STUDIJŲ KOKYBĖS VERTINIMO CENTRAS
CENTRE FOR QUALITY ASSESSMENT IN HIGHER EDUCATION

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COMMUNICATION FIELD OF STUDY

Kaunas University of Technology

EXTERNAL EVALUATION REPORT

Expert panel:

1. Panel chair: Assoc. Prof. Heidi Ashton (United Kingdom) ………………………….. (signature)
2. Academic member: Assoc. Prof. Dorte Madsen (Denmark)
3. Academic member: Prof. Christian Christensen (Sweden)
4. Social partner: Ms Raminta Stanaitytė-Česnulienė (Lithuania)
5. Student representative: Ms Kateryna Shalimova (Ukraine)

SKVC coordinator: Ms Austėja Pliupelytė

Report prepared in 2024
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I. INTRODUCTION

1.1. OUTLINE OF THE EVALUATION PROCESS

The field of study evaluations in Lithuanian higher education institutions (HEIs) are based on the following:

- Procedure for the External Evaluation and Accreditation of Studies, Evaluation Areas and Indicators, approved by the Minister of Education, Science, and Sport;
- Methodology of External Evaluation of Study Fields approved by the Director of the Centre for Quality Assessment in Higher Education (SKVC);
- Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area (ESG).

The evaluation is intended to support HEIs in continuous enhancement of their study process and to inform the public about the quality of programmes within the field of study.

The object of the evaluation is all programmes within a specific field of study. A separate assessment is given for each study cycle.

The evaluation process consists of the following main steps: 1) Self-evaluation and production of a self-evaluation report (SER) prepared by an HEI; 2) A site visit by the review panel to the HEI; 3) The external evaluation report (EER) production by the review panel; 4) EER review by the HEI; 5) EER review by the Study Evaluation Committee; 6) Accreditation decision taken by SKVC; 7) Appeal procedure (if initiated by the HEI); 8) Follow-up activities, which include the production of a Progress Report on Recommendations Implementation by the HEI.

The main outcome of the evaluation process is the EER prepared by the review panel. The HEI is forwarded the draft EER for feedback on any factual mistakes. The draft report is then subject to approval by the external Study Evaluation Committee, operating under SKVC. Once approved, the EER serves as the basis for an accreditation decision. If an HEI disagrees with the outcome of the evaluation, it can file an appeal.On the basis of the approved EER, SKVC takes one of the following accreditation decisions:

- **Accreditation granted for 7 years** if all evaluation areas are evaluated as exceptional (5 points), very good (4 points), or good (3 points).
- **Accreditation granted for 3 years** if at least one evaluation area is evaluated as satisfactory (2 points).
- **Not accredited** if at least one evaluation area is evaluated as unsatisfactory (1 point).

If the field of study and cycle were **previously accredited for 3 years**, the re-evaluation of the field of study and cycle is initiated no earlier than after 2 years. After the re-evaluation of the field of study and cycle, SKVC takes one of the following decisions regarding the accreditation of the field of study and cycle:

- To be accredited for the remaining term until the next evaluation of the field of study and cycle, but no longer than 4 years, if all evaluation areas are evaluated as exceptional (5 points), very good (4 points) or good (3 points).
- To not be accredited, if at least one evaluation area is evaluated as satisfactory (2 points) or unsatisfactory (1 point).

1.2. REVIEW PANEL

The review panel was appointed in accordance with the Reviewer Selection Procedure as approved by the Director of SKVC.

The composition of the review panel was as follows:

1. Panel chair: Assoc. Prof. Heidi Ashton (United Kingdom), Director of Education and Deputy Head of School for Creative Arts, Performance and Visual Cultures, University of Warwick;
2. Academic member: Assoc. Prof. Dorte Madsen (Denmark), Associate Professor at Department of Management, Society and Communication, Copenhagen Business School;
3. Academic member: Prof. Christian Christensen (Sweden), Professor at Department of Media Studies, Stockholm University;
4. Social partner: Ms Raminta Stanaitytė-Česnulienė, social partner representative, Co-Founder and Partner at Insynergy4 Ltd., a Management Consulting Company; independent strategic communication consultant; former Chief Adviser to the President of the Republic of Lithuania and Head of Communication Group;
5. Student representative: Ms Kateryna Shalimova (Ukraine), student representative, Bachelor student of Arabic Language and Literature, Taras Shevchenko National University of Kyiv; member of ESU Quality Assurance Student Experts Pool.

1.3. SITE VISIT

The site visit was organised on 7 May 2024 onsite.

