CENTRE FOR QUALITY ASSESSMENT IN HIGHER EDUCATION

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EVALUATION REPORT

STUDY FIELD of TOURISM AND LEISURE

at KAUNAS KOLEGIJA

Expert panel:

1. **Dr. Florian Aubke,** *(panel chairperson), member of academic community;*

2. **Associate prof. dr. Henri Kuokkanen,** *member of academic community;*

3. **Associate prof. dr. Rong Huang,** *member of academic community;*

4. **Associate prof. dr. Dalia Prakapienė,** *representative of social partners;*

5. **Ms. Skaistė Kairytė,** *students' representative.*

Evaluation coordinator – *Ms Jūratė Čergelienė*

Vilnius
2022

Study Field Data*

Title of the study programme	Tourism and Hotel Management	Wellness and Spa Management
State code	6531LX093	6531LX119
Type of studies	College studies	College studies
Cycle of studies	First cycle (undergraduate)	First cycle (undergraduate)
Mode of study and duration (in years)	Full time, 3-year studies	Full time, 3-year studies
Credit volume	180	180
Qualification degree and (or) professional qualification	Professional Bachelor in Business Management	Professional Bachelor in Business Management
Language of instruction	Lithuanian	Lithuanian
Minimum education required	Secondary education	Secondary education
Registration date of the study programme	01/09/2000	18/05/2018

*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 was evaluated as satisfactory (2 points).

The study field and cycle are **not accredited** if at least one of evaluation areas was 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 online site visit to the HEI was conducted by the panel on *May 20, 2022.*

Dr. Florian Aubke, *Head of study programs „Tourism & Hospitality Management" at University of Applied Sciences for Management and Communication, FHWien (Austria);*

Associate prof. dr. Henri Kuokkanen, *Academic vice dean at Paul Bocuse Institute France);*

Associate prof. dr. Rong Huang, *professor at Plymouth University (United Kingdom);*

Associate prof. dr. Dalia Prakapienė, *professor at General Jonas Žemaitis Military Academy of Lithuania, tour leader and guide of "Novaturas", "Kelionių laikas";*

Ms. Skaistė Kairytė, *first cycle student of Organisational Communication and Marketing at Šiauliai State College (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.	Survey about teaching quality
2.	Descriptions of study subjects
3.	Samples of final thesis
4.	Additional documents
5.	Annex5-SFTL_List of academic staff teaching modules of the study field

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

Kaunas University of Applied Sciences (hereinafter – KUAS, College) is a state multidisciplinary higher education institution established in 2000. KUAS was initially accredited as a non-university higher education institution in 2005. According to the self-evaluation report (hereinafter - SER), KUAS is one of the largest higher education institutions in Lithuania, with a community of about 5.500 students, 800 employees and 32.000 graduates. KUAS organises its academic affairs in 4 faculties (the Faculty of Business, the Faculty of Technologies, the Faculty of Medicine, and the Faculty of Arts and Education), and its administrative affairs in the Department of Studies and Applied Research and the Department of Management and Quality. The Faculty of Business counts for approximately one quarter of active students 1710 (SER, p. 6) and comprises 5 departments: the Department of Accounting and Finance, the Department of Communication, the Department of Tourism and Leisure Management, the Department of Management and Law, and the Department of Business. The present evaluation refers to two of the three study programmes within the Department of Tourism and Leisure Management, namely the Tourism and Hotel Management study programme (hereinafter - THM programme) and the Wellness and Spa Management study programme (hereinafter - WSM programme). The Sports Management programme is not subject to evaluation.

An international expert team has carried out an evaluation of the Tourism and Hotel Management programme in 2017. The evaluators presented a positive assessment and recommended an accreditation period of 3 years as a result. In 2018, a new study programme, Wellness and Spa Management was developed. In 2021, admission for the WSM programme was suspended and termination of this study programme is planned for 30/06/2023. From 2022 onwards, WSM programme is offered as an additional specialisation within the THM programme. Since 2019, students can choose the studies for a double degree that is implemented with LAB University of Applied Sciences in Finland.

II. GENERAL ASSESSMENT

Tourism and Leisure study field and first cycle at Kaunas University of Applied Sciences (KUAS) 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	3
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
	Total:	20

*1 (unsatisfactory) - there are essential shortcomings that must be eliminated;
2 (satisfactory) - meets the established minimum requirements, needs improvement;
3 (good) - the field is being developed systematically, has distinctive features;
4 (very good) - the field is evaluated very well in the national and international context, without any deficiencies;
5 (excellent) - the field is exceptionally good in the national and international context/environment.

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

Annex 3 explains the aim of THM programme is to train a tourism and hotel manager, able to conduct the functional activities of the companies in the sector; analyse and assess tourism business environment; develop and sell competitive tourism and hospitality products; apply professional knowledge; act independently and creatively in changing market conditions and communicate professionally and responsibly in a multicultural business environment.

For WSM programme as shown in Annex 3, it aims to train wellness and SPA services managers, able to identify clients' and market needs; plan and organise the activities of these service providers; develop and present products that meet the conception of wellness as a lifestyle, and communicate professionally and responsibly in multicultural business environments

To examine whether the aims and outcomes of THM programme conform with the needs of the society and/ or the labour market, as shown in the SER (p.7), the THM programme team firstly considers tourism industry contribution to the national gross value (e.g., in 2020, the added value created in the Lithuanian tourism sector amounted to 1.7 per cent of the country's gross value added) and percentage of the total number of employees in the private sector (e.g., in 2020, the Lithuanian tourism sector employed 45,800 people, i.e., 4.7 per cent of the total number of employees in the private sector) which reveals the importance of the sector at the national level. Secondly, the THM programme team considers the distribution of employees by tourism-specific activities in 2020 (accommodation 28.6 per cent, organising leisure and recreational activities and rent 17.5 per cent, travel agencies and tour operators 6. 3 percent. Transport services make up 0.8 per cent, air transport 1.8 per cent, road transport 14.8 per cent. Restaurants, bars, and other catering activities account for 30.2 per cent, water transport 0.0 per cent, rail transport 0.0 per cent) in relation to the need for tourism professionals in Lithuania. Thirdly, data of the Lithuanian Department of Statistics in relation to the number of travel agencies and tour operators between 2019 and 2020 are also reviewed as these are potential internship placements and jobs for students specialising in tourism. Fourthly, the THM programme team reviewed the statistics on hotels or similar temporary accommodation/holiday and other short-term accommodation establishments in Lithuania as these are potential internship placements and workplaces for students specialising in hotel management (SER, p. 7). Fifthly, The THM programme team recognised

that the growing tourism industry cannot undermine travellers' personal experiences, pre-, during and after the Covid-19. Hence, different components of the modules in the Study Field of Tourism and Leisure (SFTL) are adapted to reflect the changes in tourists' needs and behaviour.

To examine whether the aims and outcomes of the WSM programme conform with the needs of the society and/ or the labour market, as shown in the SER (p. 8), the WSM programme team firstly considers the infrastructure and technology of wellness and spa services in Lithuania (e.g., 14 medical and spa centres and 29 spa hotels in the 4 official resorts of Lithuania) which are potential internship placements and workplaces for students of WSM programme. The WSM programme team, secondly, considers Kaunas District Tourism Development Strategy 2020-2030 which emphasises that the number of accommodation establishments in Kaunas District was 17 per cent higher than in Vilnius District, and the number of rural tourism homesteads was similar (38). Thirdly, the WSM programme team reviewed The Strategic Development Plan 2021-2027 of Kaunas District Municipality which focuses on developing and improving the quality of water tourism services. Fourthly, the programme team reviewed The Strategic Action Plan of Kaunas City Municipality for 2021-2023 which includes measures to develop tourism, promote entrepreneurship and innovation and focuses on the heritage management programme. In response to this, the WSM programme team includes the modules on Tourism Management and Intercultural Tourism Environment aimed to introduce different trends of tourism services. Sustainability principles are introduced and integrated into the modules taught.

Competencies for THM and WSM programmes which have been identified as necessary for employees working in the tourism, hospitality and wellness sectors are developed based on consideration of the global trends in the changes of the tourism market, and consultations with employers, students and lecturers (SER, p. 7). Furthermore, termination of WSM programme in 2023 and then integrating it to be a specialisation for THM programme has also been consulted with a committee including social partners (SER, p. 9).

According to the data of the Lithuanian magazine "Reitingai" (SER, p. 8) the SFTL study programmes implemented in KUAS were declared the best among the SFTL programmes in 2020 and 2021 implemented in Lithuanian universities of applied sciences.

