



CENTRE FOR QUALITY ASSESSMENT IN HIGHER EDUCATION

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**EVALUATION REPORT**  
**STUDY FIELD of REHABILITATION**  
at UTENOS KOLEGIJA

**Expert panel:**

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## Study Field Data

Title of the study programme	<b><i>Physiotherapy</i></b>
State code	6531GX027
Type of studies	Higher College Studies
Cycle of studies	1 <sup>st</sup>
Mode of study and duration (in years)	Full time, 3 years
Credit volume	180 ECTS
Qualification degree and (or) professional qualification	Professional Bachelor in Health Sciences, Professional qualification of a Physiotherapist
Language of instruction	Lithuanian
Minimum education required	Not lower than secondary education, passed at least one state maturity exam
Registration date of the study programme	25.06.2002

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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 consisted of the following stages: 1) *self-evaluation and self-evaluation report (SER) prepared by HEI*; 2) *site visit of the expert panel to the HEI held on the 7<sup>th</sup> November 2022*; 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 *7<sup>th</sup> November, 2022*.

**1. Dr. John Xerri de Caro (panel chairperson), Senior Lecturer within the Physiotherapy Department, Faculty of Health Sciences, University of Malta (Malta);**

**2. Dr. Maija Kangasperko, Coordinator of English Degree Program in Physiotherapy at Satakunta University of Applied Sciences (Finland);**

**3. Assistant professor Dr. Magdalena Hagner-Derengowska, vice rector for science, dean of physiotherapy faculty at Private University in Bydgoszcz, Poland;**

**4. Ms Aistė Pranskaitytė-Bielevičienė, Center for care and supervision, Director of nursing homes for the elderly and disabled;**

**5. Ms Karolina Limanovskaja, Fourth year student in the Genetics study program at Vilnius University.**

### **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:

<b>No.</b>	<b>Name of the document</b>
1.	
2.	
...	

### **1.4. BACKGROUND OF REHABILITATION FIELD STUDY AT UTENOS KOLEGIJA**

The Utenos kolegija (UK, College) is a state higher education institution (public institution) in the Eastern Aukštaitija region of Lithuania. The Statute of the Utenos kolegija was updated in 2020 and aligned with the relevant provisions of the Law on Higher Education and Research of the Republic of Lithuania, which was approved by the Government of the Republic of Lithuania on 1 April 2020. The organisational structure of the College comprises two main study and research units - the Faculty of Medicine and the Faculty of Business and Technology. The Faculty of Medicine offers 7 programmes in the Health and Social Sciences study field groups. The Rehabilitation Study Field belongs to the group of Health Sciences fields of study and runs one programme: Physiotherapy which is the focus of this external evaluation.

The Utenos kolegija has developed a wide network of cooperation with regional and national social partners. The Utenos kolegija has a wide network of foreign partners in Europe and

other regions of the world. The Physiotherapy programme is focused on the local community, the region and the country.

The previous external evaluation of the Physiotherapy study programme was held in 2014.

## II. GENERAL ASSESSMENT

*Rehabilitation* study field and *first cycle* at Utenos kolegija is given **positive** evaluation.

*Study field and cycle assessment in points by evaluation areas*

No.	Evaluation Area	Evaluation of an Area in points*
1.	Intended and achieved learning outcomes and curriculum	3
2.	Links between science (art) and studies	3
3.	Student admission and support	4
4.	Teaching and learning, student performance and graduate employment	3
5.	Teaching staff	3
6.	Learning facilities and resources	3
7.	Study quality management and public information	4
	<b>Total:</b>	23

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

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

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

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

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

### III. STUDY FIELD ANALYSIS

#### 3.1. INTENDED AND ACHIEVED LEARNING OUTCOMES AND CURRICULUM

##### *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 aim of the Rehabilitation field of study and Physiotherapy study programme at Utenos Kolegija is described to train professionals who can provide independent services, or services provided in collaboration within a team of rehabilitation professionals, that would reflect the state of the art in the field. By self-admission, data analysis following a survey highlights the need for graduates to strengthen their skills in disease prevention and health promotion. The RSFP learning outcomes are divided into 5 areas of learning outcomes, as defined in the Descriptor of Study Cycles. The PSP defines the learning outcomes that reflect the profile of the programme and relate to the activities for which future physiotherapy practitioners with the necessary skills and knowledge are trained.

Evidence was provided with examples of modifications made in the programme of studies, particularly in the context of Women's Health and Paediatrics (autism) to address this. The corroboration of fact is that changes to the programme of studies were made to address the needs of society, ensuring that the Utenos Kolegija pays attention to the needs of society and the labour market. In the SER (pg. 6) reference is made to integrating European guidelines (Enphe) and international guidelines (World Physiotherapy). The integration of international guidelines is not explicit.

The expert panel concludes that the aims and outcomes of the physiotherapy programme conform to the needs of the Lithuanian society.