Meetings with the following members of the staff and stakeholders took place during the site visit:

- Senior management and administrative staff of the faculty(ies)
- The team responsible for the preparation of the SER
- Teaching staff
- Students
- Alumni and social stakeholders including employers.

There was no need for translation and the meetings were conducted in English.

1.4. BACKGROUND OF THE REVIEW

Overview of the HEI

Kaunas University of Technology is a state, higher education institution that developed from the University of Lithuania and was formerly founded on February 16th 1922. The University's vision is 'be a technological university in the international arena, interdisciplinary, and involved in the development and transfer of new knowledge and innovation'. It holds the core values of 'responsibility to society, academic integrity, cooperation within and outside the organisation and continuous improvement' which underpin it's ideals and activities.

The university offers 1st, 2nd and 2rd cycle study programmes with a total of 98 study programmes offered in 2022-2023. There are 9 faculties: Chemical Technology, Civil Engineering and Architecture, Electrical and Electronics Engineering, Informatics, Maths and Natural Sciences, Mechanical Engineering and Design, Social Sciences Arts and Humanities, Faculty of Technologies and Business, and the school of economics and business. Faculties are managed by Deans, Vice-Deans and Heads of Administration and individual departments are managed by the Heads of Department. Senior management act in accordance with the Statute of the University. Study fields and programmes are coordinated through Programme Committees.

Overview of the field of study

Studies in the field of communications are located in the Faculty of Social Sciences, Arts and Humanities (hereinafter, the faculty). There are two courses in the field 'communication studies and information management technologies' which is a 1st cycle programme, and 'strategic communications' which is a 2nd cycle programme. The 1st cycle programme is well established having received accreditation in June 2017, the 2nd cycle programme is in its second year. These are 2 of the 14 programmes offered in the faculty. In 2015 the Field Study Programme Committees (FSPC) were formed which provided a new management model that overseas programme quality in accordance with the University's overarching quality framework. The importance of the field at the societal level is recognised with the objectives, results and content of the programmes grounded in long-term EU and national strategies, perspectives of society's development, labour market and community needs. The study field collaborates with social partners to ensure that course developments are relevant and is twinned with University of Twente in the Netherlands.

Previous external evaluations

The first and last evaluation of *Communication Studies and Information Management Technologies* took place in 2017, resulting in a positive assessment and accreditation of the study programme. Each evaluation area scored a '3', and the report recommended ensuring access to specialised literature and developing students' English language skills. It also emphasised thoroughly informing students about the exchange semester at the University of Twente and the need for specific criteria, measurement, and improvement methods to ensure quality, as well as enhancing the applicability of acquired competences in the labour market.

The first and last evaluation of *Strategic Communication* took place in 2022, resulting in a positive assessment and accreditation of the study programme. Most evaluation areas received a score of '4' (very good), with facilities rated as excellent and study quality as good. Among the recommendations were promoting teachers' membership in international communication organisations, expanding partnerships with strategic communication stakeholders to enhance programme visibility and collaborative research, and acquiring

necessary literature. The progress report produced in 2024 detailed the improvements and plans made following the recommendations.

In 2023 an R&D assessment was undertaken with an overall score of 3 for the field of communications (combined with psychology). The report found that scholars engage with important topics such as policy issue life cycles in Lithuanian media, information vulnerability in Lithuania and climate crisis communication demonstrating strong engagement at the national level but limited in international recognition. Recommendations included greater cohesion of research projects and activities and the identification of expected contributions to enhance the ability to translate projects into tangible publications and bring researchers together around common themes. The report also notes challenges facing the faculty such as difficulties in creating a long-term strategy for the field at the institutional level. This creates some precarity and a barrier to developing a sustained research contribution more widely.

Documents and information used in the review

The following documents and/or information have been requested/provided by the HEI before or during the site visit:

- *Self-evaluation report and its annexes;*
- *Final theses;*
- *Previous evaluation reports;*
- *Module descriptors;*
- *Number of students enrolled on each course;*
- *Financial information relating to student intake;*
- *Examples of submitted theses and final projects with information on grades received.*

Additional sources of information used by the review panel:

- *Institutional website.*

II. STUDY PROGRAMMES IN THE FIELD

First cycle/LTQF 6

Title of the study programme	**Communication Studies and Information Management Technologies**
State code	6121JX069
Type of study (college/university)	University studies
Mode of study (full time/part time) and nominal duration (in years)	Full-time (3 years)
Workload in ECTS	180
Award (degree and/or professional qualification)	Bachelor of Social Sciences
Language of instruction	Lithuanian and English
Admission requirements	Secondary Education
First registration date	15 June 2017
Comments (including remarks on joint or interdisciplinary nature of the programme, mode of provision)	Offered in conjunction with the University of Twente (The Netherlands)

