



CENTRE FOR QUALITY ASSESSMENT IN HIGHER EDUCATION

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**EVALUATION REPORT**  
**STUDY FIELD of TOURISM AND LEISURE**  
at Viešoji įstaiga Kolpingo kolegija

**Expert panel:**

1. Associate professor Detlev Remy (panel chairperson), *academic*;
2. Senior lecturer Kristina Henriksson, *academic*;
3. Senior lecturer Anders Johannes Justenlund, *academic*;
4. Mrs Zita Krūkonytė-Teryaeva, *representative of social partners*;
5. Mr Mantas Jonas Vilimas, *students' representative*.

**Evaluation coordinator – Ms Evelina Keturakytė**

Report language – English

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## Study Field Data\*

Title of the study programme	<b><i>Ecotourism</i></b>
State code	6531LX048
Type of studies	College studies
Cycle of studies	First
Mode of study and duration (in years)	Full-time (3 years) Part-time (4 years)
Credit volume	180
Qualification degree and (or) professional qualification	Professional Bachelor of Business Management
Language of instruction	Lithuanian, English
Minimum education required	Secondary education
Registration date of the study programme	27 December 2021

*\* if there are joint / two-fields / interdisciplinary study programmes in the study field, please designate it in the foot-note*

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## I. INTRODUCTION

### 1.1. BACKGROUND OF THE EVALUATION PROCESS

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

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

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

On the basis of this external evaluation report of the study field SKVC takes a decision to accredit 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 (hereinafter referred to as the Procedure) as approved by the Director of Centre for Quality Assessment in Higher Education on 31 December 2019 [Order No. V-149](#). The site visit to the HEI was conducted by the panel on 5 May and 26 May (*additional meeting with teaching staff*), 2022. Due to the coronavirus pandemic, the Site Visit was organised online using video-conferencing tool (Zoom).

*Associate professor Detlev Remy, Expert panel's Chair Person; Associate Professor & Deputy Cluster Director (Vice Dean DSB cluster Design and specialized Businesses) at Singapore Institute of Technology, Singapore;*

*Mrs Kristina Henriksson, Senior Lecturer at Laurea University of Applied Sciences, Finland;*

*Mr Anders Johannes Justenlund, Business Developer/Senior Lecturer at University College Northern Denmark; Director of Marketing, International Council on Hotel, Restaurant & Institutional Education (ICHRIE), Denmark; External Professor at Institute Paul Bocuse, Lyon France;*

*Mrs Zita Krūkonytė-Teryaeva, Representative of Social Partners; Human Resources Management Consultant at HR Hint Online, Lithuania;*

*Mr Mantas Jonas Vilimas, Student's Representative; Studies of Administration of Institutions and Companies at Kauno kolegija, Lithuania.*

### 1.3. GENERAL INFORMATION

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

No.	Name of the document
1.	List of staff permanently working in the College in the field of the study programme
2	Description of the Procedure for Organising Student Internships (in Lithuanian)
3.	Code of Ethics (in Lithuanian)

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

Viešoji įstaiga Kolpingo kolegija (hereafter referred to as the College, KOK) is a non-governmental institution of higher education. It provides the first-cycle higher education college studies. KOK is a non-profit limited liability public legal entity operating as a public institution. Aside from other conducted programmes at KOK, since 1 of September 2012, KOK has conducted the first cycle study programme of Ecotourism (state code - 6531LX048) (hereafter referred to as the programme, ET, SP) for professional Bachelor of Business Management in the field of Tourism and Leisure.

The purpose of this programme is to foster the general erudition of students, provide them with the theoretical basis of the study field, and develop the professional competencies necessary for independent work. The ET programme in the field of Tourism and Leisure is oriented towards preparation for professional activities.

On 1 of January 2021, 4 accredited first cycle professional bachelor study programmes in three study fields (Social Work, Business and Tourism and Leisure) were entered in the State Register of Study and Training Programmes and Qualification. At the beginning of 2021, KOK had 273 students and 34 employees – 22 teaching staff (9,1 posts).

In the field of Tourism and Leisure, ET is the sole first cycle professional bachelor programme at the public institution KOK.

In 2012 KOK started a professional bachelor programme in Ecotourism. The external evaluation of this programme has been conducted for the first time in 2015, and already at this stage the Expert panel raised concerns about the rather small size of the College as well the overall direction, with four programmes on offer.

## II. GENERAL ASSESSMENT

*Tourism and Leisure* study field and **first cycle** at Viešoji įstaiga Kolpingo 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	2
2.	Links between science (art) and studies	2
3.	Student admission and support	3
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	3
	<b>Total:</b>	<b>19</b>

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

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

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

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

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

### III. STUDY FIELD ANALYSIS

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

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

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

*(1) Factual situation*

According to the SER (p. 6), the College carries out in the field of Tourism and Leisure studies “Ecotourism which corresponds with strategic priorities of KOK activity: KOK is the only institution of higher education in the Kaunas region that trains ET specialists, and the programme itself is unique, timely and oriented towards eco-thinking and sustainable development. The aims and expected outcomes of the assessed ET study programme are based on academic and professional requirements. The study field itself is conducted according to the demands and tendencies of the labour market.” The SER explains “the aims of the assessed study programme match the aims to provide students with the opportunity to acquire a solid theoretical basis and competencies in the field of tourism and recreation, constructively apply the theoretical knowledge in the broad field of scientific and professional activity; to offer students suitable measures for business and analysis of its environment, to develop the skill of solving theoretical and practical problems of tourism and recreation, to continue the studies and research of tourism and related multidisciplinary fields; to develop general competences of the student by using tourism studies.” The study programme is therefore aligned to the needs of society and the labour market, as ecotourism though still a niche is growing in importance. The SER report identifies the professional activity areas as nature and culture assets, whereas students apply management, marketing, environmental resources and economic factors to practise, and at the same time adhere to the principles of sustainable development, task integration and continuity.

*(2) Expert judgement/indicator analysis*

The Expert panel believes that there is a need for such an ecotourism study programme, and the aims and outcomes of the field are aligned to societal needs and the labour market to a certain extent. And the uniqueness of the programme cannot be disputed. Although the number of students do not support at this stage the claim to run the programme on Ecotourism solely.

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

*(1) Factual situation*

The SER (p. 10) states that “The ET study programme aims to train modern qualified tourism and recreational specialists that can apply acquired skills in practice, have the required competencies and skills to analyse and critically evaluate the tourism sector activities, create and develop the following principles of sustainable development and ecotourism while successfully coordinating the ecotourism aims with economics, management, marketing, finance, psychology, adapting to the environment of modern technologies, basing their activities on Christian morality, constantly improving and striving to contribute to the

countries sustainable development. ET study programme is oriented towards the opportunities to explore the world through the principles of sustainable development and ecotourism and trip/travel types by organising them for Lithuanian and foreign tourists.”

### *(2) Expert judgement/indicator analysis*

Expert panel notices that morality cannot be a criterion to evaluate higher education studies unless it concerns medical studies or religious studies leading to a degree within those fields.

The programme contains a lot of small-sized courses, while a set of large modules that grow the students’ knowledge in the topics might serve the purpose better.