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

The SER (pg. 7) states that the Physiotherapy programme aims to train physiotherapists who can provide, independently or in collaboration with a team of rehabilitation professionals, services in the fields of disease and injury prevention, health promotion, facilitation, rehabilitation, education, promotion of social integration and improvement of quality of life. The College strategic objectives for 2022-2024 aim to ensure that graduates are highly qualified professionals motivated to continuously improve their skills and work in an environment of global digitalisation and innovation growth; and to develop applied scientific activities, research, and lifelong learning services relevant to the region and the country. The corroboration of fact is that the programme is synchronised with the Colleges' strategy towards society in the region and Lithuania.



The expert panel concludes that the field and cycle study programme aims and outcomes conform well to the mission, objectives of activities and strategy of the HEI.

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

Table 1. below indicates the factual situation with respect to the distribution of ECTS across the programme. No evidence was provided with regards to signed attendance sheets for internships (clinical practice placements). Internships coded by PVP on the study plan include 'consultations' related to meetings between students and supervisors to discuss their placement.

**Table No. 1.** Study programme compliance to general requirements for *first cycle study programmes of college level (professional bachelor)*

Criteria	General legal requirements	In the Programme
Scope of the programme in ECTS	180, 210 or 240 ECTS	<b>180</b>
ECTS for the study field	No less than 120 ECTS	<b>135</b>
ECTS for studies specified by College or optional studies	No more than 120 ECTS	<b>45</b>
ECTS for internship	No less than 30 ECTS	<b>42</b>
ECTS for final thesis (project)	No less than 9 ECTS	<b>9</b>
Practical training and other practice placements	No less than one third of the programme	<b>1094 classroom + 1004 clinical = 2098 (43.7%)</b>
Contact hours	No less than 20 % of learning	<b>681 theory + 1094 practical = 1775 (37%)</b>

The corroboration of fact:

	Hours involved					
	Th.	Prac.	Cons.	Self-study	Internships	
Total hrs	<b>681</b>	<b>1094</b>	<b>553</b>	<b>1468</b>	<b>1004</b>	4800
%	<i>14.2</i>	<i>22.8</i>	<i>11.5</i>	<i>30.6</i>	<i>20.9</i>	100.0

Internships	
General Physiotherapy Practice	152
Surgical Orthopaedic and Trauma	76
Therapeutic and Geriatric	76
Neurological	152
Paediatric	76

Special and Gerontological	132
Final Practice	340
	<b>1004</b>
% of total hours:	21

The expert panel concludes that the Physiotherapy study programme meets the requisites for a 1st cycle degree programme at College level.

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

The aim of the study programme is described and the description of the learning outcomes to the Bachelor level include 'Knowledge and Application', 'Research skills', 'Special abilities', 'Social abilities', and 'Personal abilities' that match the provision set out in the Descriptor of the Study Field of Rehabilitation (2015), Chapter 3 Point 16.

There is a good mix of teaching/learning methods that are used to deliver the courses which are appropriate for achieving the desired and intended learning outcomes. Assessment is based on a good mix of reports, presentations and examinations which is appropriate.

The expert panel concludes that the aims, learning outcomes, teaching/learning and assessment methods are compatible with the field and cycle study programmes.

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

The course programme is described and presented in a logical manner as a modular course over 6 semesters, with two semesters each year. It is designed to include a fundamental foundation and integrates physiotherapy specific components including the study of internal diseases and geriatrics, locomotor diseases, nervous system diseases, and women's health and paediatrics over the subsequent modules/years.

The basis of the programme meets the requirements for a profession competence-based curriculum that meets entry-to-practice level thresholds.

The expert panel concludes that the Physiotherapy programme subjects/modules are consistent with the development of competence to become a physiotherapist and merits a positive evaluation. It is advisable to consider using terms that are internationally recognised, e.g., musculoskeletal instead of locomotor, older persons instead of geriatrics, neurology instead of nervous disease, and paediatrics instead of child.

#### *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*

In line with the Study Regulations of the College, students have the right to study according to an individual study plan, which is a list of compulsory study modules for 1 to 2 years or a semester, prepared following the programme. The PSP provides for freely elected subjects (9 credits) and groups of structured parts of modules selected alternatively (18 credits), which also allows for individualisation of studies.

Students can attend up to three optional course subjects under Module VIII that are made available from the list of Optional Electives of Utenos Kolegija. The total study hours for these optional course subjects are 240 hours. These optional subjects are general subjects and not Physiotherapy specific subjects.

The expert panel concludes that opportunities for students to personalise the structure of field study programmes according to their personal learning objectives and intended learning outcomes is possible.

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

The final thesis is prepared following the Final Thesis Preparation Methodology of the College and 'Procedure for the Preparation, Submission, Defence and Assessment of Final Thesis at Utenos kolegija. The topic of the final thesis must be relevant to the professional practice of a physiotherapy specialist, oriented toward the contemporary perspectives of Physiotherapy and/or Rehabilitation development, and be aligned with the directions of the research carried out in the Department.