(2) Expert judgement/indicator analysis

Analysing the statistical data in relation to the tourism industry in Lithuania, the tourism industry is an important sector for the national economy. In consideration of a range of strategic documents regarding Kaunas region mentioned in the SER, the region is famous for tourism and has a clear focus in growing its tourism industry. Given these factors, the study programmes of the SFTL are important for training highly qualified professionals for the needs of the society and the labour market.

The rates of the SFTL graduates' employment based on STRATA data and the positive employers' feedback on the managerial competencies acquired objectively justify that the study programmes are in demand and meet the needs of the labour market. The recent best

awards confirm the recognition of the programmes. Based on the available evidence, the review panel concludes that the aims and learning outcomes of the two programmes conform with the needs of the society and the labour market.

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

As revealed in the SER (p. 8), the mission of KUAS is to provide innovation-based higher education studies focused on practical activities and promote applied science and art activities significant for the development of society. In consideration of the aims and the associated learning outcomes of the THM programme as shown in Annex 3, it is apparent that they are consistent with the mission of KUAS.

KUAS strategic priority is to be an advanced European higher education institution. SFTL programmes are implemented by involving social partners in the study process in various ways.

The strategic direction of KUAS performance is efficient management and optimised infrastructure. SFTL committee and the KUAS Academic Council agreed to implement one study programme THM with three specialisations (Tourism Management, Hotel Management and Wellness and Spa Management) from 2022 based on a wide consultation with the students, current situation in the Lithuanian wellness sector, challenges of preparing final theses, the overlap in the different programmes, decreasing demand in the course but growing need for trained specialists with a broad understanding of the industry.

(2) Expert judgement/indicator analysis

Based on the available evidence, the review panel concludes that the aims and learning outcomes of the THM programme and changes to WSM programme conform with the mission and strategic activities of the KUAS.

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

(1) Factual situation

The aims and the learning outcomes of THM and WSM programmes are mentioned in Annex 3. Table 2 of the SER (p. 9-10) provides details of two programmes in relation to credits for the programme, final thesis, internships, general areas, practical training, contact hours and self-study hours. Table 3 presents academic load throughout studies for THM and WSM programmes.

Annex 1 Study plans summarise the learning outcomes, the number of credits, the distribution of hours of the two programmes. The study plans are reviewed and updated each year as required. The monitoring is under the responsibility of the SFTL Committee.

In consideration of the aims and the learning outcomes of THM and WSM programmes listed in Annex 3, the two programmes are developed in line with description of learning outcomes of first cycle programmes set by Order of Ministry of Education and Science of the Republic of Lithuania on Approval of the descriptor of study cycles (2016).

An analysis of Table 2, Table 3 and Annex 3 study plans of the two programmes indicates that the two programmes are designed in line with the requirements of the Description of the Framework of Qualifications for Lithuania, the Description of Study Cycles, the Description of the General Study Requirement. Furthermore, credits of different subjects of the two study programmes in Annex 1 demonstrate that the study credits of these subjects are developed in line with the European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System ECTS.

(2) Expert judgement/indicator analysis

Based on the available evidence, the review panel concludes that two programmes are developed in line with legal requirements.

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

Annex 3 includes the aims and the learning outcomes of THM and WSM programmes. The learning outcomes, the number of credits, the distribution of hours of the two programmes are summarised in Annex 1. Annex 2 presents the implementation of the learning outcomes of the two programmes in the matrix of the learning outcomes of the study programmes and those of the study modules. Annex 3 illustrates the links between the aims, the anticipated learning outcomes, and the study modules of the SFTL programmes. Table 3 presents academic load throughout studies for THM and WSM programmes.

Seven module handbooks are requested by the review panel during the visit. The modules include Business Communication, Economics, Basics of Law and Entrepreneurship, Basics of Tourism and Hospitality, Business Management, Intercultural tourism environment, and Professional Internship I. Among them, four modules are taught in both THM and WSM programmes.

In relation to teaching/learning as indicated in the SER (p. 11), the teaching staff aims at their coherence with the learning outcomes of the study module and the methods of assessing study achievements. A range of teaching methods is used to teach the students depending on the module contents. As indicated in the SER (p. 11), the teaching staff apply inclusive study methods focused on developing students' creativity, critical thinking, and analytical skills. The application of active methods in the study process creates a medium for developing students' social and personal competencies, and promotes self-study. To ensure the students gain the newest and advanced knowledge, the teaching staff confirmed that they regularly update their module descriptions with up-to-date literature sources, real case studies and latest trends in the tourism and hospitality industry.

Various methods are used to assess students' learning achievements, tests with different types of questions; presentations; case studies and their presentations; team project reports; research reports; solutions of practical issues; presentations of self-study assignments; internship reports; self-assessment; presentation and defence of the final thesis. The methods of assessing students' achievement are chosen considering the learning outcomes of the module and its components and are preconditioned by the integrity of the module design.

During the meeting with the teaching staff, they explained the module team needs to agree on the assessments before they share with the students. The teaching and assessments are developed in relation to the module and the programme learning outcomes. These are clearly presented in the module handbooks.

During the remote meeting with the students, the students shared information they are normally told about the programme and module learning outcomes in the start of the study. They can also find such information from the Moodle system. At the first lecture for different modules, their professors/lecturers normally explain the module information, teaching arrangement and assessments.

(2) Expert judgement/indicator analysis

The learning outcomes of the THM and WSM programmes are clearly presented in Annex 2. Regarding the THM programme, as shown in Appendix 2, there are three learning outcomes associated with Knowledge and its application including "1. Able to apply the basic theories and principles of economics, management, and managing finance and other resources in professional activities", "2. Acts in accordance with the legislation governing company activities in the tourism and hospitality sector", and "3. Applies the conceptions and principles of sustainable development and responsible business in professional activities". Regarding the WSM programme, there are also three learning outcomes associated with knowledge and its application including "1. Able to apply the basic theories and principles of economics, management, resort science, and wellness services in professional activities", "2. Acts in accordance with the legislation governing the performance of wellness and SPA service providers to assure the provision of safe and high-quality services", and "3. Applies the conceptions and principles of sustainable development and responsible business in professional activities". However, the three learning outcomes in Knowledge and its application section for both programmes are all related to the application instead of actual knowledge of the programmes. At the meeting with the staff responsible for preparing SER, they were unclear what actual knowledge requirements for the two study programmes as their vague explanations are associated with skills. The review panel, therefore, **recommends** that the SFTL programme team systematically reviews all the module contents to develop knowledge statements for the programmes.

Annex 1 provides insights into how the THM and WSM programmes are constructed. A review of the table 1 of Annex 1 reveals that THM programme has no subject specific taught modules at I and IV semester, the I semester has Economics and Business communication, the IV semester has Basics of Law and Entrepreneurship although it does include Professional

Internship II. A review of Table 2 of Annex 1 in relation to the WSM programme reveals that WSM programme has a similar pattern as the THM programme. Even though some lecturers commented during the meeting, they did contextualise their teaching of general business and management in the tourism and hotel industry. When the students were asked their views of high dropout rate in the first year, some students commented that lack of tourism or hotel specific modules in the 1st semester which led students unsure what they study was one of key reasons for the dropout. Therefore, the review panel **recommends** that the SFTL programme teams reconsider the design of the programmes to include at least one subject specific module in the first semester.

A review of two tables in Annex 1 reveals that overlaps between THM and WSM programmes are extensive (e.g., big blocks including Economics, Business Communication, Business management, Basics of Law & Entrepreneurship; individual modules such as Sustainable tourism, intercultural communication). Hence, the KUAS decision explained in the SER (p. 9) to integrate WSM programme to be a specialisation of THM programme is sensible. However, as such integration is not currently implemented, the review panel has no evidence to judge whether such integration will be a success. Furthermore, to make WSM specialisation students more employable, equipping them with a wider understanding of tourism and hotel industry is necessary. Therefore, the review panel **recommends** that the SFTL team carefully designs the integration of WSM programme specialisation to maximise the benefits of the integration not only for the KUAS but also for the students by embedding tourism and hotel industry knowledge in the specialisation.

A review of seven module handbooks indicates that the module handbooks are well organised and include extensive information to guide the students. The module learning outcomes are in the form of specific programme learning outcomes. Hence, the module learning outcomes and the programme learning outcomes are consistent. Study methods and assessment methods for each learning outcome are specified. Module teaching plans are very detailed integrating teaching topics with assessment arrangements. Topics of practical activities provide further insights into how the modules are taught and guided. Furthermore, cumulative assessment arrangement is clearly explained in all the reviewed module handbooks. Section 10 of the module descriptions include necessary material resources for the modules, and they are all with most up-to-date Lithuanian and English academic sources as many sources were published in 2019 onwards. These module descriptions are consistent with what the teaching staff confirmed during the meeting. Therefore, the review panel **commends** that the module descriptions are prepared in an excellent format and provides the newest and advanced knowledge to guide the students to work in the industry.