Internships of short lengths only introduce a business to a student. During internships students would benefit from learning more about how to work in the position offered by the organisation or business and more about the mission and vision and operations of the same organisation or business.

During the site visit the expert panel did not get an answer whether the teachers can define the level of how these graduates can perform better in a higher education manner at work compared to vocational level graduates.

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

#### *(1) Factual situation*

The description of Tourism and Leisure field studies in the group of study fields of Business and Public Administration is not currently approved; therefore, the special requirements for the programme of this study field are not regulated yet.

According to the SER report (p.9), the scope and structure of the ET study programme comply with the following legal requirements:

- The Law of the Republic of Lithuania on Higher Education and Research;
- Order No. V-1168 of the Minister of Education and Science of the Republic of Lithuania “On Approval of Description of General Requirements for the Provision of Studies” of 12 December 2016 (current version active since 15 of June 2018);
- Order No. V-1075 of the Minister of Education and Science of the Republic of Lithuania “On Approval of the List of Study Fields and Groups of Studies under which Studies are carried out in Higher Education Institutions, their Change Procedure, the Qualification of the Qualification Degree Framework and the Names of Study Programmes” of 1 December 2016 (current version active since 7 of August 2021);
- Order No. V-1012 of the Minister of Education and Science of the Republic of Lithuania “On Approval of Descriptor of Study Cycles” of 16 November 2016 (current version active since 15 of October 2020);
- Resolution No. 535 of the Government of the Republic of Lithuania “On the Approval of the Description of the Lithuanian Qualifications Framework” of 4 May 2010 (current version active since 26 of July 2019);
- Order No. ISAK-2194 of the Minister of Education and Science of the Republic of Lithuania “On the Approval of the Evaluation System of the Study Results” of 27 July 2008;
- Order No. ISAK-1026 of the Minister of Education and Science of the Republic of Lithuania “On the Approval of Descriptors of Full-time and part-time studies” of 15 May 2009.



**Table No. 1** Programme's compliance to general requirements for *first cycle study programmes of college level*

<b>Criteria</b>	<b>General legal requirements</b>	<b>In the Programmes</b>
Scope of the programme in ECTS	180 or 210 or 240 ECTS	180
ECTS for the study field	No less than 120 ECTS	157
ECTS for studies specified by College or optional studies	No more than 120 ECTS	23
ECTS for internship	No less than 30 ECTS	32
ECTS for final thesis (project)	No less than 9 ECTS	9
Practical training and other practice placements	No less than one third of the programme	~ 40 % (1909 hours = 71 (+/-) credits);
Contact hours	No less than 20 % of learning	~ 43 % (2095 hours = 78 (+/-) credits);

According to the SER (p.12), "ET study programme is prepared under the legal requirements, internal documents, and regulations at KOK by following the KOK mission and strategic activity aims. The study duration is three years (6 semesters) when studying full-time and four years (8 semesters) when studying part-time. ET study programme consists of the following subjects: 1. *General collegiate subjects*, 2. *Subjects of the study field*, 3. *Internships*, 4. *Optional study subjects*. General collegiate subjects make up 23 credits or 13% of the programme, subjects of the study field make up 106 credits or 59% of the programme, internships – 32 credits or 18%, optional study subjects – 10 credits or 6%, final thesis – 9 credits or 5%."

Furthermore, the SER (p. 12) explains that "the aim of the ET study programme and the difficulty of the expected study outcomes complies with the requirements of the first-cycle collegiate studies descriptor. To achieve the aim of the programme, five study outcomes are set. The outcomes encompass cultivation of knowledge and its application, skills ensuring independent activity, abilities to conduct research, plan, conduct and analyse activities, levels of unique, social, and personal skills that are important for the cultivation of the personality that can communicate, adapt to constant changes of knowledge and technology advancement. Part of the study outcomes is realised through general collegiate subjects. Other study outcomes are realised through subjects of the study field and optional study subjects. Studies of the mentioned subjects form skills required for the professional activity and are based on knowledge of tourism, recreation, and other fields of study."

*(2) Expert judgement/indicator analysis*

According to the SER and the Table No. 1 expert panel concludes that the study programme complies with general requirements for *first cycle study programmes of college level*.

Expert panel notices that the internships are fragmented throughout the studies. It would serve students more to spend longer times at the internship places and to study the operations more and learn from the time there, which is in line with best practice among tourism colleges.

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

#### *(1) Factual situation*

According to the SER (pp. 12-13), “The connections of assessed ET study programme outcomes with the results of study subjects and criteria and methods of their evaluation are provided in the description of each subject... Primary methods of study: lectures, discussions, observation, demonstration of practical skills, analysis of cases and situations, work in pairs, groups and others that create conditions for students to achieve learning outcomes. For assessment of learning outcomes, the evaluation of learning outcomes and their criteria are provided in the description of the subject. Study methods allow to achieve the ET programme results, provide knowledge, and cultivate skills required in professional activity.”

#### *(2) Expert judgement/indicator analysis*

The College uses varying methods of instruction and of supporting the learning process of students.

More language learning is needed for the sake of their positions in the future working with international clients. Since during the site visit, the College informed that all teaching can be carried out also in English, it is purposeful to try to engage in recruiting students from other countries to make the study environment more international and thus also an environment to practise languages.

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

#### *(1) Factual situation*

The College explains in the SER report that “the training of ET specialists is associated not only with the transfer and learning of theoretical knowledge, formation of skills but also with the creation of new scientific knowledge and its application in practice. Rapidly changing environment and approach based on eco-thinking encourage improving the training of specialists, fostering their activities, implementing the method of teamwork, managing to make individual tourism plans and realise them, and conducting applied research.” Furthermore, “the theory is closely related to practice, thus creating the premise to improve the teaching, cultivate the students’ independence and form the most important general skills required for the profession – communication, ability to independently make decisions, ethics, responsibility, critical thinking, and others. During internships, the conditions for applying acquired theoretical knowledge by improving necessary skills are created. The format of independent practice tasks – writing a diary, public presentations, discussions, analysis reports on acquired experience during practice – helps cultivate self-reflection, public speaking, and critical thinking skills... During the whole process of studies, students have five internships”.

#### *(2) Expert judgement/indicator analysis*

Sustainability is a good approach for training and educating students in the field of tourism and leisure. Nevertheless, the study programme is limiting the employability of graduates which perhaps risks the students to end up in other fields of work.

The expert panel has concerns that ecotourism per se does not generate a sufficient number of jobs, thus, widening the scope of the programme will enhance employability.

The programme could cover a wider area of tourism to enhance the employability of graduates. Should the programme be internationally implemented, it would increase the employability of graduates.

Internships are so short that it is questionable whether students meet the conditions to “apply acquired theoretical knowledge by improving necessary skills.”

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

#### *(1) Factual situation*

The SER (p. 14) explains how students can individualise their studies as follows: “ET study programme is conducted full-time (3 years, six semesters) and part-time (4 years, eight semesters) study forms. KOK provides an opportunity to study according to the individual study scheduling to ensure that every student's learning needs are satisfied. The individual study schedule is made following the study programme and individual study plans. Individual study schedule regulates the distribution of study subjects in time, form and order of the assignments, number and time of consultations, form and order of evaluation, dates of beginning and end of a session.”.