All students prepare and submit a final thesis in the 6th semester in fulfilment of the requirements to graduate. The student chooses the subject of the thesis themselves from a list of topics proposed to them. The criteria for the assessment of the final thesis are logical and fair.

The expert panel concludes that the final theses comply fully with the field and cycle requirements.

### *Strengths and weaknesses of this evaluation area:*

#### *(1) Strengths:*

1. The aims, results and outcomes of the Physiotherapy study programme are geared strongly towards the needs of the Lithuanian labour market.
2. The physiotherapy study programme is based on a philosophy of pragmatism and the concept of problem-based learning is applied.
3. There is a good mix of teaching/learning methods that are used to deliver the courses which are appropriate for achieving the desired and intended learning outcomes. Assessment is based on a good mix of reports, presentations and examinations which is appropriate.

#### *(2) Weaknesses:*

None.

### 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*

Utenos kolegija is involved in Research and Experimental Development, consultancy activities for the region and the country, implementing project activities, and offering non-formal education services in line with the regulations of scientific activities. Between 2019 and 2022 the academic staff within the Department of Physiotherapy were involved in a wide ranging number of scientific activities that included applied research (2), publication of scientific articles (5), presentations at conferences (3), participation in projects (7) and consultations to society (9). It was noted that the number of conference presentations and public consultations decreased due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

It is noted with satisfaction that faculty staff participate in projects and other scientific activities. It would be beneficial to document and/or keep a list of these activities including the journals in which they are published. The reason for a decrease in scientific activity that was attributed to the Covid-19 pandemic is justified.

The expert panel concludes that the scientific activities implemented by the HEI for the field of research related to Physiotherapy is sufficient for positive evaluation.

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

The results of the College applied research activities are integrated into the Physiotherapy Study Programme of the Rehabilitation Study Field (SER pg. 16). Furthermore, in 2022 Utenos kolegija responded to the rapid development of digital technologies with the purchase of equipment that will enable students to monitor and adapt more effective procedures to improve the physical and functional condition of the patient, by assessing the quality of the patient's movement performance through digital analysis. These tools include a digital isometric muscle strength dynamometer, a balance digital platform and a functional trainer. The use of this new equipment has been integrated into a number of study modules.

Cooperation with social partners on a national and international level allows for the continual revision of the content of the study program. This has happened particularly in the context of studies related to the nervous system, women's health and paediatrics. On an international level, participation at the Enphe seminars enables experiences for the teachers to reflect upon and adapt their teaching methods.

The expert panel concludes that the link between the content of studies and the latest developments in science, art and technology is sufficient for a positive evaluation.

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

The academic members of staff, as well as the students, are involved in research. This fact was amply corroborated by the staff and students during the site visit. All students in the physiotherapy study programme work on clinical research projects, coursework and thesis during their studies. These activities are integrated into the study process.

Specifically throughout the preparation of the thesis students develop an ability to critique the scientific literature, to identify what is valuable and to identify the relevance of the chosen topic and research problem. In the process of writing the thesis, the limitations of the research problem are determined, new aspects of the research are sought, and recommendations for further research are analysed. The students' research is also closely promoted to involve the needs of society and the region. The number of final theses with topics relevant to the regional needs has increased between 2019/20 and 2021/22 from 53% to 84% of the theses presented in that given year.

The expert panel concludes that the conditions for students to get involved in scientific activities consistent with their study cycle are sufficient and merit a positive evaluation.

#### ***Strengths and weaknesses of this evaluation area:***

##### ***(1) Strengths:***

1. Faculty staff participate actively in projects and other scientific activities.

##### ***(2) Weaknesses:***

None.

### **3.3. STUDENT ADMISSION AND SUPPORT**

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

Students are admitted to the study program in accordance with the General Rules for Admission to Higher Education Institutions of Universities and Colleges in Lithuania and also with the Student Admissions Rules at Utenos Kolegija. Students' admission rules are published on the institution's website and on the website of Lithuanian's Association of Higher Education Institutions.

All students who complete their primary education and pass state exams may enter the study programs. Additional points may be awarded to all applicants while admitting to study at this institution. Utenos Kolegija organizes open days, school visits, and provides detailed information about the study programme for students. The number of students choosing the rehabilitation study field as their first-choice study program increased in the year 2021 to 24 applicants when in 2020 there were only 15. The number of overall applicants applying for remaining priorities has been decreasing over the period from 2019 (141 students) to 2021 (69 students). Regardless of that the number of admitted students has increased from 2020

(19 students admitted) to 2021 (35 students admitted). In 2021 the competition score for access to the state non-funded places in the RSFP program was lowered to 2.5. This is less than the state recommended admission score of 4.3. At the same time the highest competition score to enroll in the program has increased from 6.82 (in 2020) to 7.58 (in 2021).

The expert panel concludes that the suitability and publicity of student selection and admission criteria and process is sufficient for a positive evaluation.