Annex 1 indicates that credits for each semester are equal and student workload is well balanced. In consideration of the SER, Annex 1, Annex 2, the module handbooks, the teaching staff replies, the students and alumni comments, it is clear that the study methods and assessment methods for THM and WSM programmes are well thought of in relation to the programme and module intended learning outcomes. The students are also well informed.

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

As indicated in the SER (p. 11), the SFTL programmes considers a range of competences of the students when they study the programmes including general, social, entrepreneurial, and professional competencies. Annex 1 illustrates how the SFTL programmes are constructed with different modules to support the students to achieve these competencies.

The SER and Annex 1 indicate that the students develop their competencies by studying modules from the macro to the micro level, i.e., from general business modules to tourism or hotel or alternative study modules. Regarding their professional competencies, the students complete professional internships and final internship which is performed in the company where the student is working on the final project. However, in relation to the WSM programme, due to Covid-19, there are serious issues in the study of the organisation and implementation of external internships and the challenges of preparing final theses.

The SFTL programme study plans and composition of the modules are reviewed periodically based on feedback from students, staff, social partners, employers and members of the SFTL committee. The integration of WSM programme with THM programme as explained in section 1.2 of the SER (p. 9) is a clear example and result of such review.

(2) Expert judgement/indicator analysis

Based on the available evidence and the remote site- visit, the review panel concludes that the totality of the THM programme does ensure the consistent development of competencies of the students. As for the WSM programme, the review panel concludes that due to the current pandemic, the current programme design means the students will be unable to develop their professional competencies in a suitable manner. Therefore, the review panel supports the SFTL programme team's decision to integrate WSM programme into THM programme as a specialisation. However, the review panel **recommends** that the SFTL programme team broadens the attraction of WSM specialisation to allow the students to learn some tourism and hotel modules and take potential internships and final projects in these areas if their practical learning and research opportunities in the WSM programme area are unobtainable.

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 SFTL study programmes provide students with a range of opportunities to personalise their studies by:
- · choosing the objects of their integrated projects;
- · the topics of their final thesis;
- · the place of their internship;

· freely elective modules, the THM and WSM programmes students may choose one 15-credit module from the list of freely elective modules offered by KUAS, which is available on the KUAS website. Table 4 in the SER provides the distribution of the THM programme and WSM programme students in the free elective modules.

· a second foreign language (Russian, German, French).

· a double degree that are implemented with LAB University of Applied Sciences (Finland) (from 2019)

In the THM programme, the students can choose a specialisation in Tourism Management or Hotel Management in the third year. From 2022 onwards, students will be able to choose a third specialisation, Wellness and Spa Management.

Every student who has started the THM programme in Lithuanian has the opportunity to switch to the THM study programme taught in English.

The SFTL students may study according to an individual study plan, a free study schedule (defined in the KUAS Study Procedure). However, the meeting with the students reveals that many students have limited knowledge of the free study schedule. The alumni in the meeting also commented that more flexibility in study arrangements could be beneficial for them to better engage in extra opportunities to improve their competencies for their career.

(2) Expert judgement/indicator analysis

Based on the available evidence and the visit, the review panel concludes that there are many opportunities for the SFTL students to personalise the structure of their study according to their personal learning objectives and intended learning outcomes. However, in consideration of the students and the alumni's comments, the review panel **recommends** that the SFTL programme team publicises the free study schedule scheme among the students and so the students can take full advantage of them to develop their competencies for future career.

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

(1) Factual situation

The THM and WSM programmes are completed when the students prepare and successfully defend the final thesis which is worth 9 ECTS (Annex 1). For the SFTL programmes, the preparation, defence, assessment, and preservation of final theses is regulated by the Description of the procedure for the preparation, defence, and preservation of final theses and organisation of final examinations, the Methodological guidelines for writing study papers in the Faculty of Business, and the methodological guidelines for preparing final papers of the SFTL.

The main requirements for the final theses include practical applicability, the solution to problematic issues relevant to the Lithuanian, EU and other markets. The students must meet the requirements of academic integrity and ethics of applied research defined in the Code of

Academic Ethics of KUAS32 and the Description of the system of plagiarism prevention at KUAS33 as indicated in the SER.

The documents necessary for preparing final theses (methodological guidelines, timetables, templates, etc.) and information are available on VLE Moodle. The KUAS Library organises training sessions for final year students on searching for information for writing papers, using literature sources, citing, checking for, and preventing plagiarism.

For the public defence of the final theses, an Assessment Committee is set up by Order of the Director on the proposal of the Dean of the Faculty, and a representative of employers is appointed the Chairperson. The Assessment Committee is composed of at least 5 members, 3 of whom are business representatives. Final theses may be defended only by the students who have fulfilled all the study programme requirements and the obligations defined in the study agreement before the defence of the final thesis.

Annex 4 provides a list of the final theses in the SFTL programmes from 2019-2021. Six samples of the theses are provided from THM and WSM programmes.

(2) Expert judgement/indicator analysis

A review of Annex 4 list indicates that the topics of the SFTL theses prepared and defended during the period under assessment show the relevance of their content to the field of study and the learning outcomes of the study programme. In consideration of the topics of these theses, they are associated with tourism, hotel and wellness issues in the region, Lithuania and wider region. The six samples are consistent with the requirements. Based on the available evidence and the additional samples, the review panel concludes that the final theses of the SFTL programmes comply with the field and cycle requirements.

Strengths and weaknesses of this evaluation area:

(1) Strengths:

1. The module descriptions are prepared in an excellent format and provide the newest and advanced knowledge to guide the students to work in the industry.

(2) Weaknesses:

1. Although there is implied knowledge for the students to learn, there are no clear knowledge statements in the current learning outcomes of the THM and WSM programmes.

2. Current programme structures for both the THM and WSM programmes lack subject specific modules in the first semester.

3. The totality of the current WSM programme is unable to ensure students to develop their professional competences due to the current pandemic.

4. Although there is a possibility for the students to take a free study schedule to personalise their learning, the students have little knowledge of such an option.

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

KUAS has developed both a defined policy that governs the link between research and the practical applicability of the findings, and a research plan for 2022-2024. The plan details funding and expectations in terms of publication year-by-year and divides them in 7 categories. Of these, subject specific management research receives a total of 3500 EUR, interdisciplinary research 8900 EUR and education research 8000 EUR. The plan is clear and specifies expected outcomes in detail for later tracking.

In terms of scientific output, the SER discusses both conferences and publications. Of the conference/ discussion forum output provided, around half appears to link with the study field (tourism), while others appear to be more general management or policy topics. Research projects and related academic publications are presented with detail, and the quantity and quality of outputs appears good based on the SER (Table 6, p. 17). Of the 143 scientific articles published during 2019-2021, 3 are in high-level academic journals (defined as having an impact factor or belonging to Scopus index) and 62 are conference-linked articles or abstracts. Many of the highlighted topics focus on tourism, but hotel topics also appear on the list. Bonuses paid to faculty members based on scientific publication, therefore, appear to bear fruit in terms of faculty engaging in research. During the site visit, both faculty involvement in and knowledge of research activities, support opportunities, and evaluation practices appeared strong in light of the answers to the panel's questions.

The link between KUAS and its social partners also comes across as strong. This is evident in the number of joint projects as well as the amount of financing acquired from the partners towards research (a total of 100kEUR during 2019-2021, SER p. 18). Such projects included "the study of the compatibility of the infrastructure and cultural objects of the Lithuania Minor Region (€9,999.4)" and "counselling regarding the development and promotion of international tourism in the region of Lithuania Minor (€1,500)" with the Pagėgiai Regional Tourism and Business Information Centre. The social partners, however, often referred to "Kaunas college" as an entity, instead of discussing the programmes in question directly. This observation correlated with the above-mentioned notes on whether the focus of research activity corresponds fully with the study programmes' goals.

(2) Expert judgement/indicator analysis

In general, research activities implemented by KUAS exceed sufficient, and the number of publications supports this evaluation. Both the reporting and the planning create an impression of a well-managed and systematically directed research program that bears the expected fruit to the KUAS. The targets given in the research plan seem ambitious, but this comes across as challenging in a healthy manner; these targets also appear realistic given the level of research until now, and the incentives for faculty to publish.