Subsequently, the College has provisions for students which wish to personalise the structure of their study programme.

#### *(2) Expert judgement/indicator analysis*

There are procedures to help students to plan their studies in an individual manner, so that the Expert panel believes that College has good provisions for this important student aspect.

It is recommended to develop a policy outlining all aspects of support and publish it on the College website for easy access.

Language skills of staff and students varied; the field of tourism requires a good, professional command of several languages. Therefore, it is recommended to add more language training and options, and credits should be allocated accordingly.

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

#### *(1) Factual situation*

According to the SER (p. 16-18), “The final examination or the preparation and defence of the final thesis is organised. The results are evaluated following the Procedure for the preparation, Defence and Evaluation of Final Theses at the KOK and KOK Regulations for Studies... The preparation of the final thesis allows evaluating the level of student's professional competencies, their level of independence while conducting applied research, ability to use professional knowledge, practical skills, ability to collect, analyse, summarise the results of research, draw conclusions and provide recommendations, professionally present their work. The content of the final thesis corresponds with the content of the tourism and leisure field of studies and involves relevant work areas for ecotourism specialists.” Though the SER report outlines clear guidelines for theses procedures, which covers major aspects as described above, any involvement of social partners has not been indicated, such as suggesting topics.

#### *(2) Expert judgement/indicator analysis*

The expert panel believes that there should be a clear and structured final theses policy, outlining all aspects from topic choice and involvement of stakeholders to plagiarism, and its

implications. This policy allows the linkage between academia and industry, and ensures integrity and consistency in this regard.

A plagiarism program of quality must be used so that quotations are disregarded by the programme.

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

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

- 1. Aims and objectives of the study programmes are clearly outlined, and aligned to societal needs.*

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

- 1. There are not enough language learning options and courses.*
- 2. The programme is too fragmented, with lots of different subjects in the form of small courses, scattered around the curriculum.*
- 3. Internships are too fragmented and thus too short.*

## **3.2. LINKS BETWEEN SCIENCE (ART) AND STUDIES**

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

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

#### ***(1) Factual situation***

According to the SER report (p. 18), at KOK, the activities of applied research and experimental development (R&D) are conducted under the Law of the Republic of Lithuania on Higher Education and Research, regulation no. 14 of 1 March 2017 of Government of the Republic of Lithuania establishing the procedure for the allocation of budget funds for research, experimental development, and artistic activities carried out by institutions of science and studies, KOK Strategic Action Plan For 2021-2023 approved by Decision No. 33 of the sole stakeholder (owner) of KOK of 18 January 2021 and other legal acts and documents.

One of the strategic priorities in the KOK Strategic Action Plan for 2021-2023 is the development of applied research to contribute to the sustainable development of the Kaunas region and the country. The strategic aim is to conduct applied research and experimental development activities by involving the KOK academic community, business and other social partners, and students and ensuring the integration of applied research and practical activities outcomes and the most advanced knowledge and innovations into the study process. The outcomes of applied research and experimental development activity of Tourism and Leisure study field contribute to the realisation of the formulated and defined objectives of applied research and experimental development activities in the KOK Strategic Action Plan.

#### ***(2) Expert judgement/indicator analysis***

During the online site visit at KOK it is clearly communicated that the institution has a keen focus on sustainability and attempts to implement a keen focus on this in a majority of activities within research, consultancy and teaching. KOK still has a lot of work in front of them to succeed in this mission. Table 8 (p. 21 in the SER), states that only 2 of the commissioned research projects (out of a total of 9) focus directly on sustainability issues. This indicates that KOK has a very broad understanding of the term sustainability within tourism. It is very positive that KOK focus on sustainability; however it is recommended that

the institution also clearly defines how they understand and will work with this broad and complex term (e.g. focus on environmental perspectives, or social/cultural issues or both).

A clear institutional definition will help improve the keen focus on sustainability within the commissioned assignments, scientific articles, consultancy, and in development projects in collaboration with students and social partners.

It is further recommended that KOK implements a stronger international focus related to their scientific activities. This to verify the very important work and research related to sustainability and to ensure a high quality related to this important work. Especially when it comes to sustainability issues no institution can stand alone. In order to increase activities and the quality of these activities it is important that research active College staff draw on the latest research within sustainability issues related to tourism/hospitality.

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

#### *(1) Factual situation*

According to the SER report (p. 22), while actively conducting scientific activities, academic teachers of the assessed study field communicate the latest achievements in science and technologies to students during the lectures, seminars, consultations, supervision of students' final theses or preparation for student conferences.

KOK quality management processes enable KOK to organise the involvement and participation of students in applied research that makes up an integral part of studies. At KOK, science and studies connection concepts are effectively coordinated in the Tourism and Leisure study field by considering the programme objectives, expected outcomes, and psychological peculiarities of students' personalities. After considering this, the work with students is organised in various forms: developing ideas in group discussions, conducting individual analytical work, encouraging to research what is already created or research new, unexplored areas. By following the results of scientific research, the integration of KOK studies content and the latest scientific achievements is conducted in various forms. Furthermore KOK participates actively in student conferences nationally where students present their own academic work.

#### *(2) Expert judgement/indicator analysis*

Overall KOK has the right intentions and goals for linking the latest developments with the content of studies. Students are actively participating in conferences, College members are active when it comes to research, commissioned projects and consultancy. However in relation to work processes and detailed plans for how to achieve these goals little information is given. The SER mentions (p. 23) that academic teachers update their study subjects by integrating the results of research, but fails to mention what this exactly means and what specific type of research College members are doing. It is recommended that KOK focus more on the content of what type of research they are conducting in order to support the intentions of a strong education programme in sustainable tourism. It is further suggested that KOK focus more on the interrelations between Applied academic research/development projects, teaching, and student involvement, so all these perspectives align into sustainability practices and understanding. In order to secure a high quality in this work, it is further recommended that the College link their research to international research done within the fields of tourism/hospitality. At this point current research seems to be more linked to generic disciplines within KOK.

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

#### *(1) Factual situation*

According to the SER report (p. 23), one KOK aims to strengthen the relationship between science and studies to acquire unique knowledge and skills. Academic teachers would get involved in students' research to create a unique and rich educational environment.

During the study process, students' abilities to understand the environment and its phenomena by themselves and evaluate them in the context of students' value constructs are consistently developed.

Therefore, the KOK Tourism and Leisure field students are encouraged to prepare research projects to expand on a chosen topic and foresee results. KOK students are encouraged to prepare potential research projects with the formulated topic and foreseen results. Students are encouraged to conduct their research projects on a small scope and draft a report on them.

#### *(2) Expert judgement/indicator analysis*

When it comes to involvement of students into research activities KOK is doing a fine job. Students are involved in R&D projects when these are commissioned by social partners and support research active College members when it comes to field research practices. On top of this students can also use data collected for their own study projects. KOK makes sure that students have the opportunity to present their research at national and international conferences. It is not mentioned in the SER and during the online site visit how many of these projects that focus on sustainability (however this is not a requirement for the programme either). This evaluation suggests that KOK should continue the current practice related to student involvement into scientific processes. When the quality level of the applied scientific research increases the skills and competences of students will increase as well.