Second cycle/LTQF 7

Title of the study programme	**Strategic Communication**
State code	6211JX107
Type of study (college/university)	University studies
Mode of study (full time/part time) and nominal duration (in years)	Full-time (2 years)
Workload in ECTS	120
Award (degree and/or professional qualification)	Master of Social Sciences
Language of instruction	Lithuanian
Admission requirements	Bachelor's Degree
First registration date	8 July 2022
Comments (including remarks on joint or interdisciplinary nature of the programme, mode of provision)	-

III. ASSESSMENT IN POINTS BY CYCLE AND EVALUATION AREAS

The **first cycle** of the Communication field of study is given a **positive** evaluation.

No.	Evaluation Area	Evaluation points[*]
1.	Study aims, learning outcomes and curriculum	4
2.	Links between scientific (or artistic) research and higher education	3
3.	Student admission and support	3
4.	Teaching and learning, student assessment, and graduate employment	3
5.	Teaching staff	4
6.	Learning facilities and resources	4
7.	Quality assurance and public information	4
	Total:	25

The **second cycle** of the Communication field of study is given a **positive** evaluation.

No.	Evaluation Area	Evaluation points[*]
1.	Study aims, learning outcomes and curriculum	4
2.	Links between scientific (or artistic) research and higher education	3
3.	Student admission and support	3
4.	Teaching and learning, student assessment, and graduate employment	3
5.	Teaching staff	4
6.	Learning facilities and resources	4
7.	Quality assurance and public information	4
	Total:	25

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1 (unsatisfactory) - the area does not meet the minimum requirements, there are substantial shortcomings that hinder the implementation of the programmes in the field.
2 (satisfactory) - the area meets the minimum requirements, but there are substantial shortcomings that need to be eliminated.
3 (good) - the area is being developed systematically, without any substantial shortcomings.
4 (very good) - the area is evaluated very well in the national context and internationally, without any shortcomings.
5 (exceptional) - the area is evaluated exceptionally well in the national context and internationally.

IV. STUDY FIELD ANALYSIS

AREA 1: STUDY AIMS, LEARNING OUTCOMES AND CURRICULUM

1.1.	Programmes are aligned with the country's economic and societal needs and the strategy of the HEI

FACTUAL SITUATION

1.1.1. Programme aims and learning outcomes are aligned with the needs of the society and/or the labour market

The study field of communication at KTU consists of the Bachelor's programme *Communication Studies and Information Management Technologies* of 180 ECTS, launched in 2017, and the Master's programme *Strategic Communication* of 120 ECTS, started in 2022.

The evaluation panel found that the aims and learning outcomes of the communication study programmes address a wide range of knowledge and skills which are in line with the ongoing changes in society and the demands of labour markets in Lithuania and abroad. Learning outcomes are supported and justified by strategic legal documents, such as the *European Digital Competence Framework* and the Republic of Lithuania Government's decision No. 955 of August 26, 2020, approving the *Procedure for Coordination of Strategic Communication in the Field of National Security* (SER).

The communication study programmes are focused on the training of specialists who can integrate knowledge from various fields, think creatively and strategically, work in conditions of risk and uncertainty, and possess strong analytical and technological skills (SER, p. 10).

The Bachelor's programme *Communication Studies and Information Management Technologies* aims to develop communication experts with analytical and information management skills. It has a focus on digitisation and the development of skills in using technological tools to generate and manage communication products creatively.

The Master's programme *Strategic Communication* focuses on strategic thinking abilities and aims to confront challenges that necessitate strategic communication knowledge and skills, in organisations, the state, and the broader society, developing long-term communication strategies and handling risks and crises.

Societal and labour market needs are identified through regular monthly meetings with social partners and committees. Collaborative projects with businesses and partners, such as Mediaskopas (a media monitoring company), provide valuable insights. Internships in these companies foster mutually beneficial partnerships and allow for feedback on students' skills. Surveys are also used to collect feedback on student competencies from social partners, which are then used to inform programme improvements. This is less clearly aligned with research as noted in area 2.

1.1.2. Programme aims and learning outcomes are aligned with the HEI's mission, goals, and strategy

The mission of KTU is "to be a pro-active University and to build a cohesive society, create and transfer interdisciplinary knowledge and innovative and value-creating technologies, and collaborate and jointly

pursue ambitious goals through continuous development with external scientific and business leaders" (SER p. 6). The implementation of the mission, vision and strategic activities is based on the core values of the KTU community: responsibility to society, academic integrity, cooperation within and outside the organisation, and continuous improvement. As a study field, communication is interdisciplinary by its links with other areas of study and research. Students are both encouraged and structurally guided to acquire a wide and varied skill set, which includes relevant technological competencies.