### *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 recognition of foreign qualifications at Utenos Kolegija is regulated by the Lisbon Convention on Recognition.

The competences acquired by students in other institutions, either nationally or internationally, are recognized by following the Study regulations and other legal acts of College. Between 2020 and 2022, 47 requests for such recognition were approved. It is also possible for students having sufficient competences recognised to be admitted to a later stage in the study program.

The expert panel concludes that the procedure of recognition of foreign qualifications, partial studies and prior non-formal and informal learning and its application is sufficient for a positive evaluation.

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

The SER reports that following an internal assessment of the growing need to develop the institution's international outlook and to detail the implementation of this priority, an Internationalization Development Strategy for 2021-2027 at Utenos kolegija was prepared. As a direct consequence of this academic mobility of students became a key priority.

Utenos kolegija students are provided with information about the options for academic mobility while studying on the RSFP. Students are encouraged to participate in the ERASMUS+ program and have a choice for both study, and internship mobility. Students from partner universities/colleges are accepted onto the programme. Between 2019 and 2022, 7 incoming students were registered for full-time studies in Rehabilitation studies representing 4.1% of the number of incoming students across the same period. These students came from Latvia, Estonia, Egypt and Colombia. During the same period just one physiotherapy student participated in the international mobility programme as an outgoing student (1.3% of the total number, n=47). The COVID-19 pandemic has had a direct impact on the mobility of students, but it is not the only factor which impacts students' mobility. Following the discussion with the students, it appears that many of them are reluctant to take part in the exchange programs due to concurrent employment, or for family reasons (e.g. they have a family to take of).

The expert panel concludes that conditions for ensuring academic mobility of students is sufficient for a positive evaluation.

#### *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*

Financial, academic, career planning and social support is provided to the students. Students are advised on their study material, the choice of elective modules, selection of their thesis theme as well as recognition of qualifications acquired elsewhere than Utenos kolegija. Individual consultations on career opportunities are also provided.

Students may apply for a wide range of financial support: tuition, social, incentive, one-off and targeted scholarships, a state loan for tuition fees and a state-supported loan with a state guarantee for tuition fees, living expenses and partial studies under international agreements, a scholarship for partial studies abroad under mobility programs. Students who excel in their studies may also get a scholarship for their achievements.

Psychological support is also provided to the student. In the period between 2019 and 2021, 52 students in the rehabilitation study field were awarded incentive scholarships and 3 students were granted the one-off scholarship. Both scholarships were granted from the fund of the college.

Student support plans and strategies are sufficient. It is important that the RSFP has a lot of flexibility and can adapt to student needs. If needed students may request extension to the deadlines of assignments or request alternative practical training lesson times. Teachers also react positively towards provided feedback and encourage students to communicate and discuss the relevance of the current study program. However, it is noted that the satisfaction outcomes towards methodological support have decreased in the period from 64% in 2021 to 31% in 2022. Openness of the administration for different needs of the students who are currently studying has also decreased from 64% in 2021 to 46% in 2022.

The expert panel concludes that the suitability, adequacy and effectiveness of the academic, financial, social, psychological and personal support provided to the students of the field is sufficient for a positive evaluation.

#### *3.3.5 Evaluation of the sufficiency of study information and student counselling*

Each academic group entering the HEI is provided with a tutor. These tutors are tasked to provide the students with all necessary information about the study program, field, and available support options for the students. There is a special module called - Introduction to Studies, during which students are better acquainted with their study field of choice and the university as an institution. If needed students may get consultations with their module teachers and are encouraged to give feedback about the study courses.

The expert panel concludes that the study information and student counselling is sufficient for a positive evaluation.

***Strengths and weaknesses of this evaluation area:***

***(1) Strengths:***

1. Very good conditions for academic flexibility.
2. Well established support system for the students.

***(2) Weaknesses:***

None.

### **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 form of study at Utenos kolegija is full-time. According to the evaluation report, the student may change the form of study to independent studies, taking into account individual abilities and motivation. During the on-site evaluation, students gave particularly positive feedback about the flexibility of studies and the possibility to adapt their study time. The learning material for the study modules is hosted on the virtual learning environment Moodle. Classes are delivered virtually, such as video lectures, interactive tutorials, virtual group and individual work, video conferencing. Although during the on-site evaluation, students expressed the importance of in-person communication and lectures in the learning process. The evaluation report describes very broadly that the educational philosophy is based on pragmatism and problem-based learning. Although this was given little emphasis during the meeting with the experts, the experts lacked evidence of the benefits and practical applicability of this philosophy. According to the evaluation report, the students' independent tasks are oriented towards their individual interests and studies. Students receive feedback on their work. Teachers provide students with information on the main mistakes, weaknesses in the assignments and what to look out for next time, when discussing students' assignment results.