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

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

- 1. Student involvement in scientific processes is working well. Continue this work.*

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

- 1. Detailed plans for how overall scientific goals are met is superficial and needs to be updated so each College member knows what to focus on related to sustainability.*
- 2. Sustainability understanding in relation research and issues is not linked clearly to international definitions and contemporary research. Applied research within this area should be based on internationally recognized research.*
- 3. ECOTourism is not visual enough in the R&D activities it should be in order to support a very specialised educational programme.*



### 3.3. STUDENT ADMISSION AND SUPPORT

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

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

##### *(1) Factual situation*

Information about the *Ecotourism* programme, admission criteria for it, and selection criteria can be found on the College's website, as well as information is stored in the Association of Lithuanian Higher Education Institutions for Centralised Admissions (LAMA BPO) system, through which admission to higher education institutions is carried out. The minimum requirements for students entering this programme are set by the Minister of Education, Science and Sport of the Republic of Lithuania in 2017. August 30 by order no. V-661 "On the Approval of the Minimum Indicators of Learning Outcomes of Persons Applying for Undergraduate and Integrated Studies in Higher Education Institutions from 2020" and the Rules for Admission of the College 2021.

The selection system in the College is applied objectively – the student's maturity exam grades, annual grades are evaluated and finally additional points are added for certain achievements that are determined by the College. According to the statistics provided by SER (p. 26), it can be seen that the number of students applying to study in this programme is declining every year, and the number of applicants is accepted.

According to the SER (p. 26), an average of 25 students were admitted to the programme each year, but in 2020 the number dropped sharply to 5, as about 70 percent fewer students applied to the program compared to the previous years.

##### *(2) Expert judgement/indicator analysis*

The expert panel found that the criteria for admission and selection of students are public, accessible and appropriate for both Lithuanian and international students.

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

##### *(1) Factual situation*

According to the SER (p. 27) KOK evaluates and recognises the learning outcomes of partial studies, previous and informal learning by following two documents: The Description of the Procedure for Crediting Learning Outcomes of Partial-Studies (2020) and The Description of Procedure for Assessment and Recognition of Competences Acquired through Non-Formal and Informal Education (2021).

General principles for evaluating and recognising qualifications and competencies acquired through partial studies, non-formal and informal education are as follows: accessibility; transparency and objectiveness; equivalence; flexibility.

During the three-year period, 4 students applied for the recognition of study subjects / credits. The study subjects were recognized for all of them during the three-year period, 4 students applied for the recognition of study subjects / credits. The study subjects were recognized for all of them.

## *(2) Expert judgement/indicator analysis*

The expert panel found that the College supports the recognition of qualifications from other educational institutions and follows ethical principles in this process. However, the documents governing the crediting of training are complicated to find on the College website and online.

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

#### *(1) Factual situation*

Based on SER (p. 29), one of the KOK priority areas for improvement provided in the KOK Strategic Action Plan for 2021-2023 is related to the development of internationality to increase the visibility of KOK in the international environment. KOK is a member of the international Kolping network that unites more than 60 countries globally and has more than 400 000 members. KOK is also a member of such international networks as UASNET – European network of Universities of Applied Sciences, FEECA – The European Federation for Catholic Adult Education, IFCU – The International Federation of Catholic Universities.

In ET studies, ten agreements are signed, based on which students and academic teachers can go to the chosen country to teach, study, or do an internship. The main priority is to have a limited number of dependable strategic partners and constantly maintain active, good academic relationships with them instead of having many agreements.

Only 12 students went to study with the ERASMUS programme during the 3-year period, and only 2 students went to study abroad during this period. During the assessment period, there were no incoming students to study in ET programme or do an internship.

#### *(2) Expert judgement/indicator analysis*

Students should be able to do an internship or study in the country of their choice in the European Union, while students can now choose from only ten institutions. There are also very few students going to practice or study abroad, and this is critical for Ecotourism students, but the College has a validated strategy to address this issue.

The College's strategy of having few partners with whom it would be actively involved in various activities does not seem to work, as no lecturer or student from abroad came during the 3-year period, so the College should increase cooperation with active international partners.

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

#### *(1) Factual situation*

Based on SER (p. 31), the following internal documents of the College regulate learning resources, student support and help:

- Regulations for studies;
- Description of the Procedure for Monitoring Students' Progress and Providing Support;
- Description of the Procedure for Administration of Compensation for Paid Tuition Fees and Compiling a List;
- Description of the Procedure for Monitoring the Implementation and Enforcement of the Equal Opportunities Policy;
- Description of the Procedure for the Preparation, Defence and Evaluation of the Final Theses;



- Description of the Procedure for Submitting and Examining Students' Appeals for Evaluation of Knowledge and others.

Students are informed that they can seek psychological help at any time, and teachers are aware of risk factors that encourage students to seek help.

According to the SER financial support is provided for students:

- The founder's scholarship to cover the tuition fees is awarded based on student's needs for social support;
- The one-time founder's scholarship is awarded to students with excellent academic performance, who are actively participating in social, cultural and student social activities while representing KOK (SER, Table 20).

KOK has created conditions of studying for students with limited capability for work.

As stated in the SER the College has signed agreements with Vytautas Magnus University, Kaunas department of Vilnius Cooperative College, and the Kaunas University of Technology on the rent of dormitory rooms. KOK aims to consider the individual needs of students with disabilities, listen to them and understand them, create conditions to participate indirectly and (or) contribute to creating favourable conditions for learning, studying, and living for them at the KOK and outside it. To identify whether the various support for students is adequate, the student surveys are conducted regularly, results of which are analysed, evaluated and, in case of problem identification, the actions are taken to remove it, and students would be informed.

#### *(2) Expert judgement/indicator analysis*

The expert panel believes that students receive all kinds of support from the College, thus, the expert panel is satisfied with this aspect.

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

#### *(1) Factual situation*

As stated in the SER the academic support for students encompasses the following main aspects:

- easily accessible and timely information about studies while choosing the field of studies;
- constant student consultations on concerns regarding studies;
- constant consultations for academic teachers to clear the concerns on study subjects.

Consultations for students are provided as follows:

- consultations and financial support are provided for students with disabilities;
- consultations on social scholarships are organised;
- consultations on State-subsidised loans (deadlines, document management) are organised;
- consultations on opportunities to participate in the Erasmus+ mobility programme are organised;
- due to financial struggles, the deadline for paying tuition fees may be postponed.

#### *(2) Expert judgement/indicator analysis*

The expert panel found that the College provides sufficient information about studies and actively consults students if anything is unclear.

The College also analyses student feedback and makes improvements accordingly.

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

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

1. *The College takes student feedback into account and improves studies.*

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

1. *The College attracts very few students to the Ecotourism programme.*
2. *The College has few international partners and is therefore not attractive to international students.*
3. *Not all documents are available, e.g. The Description of the Procedure for Crediting Learning Outcomes of Partial-Studies at KOK (2020).*
4. *Psychological help is provided by a College lecturer, which can be seen as problematic.*

### **3.4. TEACHING AND LEARNING, STUDENT PERFORMANCE AND GRADUATE EMPLOYMENT**

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

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

###### ***(1) Factual situation***

The SER (p. 33-4) describes how the College has organised the study process. The SP is offered in full-time and part-time modes. Full-time studies annually amount to 60 ECTS, which are carried out during weekdays. Part-time studies annually amount to 45 ECTS which are carried out in scheduled sessions four times during a semester. The academic year is scheduled including the exams, practices, auditorium work, etc.