The only concern related to this field is whether research activities adequately reflect the "hotel" part of the programme title. Tourism is clearly well-covered both in publication and social partner cooperation. However, while a few hotel projects exist, more could be developed. It could be a good idea to also enlarge the scope of the programme to "hospitality" instead of merely focusing on hotels. This would both create an enhanced scope for research and cooperation with the industry, as well as improve employment opportunities of graduates.

Another improvement in this part could be reconsideration in the allocation of funds between the different research categories presented in Table 5. As it stands, hotel and tourism -focused research is clearly at a disadvantage. While all business and education research are both important, research around subjects of the study programme should be the emphasis in such allocation.

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

(1) Factual situation

The start of the THM study programme contains relatively few modules directly linked with the field studied; during the first four semesters, only five of the module names link with tourism and none with hospitality or hotels. This apparent discrepancy between the name and the early content of the programme raises a question on the adequacy of the link between science and the programme during the early years. The situation improves later on with modules that clearly target the study field, but the notion that early studies do not link with the field was also mentioned by the students during the remote site visit.

Following the phenomenon identified in the curriculum, the examples in section 2.2 of the SER largely link with tourism. The organisations with which KUAS engages in cooperation also mostly belong to the field of tourism. During the remote site visit these partners seemed active in their engagement with the school, but most references to specific topics were linked with tourism and not hotels or hospitality.

The previous report recommended strengthening the link between research and study programmes. While the SER report discusses the certification of study modules that now includes this aspect, evidence of the results or changes this has created was not clear in the report or during the site visit.

(2) Expert judgement/indicator analysis

The late introduction of field specific modules into the curriculum could be a cause for students dropping out, disappointed that they are not studying subjects in the field they chose. Therefore, it is recommended to start with such content already in the early stage of the programme.

While the ample research the faculty of the institution undertakes undoubtedly feeds into the curriculum, the report should be more detailed in offering examples of this. Currently, the SER, in this section, focuses on the content of the modules in general. The information on how outside scientific knowledge is incorporated in the programmes is, naturally, relevant and valuable, but it would be also interesting to know about how in-house research knowledge is incorporated in teaching and learning the fields of tourism and hotel management.

In today's hotel/ hospitality management space, design thinking, as a basis for customer experience design, plays a central role. When considering changes to the curriculum in light of the recommendations of this report, it would be worthwhile to look into this field. Through incentivizing faculty research interest in the field, the programmes could develop some valuable skills that can further be disseminated to the students to broaden their hospitality management competencies.

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

The SER provides ample evidence of student research in terms of final theses, applied to their field of study. Here, hotel management students work on topics relevant to their specialization. Based on the report, students actively participate in scientific publication through conferences and articles, and the average percentage of students during 2019-2021 who have written a peer-reviewed scientific article (19%, SER p.19) and a conference report of contracted research presentation (14%) are noteworthy and deserve a compliment for the programmes. The students, during the remote site visit, seemed generally well-aware of research support, potential and expectations. The use of similarity detection software appeared to be well mastered both by faculty and students based on the site visit. However, as the report discusses faculty-student cooperation in research as a strength, it was somewhat disappointing to note that none of the students met during the visit actually engaged in such partnership. Similarly, while the library has research-related software licences, the students seemed unaware of some of the opportunities.

During the library site visit, it appeared that the identity of the programmes under review may not be as clear within the institution as it could be. While the business centre appears a very valuable support for research activities based on the SER, the site visit gave the impression that the tourism and hotel management programme was possibly not as well-known among its staff as it should be.

(2) Expert judgement/indicator analysis

The broad student interest in publications suggests that the programmes are doing well in engaging students in scientific activity, and the general enthusiasm of the students during the remote site - visit supported this impression. In this sense, the programmes are clearly doing well. More can always be done, particularly in terms of making sure that students are aware of all the available support, and in developing the cooperation between faculty and students further. The goal to publish more in ranked journals is noteworthy and will further improve the standing of these programmes.

The internal image of the THM programme might need some clearing, a theme that was already clear with the external partners. It appears that within the College, the study programme is not well known or properly recognized as a part of management education. The programme would certainly benefit from achieving such a recognition.

Strengths and weaknesses of this evaluation area:

(1) Strengths:

1. Strong faculty involvement in research and track record of publication.

2. Clear plan for fostering research and incentivizing faculty.

3. Student interest and involvement in research appear strong.

(2) Weaknesses:

1. Research in the subject field of hotels appears underemphasized compared to other fields, particularly those outside the tourism domain.

2. It is not entirely sure whether social partners, when considering research cooperation, see KUAS as a business college or a tourism college, but in either case it appears that cooperation in hospitality is underemphasized. The internal image of the programme within the College could also benefit from internal marketing of the programmes as tourism and hotel business management studies.

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

The admission process to the College is centralised and is carried out pursuant to the information system of the Lithuanian Higher Institutions Association for Organizing Joint Admission (LAMA BPO), by general provisions of the Lithuanian Higher Institutions Association and Student Admission Rules and institutional admission by the college. The entry requirements of the college are consistent with the national regulations. In addition, KUAS has implemented a system for institutional admission to non-state-funded study places. The average competitive score of those admitted to the THM study programme for state-funded places has been 5,62 and (out of a possible 10 points) in 2020 and 6,45 in 2021, respectively. For non-state-funded places, the average competitive scores have been slightly lower during the reporting period, with 5,51 in 2020 and 5,16 in 2021. Overall, the average competitive scores increased since the last programme evaluation and can now be considered in line with comparable study programs. In October 2021, at the time of the preparation of the SER, 228 students studied in the study programs under evaluation.

The admission numbers decreased continuously during the reporting period (see table 10, SER p. 21). In 2020 and 2021, no students were admitted to the English version of the THM study programme. In 2021, no students were admitted to the WSM study programme. This program is planned to be terminated by 30/06/2023 and then continued as a specialisation as part of the THM study programme.

During the meeting with the management it became clear that high drop-out numbers are perceived as a matter of concern and retention strategies are being put in place. However, no details on these strategies have been shared with the expert team. In regards to the English version of the study programme, the management reported that application numbers are picking up again. Overall, the expert team got the impression that the program management is aware of the difficult admission and retention situation, but clear strategies for both recruitment and retention are missing.

(2) Expert judgement/indicator analysis

The student selection process, admission criteria and process are in line with the legal requirements for higher education institutions in Lithuania. The process is transparent and all relevant information is made available to prospective students via the institution's website and recruitment documents.

The drop in admission numbers in 2020 and 2021 can most likely be credited to the pandemic situation and the resulting perceived lack of attractiveness of the tourism sector as a career choice. Therefore, it is comprehensible that the programme management remains optimistic

about future admission numbers. However, the expert team recommends the programme management to formalise a strategy for student recruitment and retention in light of continued uncertainties as to the development of the tourism sector in Lithuania and the Baltic region. The continuation of the English version of the THM study programme should be reconsidered. Alternatively, more courses in the English language should be provided as part of the regular program, which would also support the internationalisation efforts of KUAS.

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

Since 2021, decisions for the recognition of formal and informal foreign qualifications lie within the responsibility of KUAS, namely the head of department. During the reporting period, a total of 238 students applied for crediting learning achievements. The majority of applications stem from partial studies (Erasmus+ mobility, internships, etc.), the number of applications from previous studies decreased continuously during the reporting period (see table 12, SER, p. 23). International student mobility was restricted during the pandemic, which explains the respective drop in credit transfers. The decrease in applications for learning achievements from prior studies can be interpreted as an indicator of quality of the KUAS study program.

(2) Expert judgement/indicator analysis

The procedure for the recognition of formal and non-formal qualifications gained outside of KUAS seems to be well defined and implemented in the study program management.

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

(1) Factual situation

According to the SER, 23 students went to study under the Erasmus+ scheme, and 49 students spent their internship abroad. Not surprisingly, the numbers of student mobility decreased during the pandemic in 2019 and 2020. Processes are in place for informing students about the possibility for academic mobility, the selection of suitable candidates as well as the management of credit applications upon completion of the mobility. Over the reporting period, there is a positive balance of incoming versus outgoing students for partial studies (26 to 23).

(2) Expert judgement/indicator analysis

The expert team commends KUAS for reacting to the situation quickly and allowing for remote and hybrid international student exchange. The processes in place all suggest a professional integration in the study program management. An extension of courses offered in the English language may support the internationalisation efforts of KUAS and make it even more attractive for incoming students.