This mission and strategy are also reflected in the respective study programme aims and learning outcomes. Appendix 3 to the SER are Matrices of learning outcomes and courses for communication study programmes.

Bachelor's programme: examples (cf also SER p. 10)
In Appendix 3A, the learning outcome A2 (Knowledge and its Application): "Is able to integrate the theories and principles of communication science and complementary disciplines in their professional practice" which we see in courses such as *Political Communication in the Media*, *Risk and Crisis Communication* and *Statistics*. Moreover, E1 (Personal Skills): "Is able to offer innovative solutions while integrating the latest scientific knowledge as well as technologies in practical activities" which we see in modules such as. the Product Development Project and in the Professional Internship.

Master's programme: examples (cf. appendix 3 B)
A1 (Knowledge and its Application): "Are able to apply recent research findings based on strategic communication theories, models and concepts that are necessary to recognise and solve unplanned strategic communication challenges, cases and problems." This is reflected in courses such as *Strategic and Corporate Communication* and *Strategic Political Communication* combined with subject-specific skills C1 and C2 as quoted from Appendix 3B:
- C1: "Are able to apply modern communication strategies, methods and technologies, necessary to solve critical communication problems and apply nontypical management and communication methods" as, for example, seen in the courses *Psychology of Leadership and Management* and *Strategic and Corporate Communication*.
- C2: "Are able to apply principal crisis and risk communication methods to prepare the plan of communication and implement it in various organisational situations and levels", used in the course *Strategic Political Communication* and in the elective *Reputation Management*.

ANALYSIS AND CONCLUSION (regarding 1.1.)

These examples, together with the account given in the SER, demonstrate a close alignment between KTU's mission and strategy and the aims and learning outcomes of the Communication study programmes. There are effective processes and a range of activities to align the programmes with labour market needs.

The programmes' aims and learning outcomes directly reflect the university's mission to create and transfer interdisciplinary knowledge and innovative technologies. To strengthen this alignment, continuous evaluation and refinement of the curriculum to incorporate the latest advancements in communication technologies and interdisciplinary research could be emphasised.

1.2.	Programmes comply with legal requirements, while curriculum design, curriculum, teaching/learning and assessment methods enable students to achieve study aims and learning outcomes

FACTUAL SITUATION

1.2.1. Programmes comply with legal requirements

The panel found that assessment methods are aligned well with study methods for both communication programmes. The SER contains an extensive and well-organised section that details the aims, learning outcomes, teaching/learning and assessment methods. It clearly describes the aims of the study programmes, their outcomes and the study methods which allow to achieve them. In the SER, and appendixes 2-5, assessment methods are detailed and illustrated with concrete examples drawn from the two study programmes.

The Bachelor's programme is a 3-year programme of 180 credits (ECTS). The Master's programme is a two-year programme allocated 120 credits (ECTS). The layout is consistent with legal requirements. Both programmes adhere to national and international regulations and frameworks (list of documents in SER p. 12). The distribution of credits for the study field, elective credits, internships, final thesis and contact hours are shown in Table 1 for the Bachelor's programme, and in Table 2 for the Master's programme (SER p. 13).

The Bachelor's programme awards 120 ECTS credits for the study field (36 credits are electives), 15 ECTS for internship and final thesis counts for 15 ECTS. Further details on courses and distribution of credits are described in Annex 2A.

In the master's programme *Strategic Communication* 72 ECTS are available for the study field, Electives are 18 ECTS and credits for final thesis are 30 ECTS. further details on courses and distribution of credits are described in Annex 2B.

Furthermore, the SER clearly demonstrates the compliance between learning outcomes for each study programme with the Qualification levels 6 and 7, respectively of the *Lithuanian Qualifications Framework*. The first-cycle study requirements are demonstrated in Table 3 (p. 14), and the second-cycle study requirements are in Table 4 (p. 15.).

1.2.2. Programme aims, learning outcomes, teaching/learning and assessment methods are aligned

For the Bachelor's programme, the learning outcomes are divided into: 1) Knowledge and its application; 2) Research Skills; 3) Subject-specific skills; 4) Social skills; and 5) Personal skills. The subjects are divided into: General Subjects of University Studies, Core and Compulsory Subjects, Electives, Mathematics and Physical Sciences Subjects; Practice and Final Degree Project. Appendix 3A demonstrates how the learning outcomes of the programme and mapped onto the courses of the programme.