According to the SER, the College uses a cumulative assessment system, and the evaluation of students' studies meet the requirements of the SP. The evaluation system is clear and public. When a study unit or module begins, the teacher informs the students with the facts of the studies in question, including the process of how the learning will be evaluated. There is a variety of final evaluation assessment forms, such as, for example, quizzes, term papers, seminars. Weighting coefficients are in use. When knowledge assessed on a study unit surpasses 50% the student receives a positive grade. Student evaluation is available in the online system for students in question. Resits are available for students once free of charge. Students may also appeal if they are not in concert with the evaluation received.

Individual, independent work is organised and planned by the teacher of the study unit as well as the evaluation process. Students can also work independently in groups or pairs as well. There are many options on how a study unit is organised and in which formation of people working together (respectively alone). The learning objectives can be in increasing knowledge, or generating practical skills or new skills in implementing knowledge learned.

###### ***(2) Expert judgement/indicator analysis***

The expert panel considers one main issue of the programme to be the size of the annual intake classes. Too small cohort sizes do not support learning in groups, and if students drop out then it damages the group spirit. Internationalisation of offered studies is relevant to increase the intake and professionalise the student group's aims and path.

The other issue is the rather scattered curriculum which needs a thorough review.

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

#### *(1) Factual situation*

The SER (p. 15) explains that the College has designed and organised the conditions to study for students with special needs. Both social inclusion and the respect for inherent dignity are ensured. Study aspects such as material, environment etc. can be adjusted for students with disabilities or documented health issues. Even the SP can be organised for disabled students, for example, by reorganising ways to study. Remote learning can be organised, as well as an individual study plan can be drawn up. The College has special equipment to help the students with disabilities, such as keyboards to help the visually impaired.

Furthermore (SER p.35) the College offers study possibilities for students who have a limited capability to work. The College views the needs of the student with disabilities to review the conditions to meet the student's needs for learning and studying. They can also live at the College or elsewhere. There is a Student Services Centre that offers advice to all students, including the disabled. The College "ensures studying conditions for socially sensitive groups and students with special needs."

#### *(2) Expert judgement/indicator analysis*

The expert panel learned on the site visit that the College does not have any students with special needs or people with studying difficulties.

That might refer to a situation that the College does not monitor and does not work with problems of the young generation like overstress, depression, difficulties to concentrate on things in particular situations. A more formalised process is recommended to identify students with difficulties of all kinds at an early stage in a confidential manner and provide adequate support thereafter.

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

#### *(1) Factual situation*

According to the SER (pp. 35-36), monitoring of students' learning progress is systematic. The aim is to discover needs for support and potential improvement of how studies are offered. Achievements are evaluated in the cumulative assessments and independent assignments during studies being carried out. In planned sessions final assessment is carried out. All this is implemented to discover any lack of knowledge to be learned or difficulties and to solve problems. Feedback given in a systematic way during studies helps students to know their situation and helps them to study for exams. Results of monitoring are thus analysed and evaluated systematically for all parties (students, teachers, staff) to receive feedback from the monitoring.

#### *(2) Expert judgement/indicator analysis*

The expert panel found that teachers are supporting students by providing feedback and learning support to enable continuous improvement of student learning.

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

#### (1) Factual situation

Based on the SER (p. 37), “The level of graduate employment is one the most significant indicators of the quality of KOK activities. The monitoring of graduates’ employment and career begins from the evaluation of their final internship (...) After students complete their internships, heads of Centres conduct surveys of students and internship supervisors at organisations/companies. The analysis of survey results is conducted by the coordinator of the Department of Quality and Research. Six months after graduation, KOK conducts surveys of graduates. Data on the employment of graduates during the assessment period is provided in SER Table No. 22 of the SER.

**Table No. 2.** Employment of KOK graduates in 2018-2020 (%) (based on SER Table No. 22)

Year of graduation	2018	2019	2020
Employment of the graduates (%)	89% (84% working in the tourism and leisure field)  28% continue studying in second-cycle studies	91% (85% working in the tourism and leisure field)  26% continue studying in second-cycle studies	86% (80% working in the tourism and leisure field)  24% continue studying in second-cycle studies

The analysis of survey results shows that the nature of graduates’ professional activity corresponds with the purpose of the ET study programme. Most of the graduates work in their respective fields or continue studying in Lithuanian and foreign universities. During the three-year assessment period, it can be observed that the general rate of graduates’ employment remained extremely high – from 80% to 85% of graduates work in the tourism and leisure field.

In 2020, the rate was lower, but the situation can be explained by the fact that the global pandemic has created an unfavourable situation in the tourism sector, which reduced the opportunities of ET study programme graduates to start their careers right after their studies. Every year, about 24% of graduates successfully continue studying at the second-cycle studies. According to the SER, more than 80% of students are working in the tourism and leisure field.

#### (2) Expert judgement/indicator analysis

The expert panel interviewed some stakeholders which advocated a good quality of preparation of students in the College for the Tourism market. However, the expert panel has some concerns that the quality is not assured because of two reasons:

(a) Although the College is based in central Lithuania and students should have the possibility to work for the international tourism industry in Lithuania and abroad, there are just a few students in the tourism programme and none of the graduates are employed in any international tourism company.

(b) The expert panel believes that the level of foreign language is not sufficient at the moment among the teaching staff and not even among the graduates.

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

#### *(1) Factual situation*

According to the SER (p. 38), “Academic integrity is one of the core values of all KOK community members. Documents regulating KOK policy and academic integrity allow KOK to ensure that all academic dishonesty and plagiarism cases would be examined, which would contribute to the quality of KOK activities. The Code of Academic Ethics regulates the academic integrity at KOK. Each employee and student must comply with it as specified in their employment or study contracts. At the beginning of studies, the student signs a Declaration of Integrity and commits to uphold the academic discipline and independently and honestly complete tasks: while preparing written papers, participating in assessments, projects, conducting research.”

#### *(2) Expert judgement/indicator analysis*

The expert panel has some concerns to the extent that the College is ensuring academic quality, especially with regards to plagiarism. A clearly structured policy regarding the final theses including choice of topics, involvement of stakeholders and plagiarism, respectively its implications, would be recommended.

The expert panel would also recommend integrating the aspects of diversity and inclusion into their academic policies.

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

#### *(1) Factual situation*

Based on the SER (p. 39), KOK “ensures opportunities for students to dispute (appeal) the received evaluation and receive answers with reason about the examination of the appeal. Students disagreeing with the semesters’ evaluation of the subject (module), detecting violations of the procedures for evaluating study subject (module) or final thesis, have a right to appeal. The procedure for submitting and examining appeals is regulated by the College Description of the Procedure for Submitting and Examining Students’ Appeals for Evaluation of Knowledge. During the assessed period, no appeals and complaints were submitted.”