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

(1) Factual situation

Consultations are provided before admission and during the admission process itself. In order to make the tourism study program look attractive and appropriate, the College publishes all information on the website and provides it during consultations (p. 22, SER). Various types of support are provided to students - information, free attendance, consultations, meetings with a psychologist, administration, scholarships, possibility to pay for education in instalments. Active involvement in scientific work and community life is encouraged. The college community participates in projects and regularly visits other institutions. Information about support is available on the College website and other platforms. Support is provided in accordance with the forms provided by law (p. 26-27, SER).

(2) Expert judgement/indicator analysis

The process of providing support to students is ensured by assessing feedback and surveys sent by the College. Consultations are actively sought and provided. During the pandemic situation, all necessary assistance was moved to the virtual space, indicating that KUAS has the ability to react to external challenges.. The study program is presented in schools and during consultations (p. 29, SER).

3.3.5 Evaluation of the sufficiency of study information and student counselling

(1) Factual situation

Various types of counselling are provided for students - admission issues, support, materials for taught subjects, and more. The quality of the provided consultations is ensured by community rating, feedback and results. Information about possible support and other issues is provided by the administration itself or is posted to the College website (https://www.kaunokolegija.lt/pirmakursio-atmintine/). This information is also shared when visiting schools, presenting the study program.

(2) Expert judgement/indicator analysis

The information provided to students and faculty is kept up- to date, and KUAS administration reacts to student requests in a timely manner. If students submit a certain request, sources and accurate data are provided. Students find all the information on the website or by contacting faculty and/or administrative staff (p.29, SER).

Strengths and weaknesses of this evaluation area:

(1) Strengths:

1. Information about support mechanisms for students are provided in a timely manner and are regularly updated

(2) Weaknesses:

1. Motivating students to use the possibility of consultations.

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 study process is regulated by the KUAS Study Procedure (No. (2.2.)-3-26, 21/06/2021), which sets guidelines for the planning and organisation of the study process. Other related documents are the KUAS Study Procedure and the Description of the Procedure for Assessing Learning Achievements (No. (2.2.)-3-38, 09/06/2020), Procedure for Organising Students' Internships (No. (2.2)-03-44, 15/11/2021), Procedure for Assessing Learning Achievements (No. (2.2.)-3-27, 21/06/2021), Description of the procedure for preparation, defence, preservation of final theses and organisation of final examinations (No. (2.2.)-3-65, 21/12/2020), Description of the procedure for preparation, defence, and preservation of final theses and organisation of final examinations in KUAS (No. (2.2.)-3-65, 21/12/2020). During the site-visit with the lecturers and students, it was stated that the study procedures are clear and intelligible for both groups.

The KUAS Study Management System is used for the management of the study process from 2020. A meeting with representatives responsible for Learning Facilities and Resources revealed that the system is being changed to make the management of the study process more efficient, as the new system provides more user-friendly options for managing processes (e.g. it is easier to monitor students' progress, fill in reports etc.). During the remote site-visit meeting the members of the self-evaluation group stated that a significant change has occurred with the introduction of this system is that all reports are already being submitted in this system.

Moodle is also used in the teaching and learning process, both for the uploading of study material and for communication and feedback to students.

The assessment of students' learning achievements is governed by the KUAS Study Procedure and the Description of the Procedure for Assessing Learning Achievements (No. (2.2.)-3-38, 09/06/2020). Methods of evaluating learning achievements are defined by the lecturers who prepare the description of the study module. SER claims (p. 29) that KUAS applies a ten-score system of cumulative assessment. The final evaluation score of the learning achievements of a module consists of the sum of the interim evaluations and the integrated project multiplied by

the respective weighting coefficients assigned to them. The evaluation score of the integrated project comprises at least 50 per cent of the cumulative score. Internships play an important role in the assessment of student achievement. The students indicated during the site-visit that separate tripartite contracts (between the student, the college and the social partner) are signed for all placements. This indicates that the Procedure for Organising Students' Internships (No. (2.2)-03-44, 15/11/2021) is followed.

(2) Expert judgement/indicator analysis

The analysis of the information received during the site-visit and SER show that KUAS has a clear and regulated system to ensure the quality of the study process. The implementation of the new Study Management System as well as the use of the Moodle environment contributes to a better quality management of the study process.

The modular system, which combines different but related subjects in terms of content, allows the students to combine knowledge and skills in different areas. The integrated project in the subject assessment helps to ensure the integration and applicability of different knowledge of the subject. Analysis of the course descriptions of the modules (e.g., Basics of Tourism and Hospitality) showed that the descriptions provide a detailed and clear assessment framework for students and clearly identify the intended learning outcomes. Assessment activities of this kind ensure a comprehensive education of students. However, an analysis of the students' responses during the meeting suggests that clearer communication of the course objectives by the lecturers should be highlighted as an area for improvement. The students at the site-visit were unable to identify what the objectives of the integrated project are, whereas SER and the course descriptions indicate that they are clearly formulated and presented at the beginning of the module. Therefore, clarifying communication with students to ensure that they have a clear understanding of the value of assignments and the links to the learning outcomes is recommended.

It is also advisable to pay attention to the synthesis and correspondence between the learning objectives and the provided assessment tasks. During the meeting with the lecturers, it became clear that they could not explain how the assessment system is designed and how its relevance to the course objectives is ensured.

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. 30) states that the adaptation of the study process to different socially vulnerable groups and students with special needs is not yet sufficiently systematic. However, the KUAS strategy has already been drawn up and an Equal Opportunities and Diversity (gender, age, culture, origin, social status, disability, religion, reconciliation of study/work commitments, etc.) Programme has been prepared. SER (p. 39) identifies different measures that improve the accessibility of studies for students with special needs (visual, hearing, mobility, etc.): flexible forms of the assessment of learning achievements are used, adjusting them to their

individual needs and abilities (e.g. by increasing the font size of assignments, extending the time for the assessment of learning achievements, adapting the physical environment, etc.). For this purpose, KUAS has approved the KUAS Procedure for the Individualisation of the Study Process for Students with Disabilities and/or Learning Difficulties (No. 1-521, 28/12/2021). KUAS website is also accessible to the disabled; visually impaired students have access to special keyboards and software in the library self-study rooms.

To adapt the premises of the academic campus for people with special needs, KUAS invested €51,350 in the evaluation period (installation of a lift, ramps, and WC on the ground floor). In the SER there are areas for improvement: the front door is not properly equipped for people with reduced mobility; there are no warning surfaces for visually impaired persons; the places where a disabled person should be more careful are not marked in bright colours, etc.

(2) Expert judgement/indicator analysis

Analysing the information provided in the SER for students with special needs, KUAS has implemented a number of solutions to support socially vulnerable groups and students with special needs. The adequate assessment of the situation and the identification of specific weaknesses in this area by those in charge of the institution should be highlighted (based on the data in the SER). This leads to the conclusion that the situation is analysed and the areas for improvement are clearly identified.

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

The SER states (p.30) that KUAS has developed and applies the system of assessing students' achievements, which is defined in the KUAS Study Procedure (No. (2.2.)-3-26, 21/06/2021 and the Procedure for Assessing Learning Achievements (No. (2.2.)-3-27, 21/06/2021). To obtain feedback, various methods of assessing students' learning achievements are used: oral assessment, individual oral questioning, and presentation); written test; graphic and visual assessment (testing knowledge and skills; idea and concept mapping, etc.), and cumulative integrated assessment (portfolio, case study, projects, etc.). The methods of assessing learning achievements are defined by the academic staff, and the Study Field Committee approves them during module certification.

The monitoring of student study progress in the Unit for Studies is a part of the Study Management System. The system also monitors students' turnover and records dropouts. In 2020, a plan of measures to reduce students' dropout was developed at the Faculty (SER, p.30). During the site-visit with the self-evaluation group, the College representatives identified the following measures to prevent drop-out: an introductory week for the first-year students, Dean's meeting with the first-year students for a motivational talk, meetings of the tutors with the students (talks about studies, support, motivation, etc.) and the introduction of IT tools for more effective feedback and monitoring of student progress.

Once a year, the Tourism and Leisure Study Committee analyses the results of the students' surveys, the results of the defence of final theses, students' progress; evaluates the number of students in the study field, the number of those who have suspended or terminated studies, as well as the reasons for it, and makes suggestions for improving the study programme/field.