According to the evaluation report, traditional and non-traditional teaching methods are used at Utenos kolegija to achieve learning outcomes. After on-site evaluation, the Expert Panel concludes that innovative, interactive teaching methods should be incorporated to improve students' theoretical and practical knowledge.

The Expert Panel concludes that the teaching and learning process are sufficient to meet the needs of the students and enables 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***



Students from vulnerable groups and with special needs are given the opportunity to study in a way that is adapted to their individual needs and capabilities. According to the evaluation report of Utenos kolegija, the College tries to take care of students with special needs according to their needs. For students with disabilities, the study environment or learning materials can be adapted to their individual needs. An example of a student with a visual impairment who participated in a physiotherapy programme was presented. The possibilities of organising the study process for dyslexic students were presented. Distance learning is available for students with physical disabilities that limit their ability to attend Utenos kolegija. Utenos kolegija provides psychological counselling services for students. Students with special needs may receive targeted allowances to cover the costs of their studies. Students belonging to socially disadvantaged groups are supported by a social stipend.

The Expert Panel concludes that the condition to ensure access to study for socially vulnerable groups and students with special needs is met.

#### *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*

Based on the evaluation report, each module ends with an exam or project assessment. Examination sessions are scheduled in accordance with the schedule approved by the Dean of the Faculty. At the end of the semester, the results of the studies are analysed and discussed at the meetings of the Department, the Dean's Office and the Faculty Board, during which students' achievements are evaluated, problems of underachievement are solved, and solutions to the problems are planned. Students' progress is systematically monitored. Student progress is analysed twice a year, at the end of the autumn and spring semesters. The institution has a system where students can monitor their progress. One academic group is admitted each year. The average number of students per academic group is  $\pm 18$ . Student drop out is monitored throughout the duration of the course. In order to find the optimal solution to student drop out, the Faculty of Medicine prepares an annual plan for the management of the drop-out of students. The aim is that from 2020 onwards, the drop-out rate at the Faculty of Medicine should not exceed the threshold of 5-7%. The drop-out rate from the physiotherapy programme was 8.87% during the evaluation period. The expert panel notes that student drop-out rates are higher than faculty drop-out rates, but it is encouraging that a drop-out management plan is in place.

The expert panel concludes that the condition for the systematic nature of the monitoring of student study progress and feedback to students to promote self-assessment and subsequent planning of study progress is met.

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

Based on the evaluation report, the Career and Communication Department of Utenos kolegija carries out an annual analysis to assess the employability of graduates. According to the data from the Career and Communication Department, they find employment as physiotherapists, as physiotherapy technicians and physiotherapy assistants and other health professionals. In

2020, the Study Quality Committee of Utenos kolegija conducted a survey of employers on competences and on the professional preparation of interns. The employer survey showed that 75% of the employers surveyed were satisfied with the level of preparation. The on-site evaluation did not provide enough knowledge to assess the employability of graduates specifically as physiotherapists.

The Panel concludes that it is appropriate to explore the local labour market to ensure that students are employable in the context of their qualifications.

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

According to the evaluation report, the principles of academic integrity, tolerance and non-discrimination are implemented at Utenos kolegija. The study process is oriented towards academic integrity, tolerance and non-discrimination, and the quality of studies is discussed in student and alumni surveys. Each student signs a "Declaration of Integrity" before starting his/her studies, by which he/she agrees to respect the regulations of Utenos kolegija.

No cases of non-compliance with the Academic Integrity, Tolerance or Non-Discrimination Policy were dealt with during the evaluation period.

The expert panel finds that the condition for the implementation of policies to ensure academic integrity, tolerance and non-discrimination is met.

#### *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*

Based on the self-evaluation report, students have the right to appeal knowledge, knowledge assessment scores, and violations of the knowledge assessment procedure. The appeals procedure is comprehensible and adequate. Both based on the self-evaluation report and during the on-site evaluation, no appeals were received and dealt with during the evaluation period.

#### ***Strengths and weaknesses of this evaluation area:***

##### ***(1) Strengths:***

1. The problem-based learning philosophy enables students to achieve specific learning outcomes according to their abilities and competences. The teaching and learning process is adapted to the needs of students.
2. A drop-out management plan is in place that addresses student drop-out rates.
3. Employer satisfaction is high.

##### ***(2) Weaknesses:***

None.

### 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 SER (pg. 34) reports that the modules in the PSP are taught by 27 teachers (16 working FT and 11 working PT). The data from 01.04.2022 shows that there were 72 students studying in the Rehabilitation study field.

The external panel finds that the legal requirements for Utenos kolegija are met in the composition of the teaching staff and its teaching function seems to give the expected results according to the aim of the institution. The average ratio of the number of teachers currently working in the Programme meets RSFP needs. The number of teachers has increased over the last three years from 12 full-time teachers to 16 full-time teachers.

When selecting the teachers to implement RSFP, their professional qualifications and practical experience are considered. When selecting the teachers for general modules (General Modules of College Studies), education (at least a Master's degree or equivalent to it) and a research degree are considered a priority, and for the teachers of professional qualification and practical classes it is essential to have at least 3 years of practical experience.