#### *(2) Expert judgement/indicator analysis*

The expert panel relies on the evidence, presented in the SER report regarding the process for appeals. Since there were no complaints submitted, the expert panel relies on the description given.

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

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

- 1. The College offers both part-time and full-time studies.*
- 2. Graduates of a very specialised Ecotourism programme find jobs after graduation in Tourism and leisure field, at least the majority.*

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

- 1. The College has a low number of intakes per year, preventing a functioning learning environment.*
- 2. Lack of consultation services for students with learning disabilities and difficulties; a study psychologist, who is a member of the teaching staff, is not appropriate.*

### 3.5. TEACHING STAFF

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

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

*(1) Factual situation*

The SER report (p.41) states that the KOK runs one study programme in Tourism and Leisure Studies – Ecotourism. The ratio of the number of lecturers and students in the field of Tourism and Leisure studies during 2016-2020 is between 4.1 and 5.2.

All lecturers in the assessed field of studies qualify for at least a master's degree or equivalent.

As stated in Table No. 2 65% of the subjects (modules) in studies are taught by researchers conferred with a PhD degree. 80% of the KOK lecturers have at least three years of practical work experience in the taught field of study.

Moreover, the SER report (p.42) claims that the number of lecturers in the currently assessed field of Tourism and Leisure is optimal and ensures the excellent quality of studies.

Furthermore, the SER report (p.45) outlines the dynamics of the lecturers coming to teach or conduct research in the KOK field of ET studies during the assessed three academic years show a downward trend affected by the pandemic situation declared in the country in 2019 and the movement restriction of persons. By analysing the global situation of the tourism sector, it is evident that temporary restrictions have not reduced people's willingness to travel and use other tourism and leisure services. Therefore, it is expected that the growing demand for services in this sector will also require a more considerable number of professionals. The increased demand for professionals is expected to result in high demand for the field of ET studies. The SER report though does not indicate any planning regarding replacement or retirement of teachers.

Moreover, the SER report (p. 47) states the funds allocated for improving the competences of teachers, without specifying any focus on foreign language training.

**Table No. 2.** *Tourism and Leisure* field lecturers compliance with the general requirements for the first cycle studies of college level

<b>Requirement stated in Description of General Requirements for the Provision of Studies</b>	<b>In the study programmes of the first cycle of college level</b>
No less than 10 % of the first cycle of college level of study field subjects' volume must be taught by scientists or recognized artists.	65% of the subjects (modules) in studies are taught by researchers conferred with a PhD degree.
More than a half of staff of college level study field should have no less than 3 years practical experience matching to the subjects they teach.	80% of the KOK lecturers have at least three years of practical work experience in the taught field of study.



## *(2) Expert judgement/indicator analysis*

The lecturer-student ratio seems to be adequate though the expert panel has requested further information regarding the employment status, here full time vs. part time faculty, to support the claim of “optimal” College employment. Documents provided support it.

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

#### *(1) Factual situation*

The SER report (p. 43) claims that Academic mobility at KOK is ensured through the Erasmus+ programme. In 2019, the Academic Council of the KOK approved an updated description of the procedure for organising Erasmus+ teaching and learning visits of the Erasmus+ staff of KOK, which regulates the procedure of organising the visits of the KOK staff going for the Erasmus+ training and learning visits and the employees of partner science and study institutions arriving at the KOK for Erasmus+ training and learning visits. The SER report (p. 44) states in table 27 the number of outgoing teachers such as 2021 3 out of 16. Table 28 in the SER report (p. 45) provides information about incoming teachers, a number in decline though due to Covid restrictions.

#### *(2) Expert judgement/indicator analysis*

The expert panel learned during the online site visit that several College members have been working at other higher education institutions for a short stint, thus, it seems that academic mobility of College is given, respectively encouraged and supported by the College.

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

#### *(1) Factual situation*

The SER report (p. 46) states that KOK provides academic and non-academic staff opportunities to improve the knowledge and skills they need to conduct their activities. Qualification improvement aims to deepen and broaden the competencies of the KOK staff to ensure the studies are of high quality. The following tasks are envisaged for qualification improvement of the teaching staff: to update, deepen and develop competencies in subjects; develop research skills; deepen and develop didactic competencies – teaching proficiency; improve the use of information technologies by mastering e-learning methodologies and technologies; improve knowledge of a foreign language, learn foreign languages; develop other general managerial, entrepreneurial competencies.

#### *(2) Expert judgement/indicator analysis*

The expert panel learned that the College offers several courses to master digital competencies. Students supported this by applauding College for their digital competencies.

The expert panel, however, has concerns regarding two areas, one of them is mastering the English language. Secondly, the expert panel asked several College members for their understanding of eco/sustainability etc., respectively course content, but the answers have been rather vague, which raises questions about the College’s domain of expertise.

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

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

- 1. Teaching staff appear to be enthusiastic and engaged.*

2. *Teachers have been applauded by students for their professionalism and assistance in any matters.*
3. *Teachers have been praised for their digital competencies, especially during Covid times, by a variety of stakeholders, mainly students and industry partners.*

**(2) Weaknesses:**

1. *Teaching staff, as asked regarding the uniqueness and features of the eco-tourism programme, did not provide in-depth responses. This raises doubts about the depth of content and domain knowledge. Moreover, there is no evidence about any formalised approach to which extent College is encouraged and willing to adapt to new trends, developments and technology.*
2. *The expert panel got the impression that some College members did not master the English language despite the claim that all subjects at KOK are taught in Lithuanian and English language.*

### **3.6. LEARNING FACILITIES AND RESOURCES**

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

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

*(1) Factual situation*

The premises for studies and practice in the field of Tourism and Leisure studies are in two blocks of the KOK, at Raguvos st. 7, Kaunas and A. Jakšto st. 6, Kaunas. The two blocks are located next to each other, separated by a courtyard. The total area used by the KOK is 3047 m<sup>2</sup>. 17 classrooms are used for studies, 2 of which are computer classrooms. There are from 18 to 145 workstations in the classrooms.

The SER report (p. 48) states that in KOK, there are 50 computers in two computer rooms for learning purposes. The number of students using them is typically low, so the number of computers is sufficient. The Wi-Fi connection of the KOK is available in all the KOK premises. The KOK continuously upgrades its computer equipment according to the need. The last upgrade took place in 2020, and all computers, their software and anti-virus applications were updated. The KOK also has a virtual Moodle learning environment, where lecturers upload study materials for students. Students can also watch live broadcasts and video recordings of lectures.

Regarding students with special needs, the SER report (p. 48) states that KOK pays excellent attention to students with special needs and strives to ensure appropriate conditions for their studies at the KOK. The infrastructure, both physical and informational environment, is adapted for these students. The KOK building at A. Jakšto st. 6 has a fixed lift for persons with reduced mobility and one mobile climber adapted for WC. Persons with disabilities have adequate access to the cafeteria, the Library, and all classrooms at the building. By arriving at lectures with their car, they can leave it in the KOK courtyard; there is an exit lane. The classrooms are equipped with the necessary technical equipment: a computer mouse for people with motor disabilities, several specialised desks. The building at 6 A. Jakšto st. also has unique markings for different surfaces for visually impaired students. The latter have the software on their computers themselves. Students with disabilities also receive a scholarship from the state budget.



