therefore, it was difficult for the panel to e.g. see findings in the SER and how these results are made available on the KU website. In para 227 it states that summarised information is available on the KU website but not clear how "summarised" these data are. The feedback system to stakeholders including staff and administration; employers; and alumni are "informed during annual meetings and discussions, make proposals for the improvement of study programmes, and discuss the signing of cooperation agreements and joint projects. Employers are invited to participate in the activities of the final theses defence committees (e.g. PEI Klaipeda Passenger Transport, Klaipeda District Municipality specialists, the Agency of Protected Territories, and heads of community associations), where students' achievements and various issues related to the improvement of study programmes are discussed. Alumni are invited to participate in the work of KU committees, working groups, and defence panels. They also contribute to the improvement of the study programme by evaluating the entire study period and making suggestions for programme improvement." (SER, Table 20).

SER identifies that KU has successfully implemented the ISO 9001:2015 standard, demonstrating a commitment to quality management across various processes, including studies, research, cooperation, and administration. Clear Quality Policies: The institution has formalised a Quality Policy that covers a wide range of areas, ensuring that quality is prioritised in both internal and external environments.

Regular Audits are released and the university undergoes re-certification audits for its integrated management system, which includes quality management, environmental protection, and occupational health and safety. This regular auditing helps maintain and improve quality standards. The Strategic Action Plan identifies the improvement of studies as a priority, and quality assurance is entrusted to committees and teams that work to maintain and enhance the quality of education.

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

There is a defined system for collecting information on the quality of studies. Internal evaluations are conducted periodically, with a focus on alignment with European Union higher education policy documents and standards. These evaluations involve various stakeholders, including students, alumni, teachers, and administrators.

The section in SER identifying these issues is quite general. However, the evaluation expert panel sees that self-evaluations are conducted for study programs, involving students, social partners, and faculty members, ensuring a holistic perspective on program quality. There is quantitative and qualitative information about study programs, education outcomes, self-evaluation results, and

stakeholder feedback readily available to the public through its website. The university has also successfully implemented an electronic system that combines various modules to facilitate communication, feedback, and problem-solving for both students and staff. Finally, Regular surveys conducted by the Students' Union and other internal surveys help collect valuable feedback on courses, teaching methods, and teacher performance, contributing to the improvement of the education process.

Analytically, it can be seen that the information collected is systematically done and used to inform quality improvement. A Quality Management System (QMS) is in line with ISO 9001:2015 standards, which guides the development, evaluation, and improvement of study programs. The university's authorities have formalised a Quality Policy that encompasses various aspects of the institution's operations, including research, studies, and social responsibility.

Transparency and public accessibility of information is acknowledged. Quantitative and qualitative data on study programs, qualifications, research activities, self-evaluation results, and feedback from students, alumni, and stakeholders are made publicly available on the university's website and through other means. The university has also implemented an electronic system that facilitates communication and feedback from students and staff.

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

The opinion of field students regarding the quality of studies is primarily collected through a systematic process of internal surveys. These surveys include evaluations of course content and teaching quality, as well as assessments of the effectiveness of the study process, among others. Students actively participate in these assessments, which provide valuable insights into their experiences and perceptions of the educational offerings. Additionally, KU also collects feedback from alumni and administrators to gain a comprehensive view of the educational quality.

Students are actively engaged through surveys organised by the Students' Union, allowing them to assess various aspects of courses and teaching. The results of these surveys are summarised and discussed with social partners, which indicates a commitment to incorporating external perspectives into the evaluation process. Furthermore, the SER (p. 64) suggests that KU values open communication and a respectful relationship between students and teachers. It mentions that students and teachers engage in discussions about courses and teaching during field trips and expeditions, fostering an environment for constructive feedback and continuous improvement.

Overall, the opinion of field students is considered an essential element in assessing the quality of studies at KU, and the university takes various measures to gather and reflect on this valuable input, both internally and externally, to enhance the educational experience.

Strengths and weaknesses of this evaluation area

Strengths

Overall, the program is consistent with KU policies, and appears to have a strong foundation for quality management, with clear policies, processes, and a commitment to improvement. However, there is room for increased transparency, a more specific focus on program distinctions, and a deeper analysis of external feedback to further enhance the quality management system.

Weaknesses

While the university collects annual indicators and data related to quality management, it may not make all additional survey results publicly available. This lack of transparency could limit stakeholders' access to valuable feedback.

The SER mentions various surveys and evaluations, but it does not specify the criteria or benchmarks used to assess quality, making it difficult to gauge the effectiveness of quality management efforts. In addition, while the report mentions feedback from social partners, it doesn't provide details about the nature and extent of this feedback, making it challenging to assess its impact on quality management. There is a lack of transparency about the processes of involvement of social partners especially those in commercial sectors.

Recommendations

The expert panel recommends that the University ensures that data collected on student evaluations, social partners market employment needs, and the monitoring of graduate employment are transparent by making them publicly available in ways that are clear and accessible.