All 27 teachers have sufficient work experience, and their qualifications are sufficient to match the LOs of PSP. The external panel has noted that only 6 teachers (22%) are qualified physiotherapists. International guidelines dictate that the majority of the teaching staff should be physiotherapists. None of those interviewed by the panel were members of the Lithuanian Association of Physiotherapists. Teachers' membership in the physiotherapy association would also be useful in terms of education.

The education of young teachers is ensured by creating opportunities for professional development in cooperation with more experienced staff members. Teachers are provided with the opportunity to gain a Masters or a PhD.

The external panel finds that the number, qualification, and competence (scientific, didactic, professional) of teaching staff within a rehabilitation field physiotherapy study programme at the Utenos kolegija is adequate in order to achieve the learning outcomes.

#### *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)*

Teaching staff do participate in various activities of academic mobility such as teaching visits, internships, seminars, conferences and projects and international cooperation is one of the most developed areas in Utenos kolegija. The awareness of the importance of international cooperation among teachers is raising and the benefits of international exchange in the development of programme and teaching have been understood.

Teachers are well informed about the opportunity to apply for Erasmus+ visits. The number of outgoing teachers is currently higher than the number of incoming ones even though the numbers are still lower compared to pre-pandemic figures; 2019-2020 it was 5 outgoing teachers and 4 incoming teachers, 2021—2022 it was 3 outgoing teachers and 1 incoming teacher. The disparity between outgoing: incoming teachers may cause an imbalance in teaching load. New kinds of technological solutions could be considered to enable more international participation to all or most of staff members. This would also confirm the consideration of evidence-based information in its proper scope in teaching.

The expert panel finds that the conditions for ensuring academic mobility are met.

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

Teaching staff have ample occasions to participate in various professional development opportunities such as courses and seminars, and they have possibilities for research activity. The improvement of the teacher's qualification is recorded in Activity Programmes of the Department and the Faculty for the academic year, as well as in Activity Reports for the academic year. It was evident that a lot of attention is paid to the development of subject-related and didactic competence. The international exchanges enable the development of teachers too. However international activity is limited by the barrier of language e.g. the interviewees were not willing to use English even though they were encouraged. Teachers should be encouraged to improve their language skills so that international cooperation could be used more widely.

The expert panel finds that the conditions to improve the competence of the teaching staff are in place.

### *Strengths and weaknesses of this evaluation area:*

#### *(1) Strengths:*

1. Continuous teachers' professional development.
2. The ongoing demographic renewal among teachers as well as the young researchers and practitioners who are just commencing their pedagogical activities are contributing to implement the studies. Close co-operation between the teaching staff generations: young teachers join elder ones to teach separate parts of the module, while articles and research are prepared to take over the experience.
3. Large cohort of teachers with sufficient work experience, and qualifications.

#### *(2) Weaknesses:*

1. The number of physiotherapist teachers in the programme is short of the international guidelines to have the majority of the teachers being physiotherapists.

### 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*

Theoretical training in the rehabilitation study field happens across 1 auditorium for up to 50 students, 5 auditoriums with 30 workplaces each; 2 classrooms for 20 students each; specialized classrooms: 2 auditoriums with 30 workplaces each. In all auditoriums, used in the study process, stationary Multimedia projectors or widescreen TVs are installed, computer hardware and software are updated; the Internet connection is accelerated by updating the computer network equipment. There are 5 specialised classrooms dedicated to physiotherapy study programme.

The expert panel noticed that the facilities and learning resources for theoretical lectures are adequate for the size of the groups in one time. Students commented that they were satisfied with the existing teaching facilities even though auditoriums for theoretical lectures and practical training are not very spacious and comfortable, more suitable for an individual rather than group work. However, students stated that there is not enough equipment for testing and measuring within the faculty, this shortcoming is solved by using the clinical practice places. Auditoriums can be a bit too small considering the group sizes, which varies, they might have a divided group or the whole group. For the whole group the facilities are not spacious.

Students were happy with the existing teaching materials – textbooks, books, periodical publications, databases. All workplaces have the broadband Internet connection. They assured that the College recourses are adequate and accessible. The library has a reading room and an Internet Reading Room. Due to the extensive improvement of the Internet network, students can also bring and use their own computers, tablet PCs, and other devices that require access to the Internet. Students have access to Utenos kolegija wireless Internet connection and can connect to EDUROAM network.

The external panel finds that the physical, informational and financial resources are suitable and adequate to ensure an effective learning process.

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

The SER (pg. 42) reports that during the analysed period, the study infrastructure was upgraded following Utenos kolegija Strategic Activity Plans for 2019-2021 and for 2022-2024, where the upgrading of information technology and software of the library, laboratories and auditoriums, increasing resources in the English and Russian languages in the funds, and other measures are planned. Funds for the renewal and strengthening of the infrastructure are allocated from both the EU Structural Funds and Utenos kolegija own means.