Regarding practice outside the HEI, the SER report (p. 48) states that the study programme of the assessed field of studies includes four professional internships and a final internship. The internships aim to develop students' abilities to apply theoretical knowledge in practice: to get acquainted with the organisation principles, types and methods of ecotourism activity, host excursions and trips according to the ecotourism routes for Lithuanian and foreign tourists, presenting the country's geography, resources, educational programmes of cultural heritage and ecological products, and carry out an analysis of the possibilities of ecotourism certification of a tourism company.

Students choose their internships in the ET study programme based on their residence, company profile, references, and work experience, while the rest are offered internships. During the evaluation period, KOK has signed 40 cooperation agreements with social and business 49 partners, who accept the students of tourism and recreation studies for internships.

### *(2) Expert judgement/indicator analysis*

The learning facilities seem to be adequate, sufficient and well equipped, although the expert panel could not observe any students in the classrooms during the online site visit.

Although the number of final theses seems to be rather limited, the ones seen, show focus on touristic aspects, in line with the eco-tourism programme.

Regarding the financial resources, the expert panel has serious doubts about the financial sustainability of the programme, taking into consideration the steady decline in admissions.

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

### *(1) Factual situation*

According to the SER report (p. 50), the process for planning, distribution and updating of financial resources of KOK is described in the Quality Manual of KOK. The distribution of financial resources is included in the management processes. The host of this activity is the Founder of KOK. The support processes include administration of financial resources (Senior Accountant, Accountant are responsible), staff management (Staff Specialist is responsible), ensuring the support for studies (the Coordinator of the Student Service Centre is responsible), administration of the Library collections (The Library Administrator is responsible), management of the IT infrastructure (Administrator of the IT division is responsible), infrastructure management (The Head of Housekeeping Matters is responsible), project management (Project Manager is responsible). The hosts of these activities (responsible people) are responsible for planning, coordinating, compliance with the established legislation of the mentioned activities, assessing results, and reporting the indicators of productiveness to the management board.

Before every academic year, a Budget is formed, which includes acquiring the resources necessary for studies according to the demand; the budget is approved by the Sole Stakeholder (Founder) of the KOK. The reports substantiating the use of the current and newly acquired resources, their effectiveness, the satisfaction of the demands is submitted at the end of every academic year.

Updating the tangible and methodological resources necessary for the execution of the field of Tourism and Leisure studies is a part of the strategic plan of the KOK. To achieve this objective, the KOK annually allocates funds for updating the resources of KOK, considering the demands of students, lecturers, and employees.

## *(2) Expert judgement/indicator analysis*

The expert panel has not heard any concerns from the various stakeholders regarding the planning and upgrading of resources; however, the rather low intake numbers of students are of concern, and may harm the financial sustainability of the programme.

Librarians should ask for monthly reports regarding usage of electronic databases, both College and students.

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

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

- 1. The learning facilities are adequate, sufficient and well equipped.*

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

- 1. The low intake numbers of students might negatively affect the programme in the mid to long term.*

## **3.7. STUDY QUALITY MANAGEMENT AND PUBLIC INFORMATION**

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

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

#### ***(1) Factual situation***

According to the SER report (p. 51), by implementing its mission and achieving strategic goals, the KOK created and constantly improved the internal quality assurance system, which is an integral part of the KOK strategic management plan and meets the requirements of the Law on Higher Education and Research of the Republic of Lithuania, the provisions and guidelines of the Implementation of the European System of Credit Accumulation and Transfer, Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area (hereinafter – ESG).

The Quality Manual of the KOK governs the internal system of quality assurance of the KOK. The key theoretic concept of the Internal System of Quality Assurance of the KOK represents promoting/implementing the quality in the cultural context through management, knowledge of science, the process of studies, and the organisation's culture. The purpose of the Internal System of Quality Assurance is to ensure that the entirety of the executed processes and their interactions within the KOK and the field of Tourism and Leisure studies are planned, executed, assessed, and improved following the established and described requirements which are based on the provisions of the Quality Assurance of Studies of the European Higher Education Area, and other essential documents for the quality of the KOK performance.

The Internal System of Quality Assurance complies with every provision of ESG Part I and encompasses all activities of KOK, whose processes are grouped into four groups: management processes, main performance processes, support processes, and improvement processes (SER Annex 4). This system ensures the engagement of every employee in the implementation of the KOK policies on the institutional and academic levels. All employees of KOK have read it, and it is publicly available on the internet website.

#### ***(2) Expert judgement/indicator analysis***

The expert panel believes that the KOK quality management process is written according to the law and regulations, but does not support College holistically, as were mentioned in this

report section about very low students' admission and/or about students' performance and graduates employment in the Tourism and Leisure field.

Although the documentation in the SER report seems to cover all areas, the expert panel realised that there could be issues with regards to conflicts of interest, thus, policies should be established accordingly.

This report is clear evidence that College needs to improve weak points mentioned above, to have a very good score at quality management.

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

#### *(1) Factual situation*

According to the SER report (p. 54), the KOK established the internal and external concerned parties, stakeholders, and their contribution to improving the quality assurance system. This principle serves as the key one while executing the studies of the assessed field of studies. Quality assurance of studies in the KOK is based on the Kolping's community responsibility for the quality of studies and its improvement, the data of the research conducted systematically (feedback), including all concerned parties (students, lecturers, administration staff, graduates, employers, social partners, etc.) into the improvement processes of study quality, clear and transparent sharing of responsibility, creation of the environment appropriate for quality.

#### *(2) Expert judgement/indicator analysis*

The expert panel found during its online site visit that the College does effective collaboration with its various stakeholders and local partners.

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

#### *(1) Factual situation*

According to the SER report (p. 55), all impartial quantitative and quality information related to quality assurance and improvement of studies is analysed and assessed to ensure constant self-assessment and improvement.

The information of the KOK about the performed activities, study programmes, and other rendered services to every targeted group is provided through the following communication channels:

- The website of the KOK (in Lithuanian, English, and German) – public information is provided about the activity of the KOK, primary documents regulating the activity, the conclusions, and decisions of the external assessment of the activity, study programmes, timetables of studies, admission process, Founder's scholarships, the events on the competence and qualification improvement, the activity of applied science, and other activities.
- Social networks (Facebook, Instagram) – posts with relevant and engaging information on the events, initiatives, previous events, study programmes of the KOK, and other rendered services. According to the data of 2021, 5000 people follow the KOK Facebook account. On the Facebook account, communication with the current students and graduates takes place, the information on study programmes, students' achievements, and lecturers' lectures are continuously posted. By using a Facebook account, the information on the conferences in the KOK, events, and relevant information for both the Kolping community

and society are published.

*(2) Expert judgement/indicator analysis*

The expert panel believes that the College is doing well in disseminating all relevant information through its channels.

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

*(1) Factual situation*

According to the SER report (p. 57), the partnership between the lecturers, administration staff, and students is highly supported at the KOK when the most significant focus is on individual students' study results and personal needs. To ensure the quality of studies, put a more significant focus of the study process on the study results, the KOK seeks better students' engagement and active participation in organising the study process.