V. RECOMMENDATIONS

| Evaluation Area | Recommendations for the Evaluation Area (study cycle) |
|--|---|
| Intended and achieved learning outcomes and curriculum | <p>The expert panel recommends that the Bachelor's programme be reviewed to ensure that all students are able to either opt in or opt out of the pedagogical elective and route. Currently this limits the scope for personalisation.</p> <p>The expert panel recommends that for the second cycle students the geographic focus should be expanded so that research and final theses can be beyond the city of Klaipeda and its surrounding region.</p> |
| Links between science (art) and studies | The expert panel recommends that the senior management work to support teaching staff to ensure their workloads factor in time for research, drafting research grant applications and writing papers for international journals. |
| Student admission and support | The expert panel recommends that the University finds ways to increase the quota of students enrolled to both the first and second cycle programmes. |
| Teaching and learning, student performance and graduate employment | The expert panel recommends that the data on graduate employment be clarified and transparent. Currently the presentation of these data is confusing. |
| Teaching staff | <p>The expert panel recommends teaching staff develop their research activity in terms of publishing, grant capture and works to ensure regional based research has international relevance.</p> <p>The expert panel recommends that teaching staff are supported to take advantage of exchange programs to study abroad and to attend international conferences to improve networking and raise the profile of their research.</p> |
| Learning facilities and resources | <p>The expert panel recommends that the University continues to improve buildings to ensure that students with disabilities and special needs have full access.</p> <p>The expert panel recommends funding is sustained and continually reviewed to ensure updates of equipment, learning materials, and resources.</p> <p>The expert panel recommends addressing these issues to improve space adequacy for both teachers and students, particularly for studying outside class hours.</p> |
| Study quality management and public information | The expert panel recommends that the University ensures that data collected on student evaluations, social partners market employment needs, and the monitoring of graduate employment are transparent by making them publicly available in ways that are clear and accessible. |

VI. SUMMARY

Klaipėda University (KU), founded in 1991, plays a significant role in serving the Baltic Sea Region and specialises in marine sciences and other strategy defined goals. The university has undergone organisational restructuring, reducing its faculties from seven to three. KU offers undergraduate and postgraduate programs in human geography, including a Bachelor's in Geography and a Master's in Human Geography and Application of Geoinformation. Previous international evaluations took place in 2013 and 2014, with accreditation for six years. Notably, program names were changed in 2019 to adapt to evolving needs.

The expert panel conducted a comprehensive evaluation of KU's Human Geography study programs across various areas. In the field of 'Links Between Science (Art) and Studies,' the university's research strategy was noted as commendable, focusing on unique themes relevant to human geography. However, the panel recommended an increase in research outputs in higher-ranking journals and securing additional research funding.

Overall, the expert panel recognizes several strengths in the evaluated areas, such as research focus, teaching quality, and staff qualifications. However, there is room for improvement in terms of international publication efforts, using student feedback to drive improvements, and achieving a better balance between teaching and research activities. The HEI's commitment to inclusivity and academic integrity is commendable. The report provides a valuable basis for further development and enhancement of the institution's performance. The expert panel acknowledges the HEI's efforts and contributions to these areas.

Regarding 'Student Admission and Support,' there is demonstrated transparency and quality in its admission processes, with increased applicant quality. However, more specific details on the recognition of foreign qualifications and prior learning were suggested for inclusion in the report. In 'Teaching and Learning, Student Performance, and Graduate Employment,' the university's commitment to academic mobility, teaching methods, and student support were lauded. The need to attract more students and increase outgoing student numbers was highlighted. There is evidently a demand for geography teachers and also for human geographers with skills to contribute to inter alia tourism, planning, ecological development, logistics, and transportation which second cycle studies are ideally placed to contribute to.

In terms of 'Teaching Staff,' the teaching staff in the field of study was acknowledged for their experience, with a majority holding PhDs and engaging in research activities. However, there was a call for an increase in international publications and a potential re-evaluation of teaching staff teaching hours. In the domain of 'Learning Facilities and Resources,' the university's physical facilities, including classrooms and computer labs, were considered adequate. However, concerns were raised about limited space for teaching staff and student library spaces, along with the need for improved financial resourcing.

In 'Study Quality Management and Public Information,' KU's commitment to quality management, including ISO 9001:2015 implementation, was noted. The institution actively sought feedback through surveys from various stakeholders. Recommendations included greater transparency in sharing survey results and more detailed reporting on feedback from social partners.

The expert panel recognized several strengths in Human Geography study programs, including a strong research focus, student support, and quality management. Areas for improvement included increasing international publications, addressing space limitations, and enhancing transparency in quality management processes. The university's efforts in preparing the self-evaluation report were

appreciated, and the panel looked forward to further developments and improvements in the highlighted areas.

In conclusion, the expert panel commends both programmes and the Faculty for strong alignment with market demand, integration of GIS technology, specialisation in Baltic regional geography, and adherence to legal requirements. The programs also align well with KU's mission and offer personalization opportunities for students. To further enhance the program's effectiveness, the panel suggests improving international research goals alongside international collaboration.

The panel expresses appreciation for the University's efforts in preparing the self-evaluation report and organising the site visit. All the meetings were well attended and the expert panel were impressed by the engagement of the senior management, teaching staff, students and social partners.

Expert panel chairperson signature:

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Sami Miettinen". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long horizontal stroke at the end.