During the meeting, the students confirmed that they receive feedback in the Moodle environment, in the Study Management System and by email. This fact was confirmed in SER (p. 31) and during the site-visit with the lecturers, who indicated that they provide feedback both verbally and in the Moodle environment in the comments section of each assignment). The students also have an opportunity to express their opinion on the study process and quality by filling out a questionnaire (not mandatory). As an advantage, the KUAS website has the rubric 'You Told Us, We Did It' (https://www.kaunokolegija.lt/vf/fakultetas/griztamasis-rysys/#1629186636097-57afe61c-d02c), in addition to summary reports of students' feedback. This provides students with a brief and clear update on the developments related to the shortcomings in the study process they have identified.

(2) Expert judgement/indicator analysis

To summarise and evaluate the information provided in the SER, on KUAS website, and during the meeting with the students, the monitoring of student study progress and feedback to students to promote self-assessment and subsequent planning of study progress is clear and regulated. At the site-visit, the students indicated that assessment and organisational information reaches them in various forms, in a timely manner and of good quality, and is also available on KUAS website.

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

(1) Factual situation

According to SER (p. 31) KUAS analyses the employment of the graduates' every year. For this purpose, they use the information from the Lithuanian Employment Services on graduates' registration and analyses the data of the Government Strategic Analysis Centre (STRATA) on graduates' employment according to the qualification acquired in 12 months after graduation. The data from the Saiku Career Management system are also assessed. Additionally, six months after graduation, the Department of Tourism and Leisure Management organises graduates' surveys (the process is regulated in Procedure for Managing Feedback from Stakeholders in KUAS (No. (2.2)-3-23, 31/10/2017). One year after graduation, KUAS conducts an institutional survey on the graduates' readiness for professional activities and integration into the labour market. The data collected are discussed by the Study Field Committee and used to improve the programmes of the study field (SER, p.31). The analysis of the results shows that a relatively high percentage of graduates participated in the survey (82 per cent of the Tourism Hotel Management graduates participated in the survey in 2019, 83 per cent in 2020, and 71 per cent in 2021.). However, there is a tendency for a lower number of graduates to be employed in their field of specialisation (36 per cent in 2019; 34 per cent in 2020, 33 per cent in 2021. During the site-visit discussion with the social partners, the

following reasons for this trend were identified: the pandemic situation and the fact that tourism is still not a priority area for business development in Lithuania.

The College has an Alumni Club of Kaunas College, whose members during the remote site-visit confirmed that they meet with the students, carry out career guidance, share work experience, career employment opportunities, participate in events, etc.

(2) Expert judgement/indicator analysis

KUAS's analysis of the employability of graduates and graduate career tracking in the study field relies on reliable and comprehensive sources of information (institutional data) and the institution initiates its own feedback gathering by conducting surveys. Based on the reporting results on the KUAS website and in the SER report (p. 31), the participation of graduate students in the feedback survey is high. This is likely to provide the institution with reliable results for the evaluation and improvement of the study programme.

The decreasing employment of graduates in the field of tourism is likely to be a reflection of global problems (pandemic, war), but those in charge in the institution should find means and ways to encourage students graduating in Tourism and Recreation to choose this field of work.

The activities of the Kaunas College Alumni Club contribute to the professional guidance of the students and the improvement of the study process.

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

(1) Factual situation

The implementation of policies to ensure academic integrity, tolerance and non-discrimination at KUAS is regulated by KUAS Code of Academic Ethics (No. (2.2)-3-22, 4/09/2018). Strengthening the academic integrity, the institution has used a plagiarism detection system (Nr. (2.2.)-3-29, 20/11/2018). The lecturer of each study course/module is responsible for preventing plagiarism while assigning and evaluating written papers. According to the opinion expressed by the lecturers at the site-visit, the text-matching tool *Turnitin* in the Moodle environment to check study papers is used for this purpose, and several task variants are used in tests; test tasks are renewed every year. According to the SER (p.32), the library staff are also involved in this process and organise training for students to help ensure academic integrity (e.g., on copyright, academic ethics and plagiarism prevention, etc.).

In order to reinforce one of the norms established in the KUAS Code of Academic Ethics not to tolerate cases related to corruption and(or) academic dishonesty, the institution has newly adopted KUAS's Policy on Creating a Corruption-Resistant Environment (No. 1-2, 03/01/2022).

According to the SER (p.33), the institution strives to ensure the smooth application of the principle of equal opportunities, the implementation of the provisions of the Law on Equal Opportunities and the Law on Equal Opportunities for Women and Men by adopting internal documents establishing equal opportunities and non-discrimination and taking other preventive measures. Harassment or discrimination observed or experienced at KUAS can be reported in full confidence via a special trust e-mail pasitikejimas@go.KUAS.lt.

(2) Expert judgement/indicator analysis

The analysis of the information provided in the SER and the legal documents show that KUAS has planned and implemented measures to reduce academic integrity, tolerance and non-discrimination, and that these measures and actions are regulated and publicly available. The institutions stated that no appeal regarding the evaluation of the final thesis was considered.

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

The procedure for handling appeals at KUAS is established in The Procedure for Assessing Learning Achievements (No. (2.2.)-3-38, 09/06/2020). The procedures are described in a clear and understandable way. The document is published on the College's website. During the meeting with the students, when students were asked about the existence of this document and awareness of the procedure, they said that they were not familiar with the procedure. When students were asked where the document could be found, they mentioned *Google*.

(2) Expert judgement/indicator analysis

KUAS has an official document that defines the procedure for appeals and complaints, but the students are not familiar with it. Therefore, closer communication between the administration and students on this issue is recommended.

Strengths and weaknesses of this evaluation area:

(1) Strengths:

1. A clear and regulated system to ensure the study process (process regulation system, monitoring of study progress, variety of assessment methods, etc.).

2. High involvement of the students and alumni in providing feedback.

3. Activities of the KUAS Alumni Club to support the professional development of the students.

(2) Weaknesses:

1. The students are not familiar with the appeal procedure. KUAS should strengthen communication through the presentation of official documents to the students.

2. Lack of communication between the lecturers and students to clarify the links between student assignments and learning outcomes.

3. The lecturers' inability to identify/explain clearly the design of the assessment system and its relevance to the objectives of the subject.

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

Updated Annex 5 provides details of academic staff currently teaching in the SFTL programmes. Nineteen academic staff are included. Among them, only four staff have doctoral degrees and others obtained postgraduate qualifications. A review of their subject areas associated with their qualifications, very few of them are directly related to tourism or hospitality or wellness. Two out of 19 staff are associate professors. The updated Annex 5 also indicates that these 19 academic staff have average 22.5 years of pedagogical work experience. They have an average 11.8 years of practical work experience.

Table 16 of the SER (p.33-34) presents the ratio between the number of academic staff teaching in the SFTL programmes and the number students in the last three academic years. The number of students per lecturer and number of students per FTE are provided in three academic years under review (i.e., the number or students per lecturer in 2019/2020 was 8, in 2020/2021, it was 7 and in 2021/2022, it was 8; the number of students per FTE: in 2019/2020, it was 27; in 2020/2021, it was 20; and in 2021/2022, it was 22). The ratio of the academic staff and students is optimal and sufficient to achieve the anticipated learning outcomes of the study programmes.

Table 17 of the SER (p. 34) presents the academic staff of the courses in the field of study by age. The table reveals that the number of those aged between 30 and 39 increased over the period under assessment, and the number of those aged over 50 decreased. However, the average age of the teaching team is very stable.

Table 18 of the SER (p.34) presents the composition of the academic staff in relation to their positions in the last three academic years. Table 19 compares the composition of the academic staff of the SFTL with legal requirements. In consideration of Table 19 and the updated Annex 5, the composition of the academic staff in the SFTL programmes complies with the legal requirements to achieve the anticipated learning outcomes.

The academic staff with the SFTL programmes took part in seminars, conferences, courses, internships to improve their professional, didactic, and scientific competencies considering personal needs, recommendations of the Head of the Department, and KUAS proposals. Table 20 provides detailed information of areas of the development of the competencies of the academic staff. They can also take practical internships to refresh their experience in business companies. As the SER (p. 35) indicates, in 2021, 13.7 percent of the SFTL academic staff had internships, while in 2019, only 6.5 per cent had them.

(2) Expert judgement/indicator analysis

Based on the available evidence, the review panel concludes that the number, qualification and competence of teaching staff within SFTL programmes at KUAS in order to achieve the learning outcomes are adequate. However, in relation to their qualification and associated subject areas, the review team **recommends** that the SFTL programme team increases the number of the staff to hold a PhD and encourages more staff to gain subject related qualifications.