For the Master's programme, in Appendix 3B the learning outcomes are also divided into: 1) Knowledge and its application; 2) Research Skills; 3) Subject-Specific skills; 4) Social skills; and 5) Personal skills. The subjects are divided into: Core and Compulsory Subjects, Competence Electives, and Final Degree Project.

There is a clear progression of learning outcomes from the Bachelor's programme to the Master's programme. Appendix 4 gives a commendable overview of the linkages between the learning outcomes of communication study programmes and courses, learning, and assessment methods. Distributed in 4 columns: 1) Study course learning outcomes; 2) Study course code and title; 3) The teaching/learning methods used; and 4) The assessment methods used in the course.

Furthermore, beyond the appendixes, the evaluation panel has access to module descriptors in English on the following website. Here, compared with Appendix 4, the expert panel can see a fuller description of a course and its assessment methods, including the *Procedure for knowledge and skills assessment*, as well as the main readings and supplementary readings for a course. The university website pages are clear and the courses are very well presented.

As appears from the SER (p. 17) KTU has an approved methodology for the preparation of a Study Module Programme. The module specifies its scope in terms of the number of credits, the main topics and literature; the links between learning outcomes, study methods and assessment methods; the assessment criteria for each form of assessment; and the coordinating lecturer for the subject. This methodology is available in KTU's Academic Information System that offers the primary data and information needed for study management, and thus also connects study and assessment methods. The panel was curious to hear more about the Academic Information System, and during the visit, the panel had the opportunity to have a brief look at the frontpage of the system showing the interface for academic staff and functions available.

In addition, KTU provides training for study programme managers (SER p. 16) on the principles of curriculum construction and the KTU EDU_Lab regularly arranges workshops or training sessions for lecturers to develop study modules, programme objectives, outcomes, module results, as well as assessment criteria and rubrics. The role of the EDU_Lab was further confirmed during the visit.

1.2.3. Curriculum ensures consistent development of student competences

The study programmes are designed in accordance with the KTU *Study Programme Structure Guidelines* (SER p. 17) and organised in a way that there is no overlapping of content or topics, except in cases where the general topics of a particular module are subsequently deepened in more specialised modules.

The Bachelor's programme distinguishes between General Modules, Mathematics and Physical Science modules, Core and Compulsory modules and electives. Moreover, competences are developed in professional practice (internship) and the final degree project. General Modules, and the Mathematics and Physical Science modules are taken in the first year to ensure a broad foundation. Core and Compulsory Modules (120 ECTS) are taken during all three years. In the first year, students focus on basic modules (e.g., *Introduction to Communication*, *Organisational Communication*, *Communication Theories*, etc.). In the second and third years, more specialised modules are studied (*Risk and Crisis Communication*, *Public Relations Management and Compulsive Technologies*, etc.). The second and third years also provide intensive training in analytical (*Quantitative and Qualitative Methods in Social Research*) content development (*Text Laboratory*, *Audiovisual Laboratory and Communication Design*, *Data Journalism and Science Communication*) and/or digital competences (*Information Systems Graphical User Interface*, *Multimedia Elements*). In their second year, students take the compulsory *Product Development Project* (12 ECTS) which focuses on practical and applied methods using a design thinking approach. Social partners act as mentors during the practical training. The internship (15 ECTS) is designed to further develop and strengthen students'

practical skills. Students have two mentors: one is appointed by the internship organisation, and the other by the university.

Moreover, in their third year, students have the possibility to spend one semester at the University of Twente. Those who do not wish to study abroad can choose five modules out of ten alternatives offered by KTU such as *Network Ethics*, *Business Law*, *Media Psychology*, etc. (Appendix 2). Further, in their second year, optional modules of 6 ECTS give students the possibility to either deepen their competences or extend them to other areas. Finally, students complete their *Degree Project* to demonstrate that one has achieved the intended learning outcomes and acquired the necessary knowledge and skills.

The Master's programme distinguishes between Core and Compulsory Subjects, Competence Electives, and Final Degree Project. Core and Compulsory modules comprise 72 ECTS credits, distributed over the two years of studies. There is a particular emphasis on analytical competences, which are systematically developed throughout the programme (e.g., modules on *Social Research Methods*, *Media Monitoring* and *Research and Research Project*). The first semester students work on quantitative and the second on qualitative research competences. Finally, in the third semester, students develop a research project on selected communication issues. Competence Electives include 18 ECTS credits. Opportunities for these students to also work with Twente would be advantageous.