The need for important resources that directly affect the quality of the studies was discussed and the external panel has noted that work towards the improvement of the facilities has

started. The process of planning and upgrading the resources, necessary to carry out the studies is defined in Utenos kolegija Study Quality Management System.

In addition to consideration of the local standards/expectations, the panel notes that decision must consider international standards. For example, in teaching electrotherapy the latest evidence-based modalities should be addressed, and there should be sufficient equipment to meet the size of the student group. At this point in time the equipment used in electrotherapy was very limited. This requires an on-going investment.

The expert panel finds that the planning and upgrading of resources needed to carry out the field studies is adequate.

#### ***Strengths and weaknesses of this evaluation area:***

##### ***(1) Strengths:***

1. The size of student groups in practical lessons enables very individual teaching and support.
2. Student's satisfaction with the existing teaching facilities is good.

##### ***(2) Weaknesses:***

None.

### **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 Head of the Department is the main coordinator of RSF PSP implementation, and reports to the Dean. The Dean of Medicine Faculty is responsible for the quality of studies that are implemented at the Faculty.

The process and documentation is organised in line with the national legislation and the regulations of Utenos kolegija. For the latter the quality management system is regulated by Study Program Committee Regulations and it is managed by the Chairperson. The process is executed in a structured sequence that includes a student survey at the end of the autumn semester. On a yearly basis, normally in September, an analysis of the study programme is held. At the end of the academic year, the study program committee prepares a Progress Report on the Study Programme Quality Assurance that is presented and discussed in the Study Quality Committee, approved by the resolution of the Medicine Faculty Board.

The internal quality assurance systems are present at the Utenos kolegija. The responsibilities are clearly distributed and outlined.

The Expert Panel concludes that the internal quality assurance system of the physiotherapy study programme is sufficient.

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

The internal stakeholders identified at Utenos kolegija include the students, teachers, Utenos kolegija management, and the external stakeholders include the alumni, employers, and parents.

The input of the stakeholders is mainly present through representation on Utenos kolegija governance as members of the management and academic self-government bodies; in the process of development and implementation of study programmes as study programme committee members, as members of the Qualification Commission of final theses and qualification examinations; and in the delivery of lectures. They also provide practice placement opportunities for students (SER pg. 45).

The Expert Panel concludes that the involvement of stakeholders in the internal quality assurance is sufficient.

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

The responsibility for the collection of data on studies is distributed across a number of different departments, for e.g. the Department of Studies is responsible for the information about students, their progress and result indicators; the Faculty Management keeps records of the study performance of students of individual study programmes; anonymised graduate employment rates and employers' survey results are compiled by the Career and Communication Department; information on international mobility and international events is collected by the individual professional departments and the Department of International Relations; information on the tools for e-learning (teaching) competence development is collected by the E-Learning Centre. This appears confusing and lacks a chain of control.

In line with the Utenos kolegija principle of accountability to the public, the main results of the internal evaluation of RSF PSP are discussed at the meetings of the Study Programme Committee, the Department, the Dean's Office, the Faculty Board, the Academic Board and the Faculty Teachers' Meetings. Updates of RSF PSP, student enrolment results, results of external expert evaluation, improvement plans, etc., are publicly available on Utenos kolegija website. The website also provides information towards the outcomes of the surveys, indicating how the student proposals were taken into account and identifying areas for improvement.

The Faculty Management supervises the plans for the improvement process, which was presented during site visit.

The expert panel concludes that the collection, use and publication of information on studies, their evaluation and improvement processes and outcomes is sufficient and merits a positive evaluation.

### *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*

Physiotherapy students' opinions are sought via a student survey at the end of each semester, however students trust in the process appears low and this is based on two factors: first, the students feel that there is little to no action taken on the recommendations, and second they don't trust the system. Results of these surveys were not presented and the response rate was not indicated (Presented in SER on page 47).

On the basis of the information provided in SER, the expert panel concludes that the opinion of the physiotherapy students about the quality of the studies at Utenos kolegija is sought, even though the response rate is very low. Students should be encouraged to provide feedback as this is important for the evaluation of the programme of studies. Measure should be put in place to increase trust in the system by ensuring anonymity and by taking action.

The expert panel concludes that the opinion of the field students about the quality of the studies at the HEI is sufficient and merits a positive evaluation.

***Strengths and weaknesses of this evaluation area:***

***(1) Strengths:***

1. Students and partners take a part in assessment and internal evaluation process to improve the program at the College, which helps to improve the quality management process.