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 KUAS academic staff have an opportunity to participate in various mobility programmes. As indicated in the SER (p. 36), the Unit of International Relations and the Coordinator of International Activities in the Faculty manage the process and the activities. *Description of the Procedure for Organising Mobility of KUAS Staff under International Exchange Programmes*, guides the selection and funding process of academic mobility activities of the KUAS staff. Participation in mobility activities is assessed during the certification of the academic staff. Due to the limited possibilities for physical mobility because of the global pandemic, the academic staff can participate in international exchange programmes virtually.

Procedure for organising the reception of foreign academic and other employees visiting KUAS regulates the reception of international academic and other staff coming to KUAS for teaching/ training under Erasmus+, Nordplus or other mobility programmes.

Table 21 of the SER (p36) provides details of academic mobility activities in the last three academic years. It is clear that the academic staff are actively involved in Erasmus+ projects and activities both in Lithuania and abroad.

(2) Expert judgement/indicator analysis

Different regulations are developed for outgoing and inbound academic mobility activities at the KUAS. They are clearly prepared and promoted at least four times a year. Based on the available evidence, the review panel concludes that the conditions for ensuring teaching staff's academic mobility at the KUAS are favourable.

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

(1) Factual situation

As indicated in the SER (p. 37), the *Procedure for In-Service Training of KUAS Employees* emphasises providing conditions for the staff to acquire relevant competencies. The newly recruited academic staff must undergo introductory training (within the first two months of their employment), which provides them with the knowledge and skills necessary to perform the functions specified in the job description.

Based on the staff's annual self-assessment reports, in consideration of the goals and objectives of KUAS and the academic division, the head of departments and academic divisions identify and define the needs for improving the competencies of the staff. The KUAS Human Resources Service organises internal training for the academic and administrative staff according to the plan of in-service events approved annually for the current year and supplemented as necessary. Staff members can also suggest relevant topics for in-service events within KUAS. The staff may express the need to participate in in-service training events outside KUAS. Staff's in-service training is financed from KUAS funds, the EU structural funds. The employee can also personally remunerate them. Detailed information of areas of the development of the competencies of the academic staff is presented in Table 20 of the SER.

The achievements of the academic staff in professional development are evaluated every five years during certification.

The meeting with the teaching staff indicates that they received a range of support to develop their pedagogical, subject and research competencies. They commented that the support they received from the KUAS is sufficient as they have many possibilities internally and externally to develop their competencies.

(2) Expert judgement/indicator analysis

Based on the available evidence and the visit, the review panel concludes that the teaching staff at the KUAS are provided favourable conditions to improve their competencies. The review panel **commends** the clear procedure and well-managed in-service training to improve the competencies of the teaching staff as a good practice.

Strengths and weaknesses of this evaluation area:

(1) Strengths:

1. The clear procedure and well-managed in-service training to improve the competencies of the teaching staff as a good practice.

(2) Weaknesses:

1. Few staff have a PhD. Many staff have postgraduate qualifications, but they are not directly related to tourism or hospitality or wellness subject areas.

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

Resources are varied and available for the entire College community. The community has access to auditoriums. They are equipped with IT and wireless internet. 9 auditoriums provide the opportunity to work for most students (60 to 100 seats). The library has separate areas for work and study. Various publications and books for studying and further development are available on-line and in the library. The teaching materials include lecture notes and methodological materials (p. 42). Feedback on the use and usefulness of learning resources and their quality is sought. The college community is actively accessing and using the resources provided.

(2) Expert judgement/indicator analysis

A large and wide variety of learning resources is provided, which the community can choose from. Training on how to use these resources is organised and held by the library. Quality is assured. Community offers apply. Necessary information about learning resources and their opportunities arrives in time (p. 42, SER).

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

(1) Factual situation

The use of sources is actively planned and organised. Great attention is paid to the renovation of the premises. A larger amount of money is allocated for the use of resources - 100,000 euros (p. 41, SER). The amount invested per student has increased from 49,5 euros to 76,5 euros (p. 41, SER). Learning resources are frequently and qualitatively updated. Table 22 shows that money for updating learning resources has increased (p. 41, SER).

(2) Expert judgement/indicator analysis

The available resources are updated and their quality is ensured by the money amount, which is intended, meetings and discussions. Community needs and wishes are listened to through the communication channels, such as e- mail, meetings, consultations. Students are informed about the available opportunities through the email or can find the information on the website (p. 43).

Strengths and weaknesses of this evaluation area:

(1) Strengths:
1. A wide selection of learning resources are provided to the college community. The resources are continuously assessed and updated, when necessary.

(2) Weaknesses:
none

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

The internal quality assurance system is based on the Quality Assurance Policy and the KUAS Strategy. The development of this process in the Colleague is specified in the KAUKO Quality Manual (No. (2.2)-3-15, 08/04/2021). The quality assurance system covers all levels of the implementation of studies in the field and provides for the related processes, which are regulated by the more than 10 documents mentioned in SER (p. 41-42).

The management of the studies of the college and decision-making is performed at several levels: institutional (e.g., preparation of documents regulating studies), faculty, and department. Programme management is defined in the Description of the Procedure for the Assessment and Improvement of the Quality of Ongoing Study Programmes (No. (2.2.)-3-16, 8/04/2020). Control and change procedures are defined: the amendments to the study programmes related to the change of the title of the programme, its duration, volume, introduction/closure of new specialisations are approved by the KUAS Academic Council; the amendments to the study programmes related to improving the description of a study module (annotation, bibliography, study plan, learning achievement assessment system and other structural parts) are approved at the Department meeting.

During the site-visit discussion with the lecturers, it was confirmed that students' feedback is very important for the lecturers for the improvement of the course, as well as for the motivation system and the lecturer's evaluation (Procedure for Planning and (Self) Assessing the Activities of the Academic Staff, No. (2.2.)-3-107, 13/04/2021). The lecturers also noted the continuous support from the administration and social partners, from whom they receive suggestions on both the content of the course and the development of practical skills.

The SER (p. 43) specifically identified the indicators that are measured within the institution and help to ensure the quality of the study programme: the volume of research productivity of the academic staff working in the field of Business Studies; the demand for graduates in the

labour market; the dropout of students; the results of admission to studies and graduation; the topics and applicability of final theses; the mobility of students and staff; the applicability of the materials of modules for distance studies; the methodological activities of the academic staff; participation in international projects/programmes; the expansion of cooperation with stakeholders; the feedback of stakeholders (students, partners, employers).

(2) Expert judgement/indicator analysis

The analysis of the documents provided in the SER suggests that they systematically regulate the quality of the internal quality assurance system of the studies at all levels of the organisation's management. The content of the documents showed that they clearly outline the roles and responsibilities of each structural unit. The discussions with teachers and the self-assessment group during the meetings confirmed that each group is aware of its responsibilities and the value of the measurable indicators identified in SER.

The authors of the SER clearly identified and declared the indicators that measure the quality of studies both in the SER (p. 430) and during the remote site-visit. The following key factors were identified by the institutional representatives as key to measuring the quality of studies: good planning, collection and analysis of feedback from the students, social partners and alumni, employability of graduates, accreditation of modules, etc. This is in line with the indicators provided in the SER and the quality process documents.

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

(1) Factual situation

KUAS has a formal document governing the collection of feedback from stakeholders (Procedure for Managing Feedback from Stakeholders in KUAS, No. (2.2)-3-23, 4/05/2021). It is used as a basis for periodic surveys of students (questionnaire survey of the first-year students at the end of the first semester; questionnaire survey of the students on the quality of the course/module they have taken and on the quality of teaching; questionnaire survey of students (excluding first- and final-year students) on their satisfaction with their studies during the spring semester of each year; questionnaire survey of the students who have returned from a professional placement, etc.); graduates are surveyed about their readiness for professional activities and integration into the labour market, the quality of studies and employment. The academic staff assess the quality of studies, and employers evaluate specialists' theoretical and practical readiness (SER p.43). Other measures are in place to help guarantee the quality of studies (according to the SER): social partners participate in thesis defence committees, individual meetings on internships, etc. During the site-visit with the social partners, a specific example of how the insights of the social partners are taken into account was given of the decision to close the Wellness and Spa Management study programme.

(2) Expert judgement/indicator analysis

The analysis of the information received during the remote site-visits, the SER and the documents regulating the processes show that all stakeholder groups are involved in the internal quality assessment system: they take part in the surveys, make suggestions for the improvement of the study programmes, are directly involved in the process through the admission of students to internships or through the participation in the Study Programme Committee or thesis defence committees.