1.2.4. Opportunities for students to personalise curriculum according to their personal learning goals and intended learning outcomes are ensured

Students in the study field of communication have ample opportunities to personalise the curriculum. Bachelor students may choose bridging modules to reach the required level of knowledge and skills for further studies at the same time as studying the basic modules during the first two semesters. They can choose one 6-credit module out of two general alternatives (Appendix 2A). In their fourth semester, students have the choice between three social research methods, in their fifth semester students may apply to attend the University of Twente and choose between their communication modules. Fifth-semester students at KTU have the option to select five modules from a list of ten alternatives. Moreover, there are personalisation opportunities for students to choose topics in their semester works and projects as well as in the final degree project. Finally, they may organise an additional internship during the time off or in the summer.

In the Master's programme students can choose one of two paths - field expert or interdisciplinary expert. The student, who chooses the path of a field expert, deepens the knowledge, and strengthens the skills in the major study field, whereas the student, who chooses the path of an interdisciplinary expert, obtains the knowledge and skills in another study field or area.

The university offers MA+ competences (*Computer Visualisation Technologies*, *Language Studies*, *Legal Awareness*, *Management*, *Project Management*, and *Public Communication*) implemented in cooperation with high-level business and public sector partners. (SER).

Similar to the Bachelor students, the students in the Master's programme have personalisation opportunities in the topics they choose in their semester works, projects and their final degree project. Likewise, they may organise an additional internship during the time off or in the summer.

1.2.5. Final theses (applied projects) comply with the requirements for the field and cycle

The university has *Guidelines for the Preparation and Defence of Final Degree Projects* as well as *Methodological Requirements* to ensure that theses comply with the requirements for the study field. For instance, the project topics, whether they are proposed by students, social partners or the academic staff, are approved by the Communication Study Programme Committee (SPC).

The Qualification Commission of the study field consists of researchers of the student's study field, practitioners, and employer representatives. The Commission has at least 5 members and at least one member from another institution. The members of the Commission assess the project and its presentation, the student's ability to justify the conclusions made, participate in the discussion, and answer the provided questions. The final evaluation consists of three components: the evaluation of the project by the reviewer, the evaluation of the project by the Qualification Commission, and the evaluation of the defence by the Qualification Commission, and each has a respective weighted coefficient, by which the points are multiplied. The sum of these multiplications, rounded to a whole number, is the final mark.

As noted in the SER, the Master's programme was launched in 2022, therefore, the first final projects in this programme will only be produced in 2024. The evaluation panel has reviewed the list of Bachelor theses titles in Appendix 6. Based on the titles, the theses are varied and interesting and appear consistent with the contents of the Bachelor's programme.

ANALYSIS AND CONCLUSION (regarding 1.2.)

Based on the findings of the visit, it is evident that both the first and second-cycle programmes within the field of communication effectively meet the current demands of the labour market, as evidenced by stakeholder engagements, feedback from graduates, and research on labour market needs. The system for gathering and implementing feedback from stakeholders relies heavily on individual connections and responses from social partners, rather than a structured system.

Programme aims are clearly articulated and in alignment with KTU's mission and strategy, and carefully mapped onto the learning outcomes of the communication study programmes. The learning outcomes are consistently applied and defined for the specific courses of the relevant programme. There is a commendable consistency and accurate alignment throughout all stages from intended learning outcomes to subjects, to readings, study methods and assessment methods, including a specification of the *Procedure for knowledge and skills assessment* as detailed in the Module Descriptors.

The consistency and coherence of the study programmes' aims and intended learning outcomes with subjects, learning methods and assessment methods is supported by the methodology built into the Academic Information System and combined with the EDU_Lab's didactic training and workshops. This indicates a strong and sustained commitment to the quality of the study programmes and all processes involved in study management.

Both study programmes in the communication field provide opportunities for the consistent development of competences of students and provide students with ample opportunities to design their own study experience. In both programmes, students have personalisation opportunities in the topics they choose in their semester works, projects and in their final degree project, and in the Master's programme, students can choose one of two paths - field expert or interdisciplinary expert.

AREA 1: CONCLUSIONS

AREA 1	Negative - 1 Does not meet the requirements	Satisfactory - 2 Meets the requirements, but there are substantial shortcomings to be eliminated	Good - 3 Meets the requirements, but there are shortcomings to be eliminated	Very good - 4 Very well nationally and internationally without any shortcomings	Exceptional - 5 Exceptionally well nationally and internationally without any shortcomings
First cycle				███	
Second cycle				███	

COMMENDATIONS

1. Alignment between programme aims, learning outcomes, teaching/learning and assessment methods is carefully prepared, systematic and clear.
2. The alignment is articulated in a commendable overview (Appendix 4).
3. The KTU-approved methodology which is built into the Academic Information System.
4. The EDU_Lab's didactic training and workshops.
5. A strong and sustained commitment to alignment and all processes involved in study management.