The research on students' opinions on the quality of studies at the KOK is included in the surveys of ensuring the internal quality of studies.

The survey for the students of the assessed field of studies on the completed curriculum subject and its teaching quality, the Quality Assessment of the Taught Subject: Student's Approach, is carried out at the end of every semester. Considering the predetermined criteria, students are enquired about the quality of teaching. Students are also asked about their engagement in studies—about the completed assignments, attendance of study sessions, and the self-evaluation of their effort put into studies. After concluding the research results during the assessed period, it was noted that at the beginning, full-time junior students find a tough time grasping the very study process, which completely differs from the one at school. At the beginning of studies, students find it challenging to plan personal studying time, completing independent assignments.

*(2) Expert judgement/indicator analysis*

The expert panel learned that student voices are heard. The expert panel interviewed a range of social partners, employers and alumni, some of them in the area of botanics, textile and other production, arguing that students and graduates learn more practical aspects of ecotourism. The expert panel also learned that several stakeholders are interested in getting involved in final theses research topics.

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

***(1) Strengths:***

- 1. The College has a quality management system.*
- 2. Teaching staff are happy with the provided results of the existing Quality Management system.*

***(2) Weaknesses:***

- 1. The Quality Management system for quality improvement of the Tourism and Leisure field studies at the College is not helping to gain more students for the Ecotourism study programme.*
- 2. Existing Quality Management system does not support all the fields of studies organisation as it is already mentioned above in this report (other sections).*

#### IV. RECOMMENDATIONS\*

Evaluation Area	Recommendations for the Evaluation Area (study cycle)
Intended and achieved learning outcomes and curriculum	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Expert panel recommends a thorough review of the curriculum, in order to find the programme’s position in the field of tourism and leisure.</li> <li>• The curriculum is rather scattered, and lacking width, such as hospitality and entrepreneurship related subjects. Furthermore, it's advised to place more emphasis on tourism &amp; hospitality in a wider context to ensure attractiveness and career path options of the programme for prospective students.</li> </ul>
Links between science (art) and studies	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The expert panel could not verify the quality of the eco-tourism programme content, having discussions with teachers at the site visit, thus, a review is recommended, also to ensure a proper positioning of the programme between secondary education and higher education institutions.</li> <li>• Another area of concern was that the Expert panel learned that students work on internships in production businesses which are rarely linked to the field of eco-tourism. Hence, the recommendation is to review the whole internship procedure to ensure the alignment with the programme outcomes.</li> </ul>
Student admission and support	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Definitely the area of main concern, review the programme’s positioning, review the programme’s career perspectives, and promote it to the local market; work on more international collaboration.</li> </ul>
Teaching and learning, student performance and graduate employment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The Expert panel has a concern regarding the graduate employment in the field of tourism and leisure, specifically taking into consideration the given internships in non-touristic areas.</li> </ul>
Teaching staff	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Teaching staff need to upgrade their language skills. Teaching staff should also review curriculum in terms of depth and width, especially to find the College’s positioning in the field of tourism and leisure.</li> </ul>
Learning facilities and resources	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Librarians should provide monthly reports regarding usage of electronic databases, both College and students.</li> </ul>
Study quality management and public information	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Although the documentation in the SER report seems to cover all areas, the expert panel realised that there could be issues with regards to conflicts of interest, thus, policies should be established accordingly.</li> </ul>

\*If the study field is going to be given negative evaluation (non-accreditation) instead of RECOMMENDATIONS main **arguments for negative evaluation** (non-accreditation) must be provided together with a **list of “must do” actions** in order to assure that students admitted before study field’s non-accreditation will gain knowledge and skills at least on minimum level.

## V. SUMMARY

In the following, a summary of comments regarding the first cycle *Ecotourism* study programme (hereafter referred to as the programme, ET) implemented at viešoji įstaiga Kolpingo kolegija (hereafter referred to as the College, KOK) in Kaunas, is given. The process of evaluation follows the Centre for Quality Assessment in Higher Education (SKVC) system for the evaluation of study fields and is based on the Self-Assessment Report provided by the College and the assessment agreed upon by the Expert Panel during its online visit on the premises and following discussions.

The programme is offered in full-time and part-time modes. The programme prepares graduates for careers in the tourism and leisure field, especially ecotourism.

The Expert panel formed the opinion that not enough attention is paid to other areas of tourism, specifically hospitality, which in fact, may prevent prospective students from joining the programme.

While the learning outcomes of the programme are quite well developed, they failed in two aspects: they have not attracted students in sufficient numbers, and the expert panel believes that learning outcomes are not understood by various stakeholders, such as teachers, students and social partners. Therefore, urgent action by the College management is required here.

The curriculum of the programme meets the requirements of the Ministry of Education, Science and Sport of the Republic of Lithuania, but not necessarily the requirements of the labour market.

As already outlined, a broader perspective would benefit the programme, including not only hospitality related subjects but also entrepreneurship modules. The bulk of jobs is created in the wider hospitality industry, whilst tourism per se does not produce that many job opportunities.

The staff members of the College are enthusiastic and meet all the legal requirements for their appointments as teachers.

However, there are some weaknesses that need to be addressed. Most staff members need to improve their competence in the English language, especially as the College offers to teach almost all subjects in English and Lithuanian.

Secondly, staff members should assist the College in reviewing the Ecotourism programme to crystallise its core, and position it between secondary education and higher education institutions.

The learning facilities are adequate, clean, and rather modern. The library seems to be quite well stocked although the expert panel has concerns that there are no records of the usage of electronic databases, both students and the College.

The admissions requirements are in line with the requirements and regulations of the Ministry of Education, Science and Sport of the Republic of Lithuania, but there has been an alarming drop in student numbers in the recent past and this is a cause of concern.

The Expert panel wishes to thank the College for their preparation of the comprehensive SER report and for taking their time to attend the online visit sessions.

Based on the evaluation, the Expert panel advises to focus on:

- To review the programme's place in the tourism and leisure education field and its positioning, including internships and international collaborations.



- To focus on the internationalisation of offered studies as this is relevant to increase the intake and professionalise the student group's aims and path.
- To review the rather scattered curriculum which needs a thorough review.
- To have a more formalised process in place, to identify students with difficulties of all kinds at an early stage in a confidential manner and provide adequate support thereafter.
- To ensure academic quality, especially with regards to plagiarism. A clearly structured policy regarding the final theses including choice of topics, involvement of stakeholders and plagiarism, respectively its implications, would be recommended.
- To integrate the aspects of diversity and inclusion into their academic policies.
- To strengthen staff's language competencies.
- To put urgent action on low admission numbers by reviewing the programme's value position, its career paths and job opportunities to make it more attractive to prospective students.
- To introduce first year students to the main social partners in order to allow for more opportunities on hands-on, respectively real business examples.
- To educate students about gaining practice on volunteering projects in the tourism and leisure field in Lithuania and abroad.
- To focus on expanding international partners, as the College's plan to have few partners but quality collaboration is not working because there are no incoming students and teachers from abroad.

**Signature of expert panel chairperson:**

**Associate professor Detlev Remy**