Although discussions with the SER self-assessment group, administration and lecturers gave the impression that there is a relatively close cooperation with the social partners, both in terms of internships and the improvement of the study process, but only a few representatives confirmed this when asked who had contributed to the improvement of the programme. They indicated that they usually contribute as consultants by suggesting new and relevant topics, IT tools, etc. However, they noted that meetings are organised, but they are not formalised and it is not clear how their suggestions are translated into the curriculum. This is confirmed by the SER self-assessment group (p. 32), who themselves identify this as a weakness. Therefore, it is recommended to formalise the meetings with the social partners to improve the quality of communication and capture the results of the changes. This is likely not only to involve social partners in improving the study process, but also allow for higher quality of recording and implementation of suggestions and feedback on changes to stakeholders.

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 (p. 44), data collected and analysed to implement and improve studies in the field include the results of students' admission and graduation; data on learning achievements, students' dropout, graduates' employability, participation of the academic staff in in-service training and project activities; indicators of the mobility of the academic staff and students; data on the research, expert and counselling activities of the academic staff and students, etc. are collected in the Academic Staff Activity Planning System and in the Study Management System. The data obtained are analysed at various levels of management and the results are presented at department meetings, faculty meetings and published on the KUAS website (https://www.kaunokolegija.lt/).

(2) Expert judgement/indicator analysis

 The analysis of the data on the study process and the methods and tools for collecting and presenting the results show that the system used by KUAS is effective.

The information on the KUAS website is very clear and structured. The website is clearly structured and contains information and documents related to the organisation of the study process (study documents, information on study programmes, information on student

support, career opportunities) as well as quality assurance documents and results of feedback surveys.

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

KUAS conducts a survey on student satisfaction with their studies. Overall student satisfaction with their studies is high (68% of students surveyed in 2021) (Source: https://www.kaunokolegija.lt/kk_wp_content/uploads/2021/05/KK_ataskaita-pasitenkinimas-studijomis-2021.pdf). The report does not present indicators by field of study or study programme.

According to the Procedure for Managing Feedback from Stakeholders at KUAS (No. (2.2)-3-23, 4/05/2021), the institution periodically organises eight student surveys.

The SER states that the results of the survey on the quality of module teaching conducted in 2019-2021 showed that students of the Tourism and Recreation study field (81% of the surveyed students) positively evaluated the lecturers' teaching methodology, the content of the course, and confirmed that the material of the module helped them to acquire new knowledge and skills, etc.

During the onsite-visit discussions, the students demonstrated a positive attitude toward their studies: they mentioned the professionalism of the lecturers, the variety of teaching and assessment methods, indicated that they were informed about the changes in the study programme and were involved in its improvement by filling in questionnaires and submitting suggestions. Among the shortcomings related to the organisation of the study process, the students pointed out the problem with the timetabling of lectures; according to them, sometimes there are long gaps between lectures, which they consider inconvenient when planning their daily activities.

(2) Expert judgement/indicator analysis

Considering the documents regulating the feedback and the information provided on KUAS's website and SER, the institution systematically collects and analyses students' feedback on the processes and their quality in the study process. During the feedback survey and the meeting with the students, a positive attitude towards studying at KUAS was identified. However, it is recommended to improve the precision and transparency of the publicised feedback reports. For example, student satisfaction results are not differentiated by field of study or study programme. This makes it difficult to assess the results of any single study programme. Therefore, it is recommended to revise the analysis of results to include an evaluation indicator by study programme.

Strengths and weaknesses of this evaluation area:

(1) Strengths:

1. A clear and well - regulated internal quality assurance system.

2. Systematic data collection and analysis ensures realistic assessment of the situation and allows for timely improvement and updating of study programmes in the field of Tourism and Recreation.

(2) Weaknesses:

1. Informal involvement of the social partners in improving the study process and lack of feedback on this aspect.

2. The summarised feedback reports that are made publicly available do not differentiate results by field of study or study programme.

IV. EXAMPLES OF EXCELLENCE

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

In fostering faculty and student involvement and engagement in research, the HTM programme has created a culture of research that appears to be producing excellent results, even if the research focuses on tourism or other business management topics. With more emphasis in hotel/ hospitality management, the ambitious targets set are likely to produce an increasing level of results in terms of ranked publications and student involvement in research in the years to come. This, together with the systematic planning, would serve as a good example to other similar institutions.

V. RECOMMENDATIONS*

Evaluation Area	Recommendations for the Evaluation Area (study cycle)
Intended and achieved learning outcomes and curriculum	- The SFTL programmes team should systematically review all the module contents to develop knowledge statements for the programmes. - The SFTL programmes team should reconsider the design of the programmes to include at least one subject specific module in the first semester. - The SFTL programmes team should carefully design the integration of WSM specialisation to maximise the benefits of the integration not only for the KUAS but also for the students by embedding tourism and hotel industry knowledge in the specialisation. - The SFTL programmes team should broaden the attraction of WSM specialisation to allow the students to learn some tourism and hotel modules and take potential internships and final projects in these areas if their practical learning and research opportunities in the WSM area are unobtainable. - The SFTL programmes team should publicise the free study schedule scheme among the students and so the students can take full advantage of it to develop their competencies for future career.
Links between science (art) and studies	- The SFTL programmes team should incentivize faculty to direct more research on hotel (hospitality) management and identify social partners that are specifically interested in this field. This can, subsequently, feed more hospitality-focused content into the curriculum. - The SFTL programmes team should reinforce the external and internal image of the study program so that it clearly stands out from the general business management programs the institution and the partners work with.
Student admission and support	- The SFTL programmes team should formulate a strategy for student recruitment and retention, the English version of the THM programme should be considered. - The SFTL programmes team should enhance the means of communicating academic processes to students.

Teaching and learning, student performance and graduate employment	• The SFTL programmes team should strengthen communication through the presentation of official documents related to the study process to the students. • The SFTL programmes team should clarify communication with students to ensure that they have a clear understanding of the value of assignments and the links to the learning outcomes.
Teaching staff	• The SFTL programmes team should increase the number of staff holding a PhD and encourage more staff to gain subject related qualifications.
Learning facilities and resources	• None
Study quality management and public information	● It is recommended to formalise the meetings with the social partners to improve the quality of communication and capture the results of the changes.

*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.

VI. SUMMARY

Main positive and negative quality aspects of each evaluation area of the study field of Tourism and Leisure at Kaunas kolegija:

The first cycle programmes under review can be considered well-functioning, and well-managed programmes overall. The positive employers' feedback on the managerial competencies acquired objectively justify that the study programmes are in demand and meet the needs of the labour market. The review panel concludes that the aims and learning outcomes of the two programmes conform to the needs of the society and the labour market. Both programmes are developed in line with legal requirements. Furthermore, the THM programme and anticipated changes to WSM programme conform to the mission and strategic activities of the KUAS.

The review panel supports the SFTL programmes team's decision to integrate WSM programme into THM programme as a specialisation. However, it is recommended that the SFTL programme teams reconsider the design of the programmes to include at least one subject specific module in the first semester and to develop clear knowledge statements for the programmes. At the same time, the review panel commends that the module descriptions are prepared in an excellent format and provides the newest and advanced knowledge to guide the students to work in the industry.

The student selection process, admission criteria and process are in line with the legal requirements for higher education institutions in Lithuania. The process is transparent and all relevant information is made available to prospective students via the institution's website and recruitment documents.

However, the expert team recommends the programme management to formalise a strategy for student recruitment and retention in light of continued uncertainties as to the development of the tourism sector in Lithuania and the Baltic region. The continuation of the English version of the THM study programme should be reconsidered. Alternatively, more courses in the English language should be provided as part of the regular program, which would also support the internationalisation efforts of KUAS.

In terms of research, the review team got the impression of a well-managed and systematically directed research program. Students show a broad interest in publications, which is a sign that students are engaged in scientific activity. Faculty research may be further incentivized.

KUAS has planned and implemented measures to reduce academic integrity, tolerance and non-discrimination, and that these measures and actions are regulated and publicly available. The communication with students in regards to academic processes should be improved.

The review panel concludes that the number, qualification and competence of teaching staff within SFTL programmes at KUAS in order to achieve the learning outcomes are adequate.

However, it is recommended to increase the number of faculty holding a Phd and/or develop a strategy for encouraging more staff to gain subject-related qualifications. At the same time, the review team commends the clear procedure and well-managed in-service training to improve the competencies of the teaching staff as a good practice. This also includes the possibility for teaching mobilities.

The social partners are integrated in the quality management processes, yet it is recommended to formalise the feedback loops and consider a closer alignment for the continuous development of the curricula.

Expert panel signatures:
Dr. Florian Aubke, (panel chairperson), member of academic community.