RECOMMENDATIONS

To address shortcomings

> *No shortcomings were identified*

For further improvement

1. Strengthen the clear alignment framework through engaging in continuous evaluation and refinement of the curriculum to fully incorporate the latest advancements in communication technologies and interdisciplinary *research*.
2. Evaluate the potential for second-cycle students to also engage in learning abroad through the twin programming initiative.

AREA 2: LINKS BETWEEN SCIENTIFIC (OR ARTISTIC) RESEARCH AND HIGHER EDUCATION

2.1.	Higher education integrates the latest developments in scientific (or artistic) research and technology and enables students to develop skills for scientific (or artistic) research

FACTUAL SITUATION

2.1.1. Research within the field of study is at a sufficient level

The SER outlines a significant level of research engagement including publications, grant applications and funded research. The faculty received a score of 3 out of 5 overall and 4 out of 5 for impact and potential in the 2023 expert evaluation for research (SER). As an interdisciplinary faculty, the research is wide-ranging with demonstrable links to policy. Faculty members are actively engaged in policy making through engagement with organisations as experts in the field at a national and international level (SER).

The research presented includes papers in internationally recognised, peer reviewed journals, monographs and a clear engagement with the wider research community through European funding initiatives and participation in international conferences (SER, visit). The evaluation reports show an upward trend in quality, quantity and variety of activities over time.

The faculty has links across three research groups at the institutional level: Digital Culture, Communication and Media, Civil Society and Sustainability and Public Governance. As an interdisciplinary faculty, faculty members do not always neatly fit the categories assigned through external evaluations (visit); however, a more recent strategic approach has identified 'mega-trends' which bring strands of research together across global, interdisciplinary themes that respond to 'long-term societal forces, identified by the European Commission' (SER, visit). Research projects are interdisciplinary and collaborative, working across institutions.

Research is underpinned with appropriate opportunities for development (see area 5).

2.1.2. Curriculum is linked to the latest developments in science, art, and technology

The curriculum is updated and taught by research-active staff with an emphasis on employability and the expectations of social partners (SER, visit). Modules are sufficiently flexible to provide opportunities to make content relevant and incorporate new empirical research, for example the challenges created by global events such as COVID-19 are used in some modules to discuss issues of sustainability, resilience and robustness - this is linked to specific staff who are also active researchers in this area(SER). Overall, links to scientific (intellectual) developments and criticality were less prominent (visit). During the meetings the panel found that students and social partners were less familiar with the work of research staff or the broader developments in the field from a scientific (conceptual and theoretical) perspective.

The first-cycle degree includes training in statistical analysis as a result of consultation with social partners, this has become a defining feature and USP of the programme which is one of a relatively large number of similar degrees in Lithuania. The second-cycle programme is more oriented towards HR and management perspectives (SER). Research outputs overlap with the curriculum aims and the input of social partners is evident in the module titles.

A newly opened space provides a creative environment to explore new technologies in relation to module content and to work collaboratively as staff and students. The emphasis for the first cycle leans towards practical skills and development using the latest technologies to develop workers for the labour market (visit), students in this cycle were not familiar with developments related to theory or how conceptual and theoretical understanding might apply to practice. Second-cycle students were more familiar with connections and the latest developments in critical thinking and approaches that inform studies (visit).

There is a particular emphasis on design thinking (visit). This can be useful but a more critical engagement with the literature around these methodologies can highlight the limitations and pitfalls of such approaches that come in and out of popularity in the broader fields of education, management and change.

2.1.3. Opportunities for students to engage in research are consistent with the cycle

Students have the opportunity to engage in research through their dissertation projects conducted at the appropriate level with instruction on methodological approaches (SER). Students also have access to advanced equipment including eye-tracking computer technology (SER). Some of the titles for first-cycle dissertations are more oriented to business level reports than critical engagement with relevant theoretical approaches (Appendix).

Activities with social partners are business oriented with approaches such as design thinking used to provide external training (SER, visit). These types of approaches are used in teaching and students have the opportunity to engage with 'real-world' problem solving through challenges that are submitted by social partners (SER). It was not clear how this related to intellectual developments in the field.

Students are encouraged to take up other research opportunities such as undertaking funded research and engaging in student conferences although take up is minimal (SER, visit).