***(2) Weaknesses:***

1. Low trust ratings by students towards in the process that seeks their opinions.



## IV. EXAMPLES OF EXCELLENCE

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

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

## V. RECOMMENDATIONS

Evaluation Area	Recommendations for the Evaluation Area (study cycle)
Intended and achieved learning outcomes and curriculum	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a) Make the links to the international benchmarks (Enphe and/or World Physiotherapy) more explicit.</li> <li>b) Consider the offering of optional elective subjects that are more relevant to the physiotherapy profession.</li> </ul>
Links between science (art) and studies	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a) Integrate research activities for both the academic staff and for the students.</li> <li>b) Keep a documented record of the scientific activities, e.g., journal publications.</li> </ul>
Student admission and support	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a) Actively consider alternative arrangements of international exchanges beyond the strict minimum duration imposed by the ERASMUS+ programme to facilitate mobility for those students constrained by family/work commitments.</li> </ul>
Teaching and learning, student performance and graduate employment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a) Incorporate innovative, interactive teaching methods to improve students' theoretical and practical knowledge.</li> </ul>
Teaching staff	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a) To meet international standards, the expectation is most of the teaching staff would be physiotherapists. The external panel recommends increasing the number of teachers with physiotherapy background up to at least 60%.</li> <li>b) Physiotherapist teachers should be encouraged to be members of the Lithuanian physiotherapy association as this would add value to the programme by means of sharing and collaboration on a national level.</li> </ul>
Learning facilities and resources	-
Study quality management and public information	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a) Encourage more student participation in the evaluation process by directly addressing the students' low trust ratings due to their perception that no action is taken on their feedback. One way of addressing this could be to engage in evaluation mid-way through the semester to effect any changes by the end of the semester.</li> </ul>

## VI. SUMMARY

The expert panel reviewed all the documents submitted as part the evaluation process of the Rehabilitation Study Field, Physiotherapy Study Programme, 1st cycle of studies (3 years) at Utenos kolegija, leading to a Professional Bachelor in Health Sciences, professional qualification of Physiotherapist, including the self-evaluation report. An onsite, in-person visit was held on the 7th November 2022. The members of the panel were immensely grateful for the warm welcome, and for the openness and honesty of all the participants, and for addressing all the questions.

The task of the expert panel was to read the papers submitted, especially the Self Evaluation Report, and to connect the evidence, to get a better understanding of the work that is done within the Physiotherapy study programme at the Utenos kolegija. The preparation of the self-evaluation report was important and helpful.

The aim of the Physiotherapy field and study cycle at Utenos kolegija is to train professionals who can provide independent services, or services provided in collaboration within a team of rehabilitation professionals, as described, that would reflect the state of the art in the field of physiotherapy. The general impression is overall positive and is based on the feedback received from all those involved in the meetings, including the program leaders, staff/teachers, students, alumni, and social partners.

The expert panel finds that the programme of studies conforms to the general needs and expectations of the Lithuanian society, and that there is a strong link to society. This gives the expert panel confidence that the programme is valued and relevant to society. However more needs to be done to link the programme to a wider international market.

The study aims, outcome and content of the Physiotherapy study programme are geared strongly towards the needs of the Lithuanian labour market. The physiotherapy study programme is based on a philosophy of pragmatism and the concept of problem-based learning is applied. The learning outcomes are not written in a manner that is universally understood, and this places the graduates at a disadvantage when seeking the recognition of their qualifications in a foreign jurisdiction.

The link between studies and science is good on one hand because the College has invested in the purchase of new equipment, however more research and research publications are expected.

Student admission and support processes demonstrate academic flexibility with implemented hybrid learning systems, and well-established support system for the students. Yet, the admission score for state non-funded places in the study program is lower than the state recommended admission score. International mobility amongst physiotherapy students is very low.

The teaching staff levels are adequate however only six from the 27 members have a physiotherapy education background. These six teachers are not members of the Lithuanian

Physiotherapy Association which would be beneficial for national and international exposure. The ongoing demographic renewal among teachers as well as the young researchers and practitioners who are just commencing their pedagogical activities are contributing to implement the studies. Close co-operation between the different generations of teaching staff is commendable.

The facilities and learning resources for theoretical lectures are adequate.

The procedures for quality management are implemented, and the recommendation from previous evaluations to involve teachers, students, graduates and social partners in shared process of decision-making, is noted.

This final report reflects the findings of the expert panel and offer recommendations to continue evolving. This is fundamental. Quality assurance as a process is irrelevant without quality enhancement, at all stages. Quality assurance demands that a system of recognised procedures to establish standards, as well as means of reaching these standards, be in place. But not taking deliberate action to continually improve education programs, and practices, would render quality assurance an orphan. This is important especially in the context of the recommendations that are made, and that need to be addressed in a timely manner.

These are a few of the key strengths that we wish to highlight:

- The aims, results and outcomes of the Physiotherapy study programme are geared strongly towards the needs of the Lithuanian labour market.
- The Physiotherapy study programme is based on a philosophy of pragmatism and the concept of problem-based learning is applied.
- Very good conditions for academic flexibility.
- Well established support system for the students.
- Employer satisfaction is high.
- Continuous teachers' professional development.

Expert panel chairperson signature:

Dr. John Xerri de Caro