ANALYSIS AND CONCLUSION (regarding 2.1.)

There is a strong and varied research culture with a clear commitment and strategy to continue developing research. The integration of relevant sector developments into the curriculum provides students with *opportunities* to engage with literature that links conceptual and theoretical approaches to current issues at the organisational, national and global levels but this connection is currently underdeveloped.

The panel found that first-cycle students in particular were not familiar with the purpose of research and theory development. They believed theory to be the written instructions of how to do something as opposed to the practical action of completing a task. This aligns with the social partners' perspective of the purpose of university study which they believed should be directly aligned to specific, job-related skills rather than intellectual development. The panel found this to be misaligned with staff perspectives, research activities and attempts to integrate theoretical approaches and critical thinking in the curriculum.

The emphasis was on gaining vocationally oriented skills with theoretical and conceptual developments less clearly linked. Staff are evidently engaging with theoretical developments in the field (Appendix 7, visit) but the extent to which this is integrated into the first- and second-cycle study is not fully realised. The panel found a mismatch here between the interesting approaches to engaging students with academic research discussed with staff and the experience expressed by students who were not familiar with the value or application of theoretical and conceptual developments (visit).

In conclusion, there is some high quality, engaging and important research being conducted by faculty members. The ability to translate this into student learning is challenging and requires further consideration, particularly for first-cycle students who tend to prefer and understand the value of 'practical' modules more readily. The faculty has integrated technologies into the curriculum which provides students with rich and varied opportunities to develop their research and their thinking.

AREA 2: CONCLUSIONS

AREA 2	Negative - 1 Does not meet the requirements	Satisfactory - 2 Meets the requirements, but there are substantial shortcomings to be eliminated	Good - 3 Meets the requirements, but there are shortcomings to be eliminated	Very good - 4 Very well nationally and internationally without any shortcomings	Exceptional - 5 Exceptionally well nationally and internationally without any shortcomings
First cycle			████		
Second cycle			████		

COMMENDATIONS

1. A demonstrable commitment to research and the development of a strong and growing research culture.

RECOMMENDATIONS

To address shortcomings

1. Embed new developments in the field, critical perspectives and critical thinking into *all* modules ('theoretical' and 'practical') through the curriculum review process. This should engage students in researching and examining how theory relates to practise with the aim of helping students to understand the value and importance of theory in practice and in and of itself.
2. Build partner relationships that foster an engagement with critical perspectives and the intellectual work of staff to gain greater depth from the connection and avoid a more transactional relationship.

For further improvement

1. Consider building in attendance requirements so that students can benefit from innovative teaching and gain a stronger understanding of how theory and research relate to work and practice in the field.

AREA 3: STUDENT ADMISSION AND SUPPORT

3.1.   Student selection and admission is in line with the learning outcomes

FACTUAL SITUATION

3.1.1.   Student selection and admission criteria and procedures are adequate and transparent

The list of programmes, application procedure, list of required documents and other useful information regarding the admission process is transparent and available on the KTU website. The application procedure for citizens of Lithuania is conducted through the LAMA BPO system, where the competitive score description is presented. Admission requirements and procedures for all study levels at KTU are determined in the *Regulations for the Student Admission to Kaunas University of Technology*.

A competitive score of first-cycle applicants from Lithuania in 2024 includes results of the Lithuanian language exam (weighting coefficient - 0,4), history/geography/maths/IT (0,2), any other subject (0,2) and foreign language (0,2). In addition, supplementary scores are counted in (students are granted for achievements in sports, art, scientific work etc according to Ministry of Education regulations). A competitive score of first-cycle international applicants consists of English language (0,4), history/geography/maths/IT (0,4), motivation (0,2). International students can apply only for state non-funded positions.

The second-cycle admission procedure is conducted online. A competitive score of second-cycle applicants is based on their motivation (offline/online interviews are conducted after the documents are approved and evaluate student's language knowledge, motivation to study on chosen study programme at KTU and to participate in scientific events) (0,1) and their Bachelor's degree grades (0,9). There are requirements listed in the SER concerning Master's programme applicants (regarding college graduates), but no requirements regarding the study field of the university Bachelor qualification degree, however, it was revealed during a focus group meeting that it is obligatory for applicants without former communication background to take an additional year to get at least 30 credits in Social Sciences. Additional points for second-cycle applicants can be equal to 4 points or less and are counted in the competitive score (points are given for the applicant's research activities, work experience in this field, partial studies, participation in the academic talent development programme of the higher education institution and bachelor diploma with honours) - detailed information is also determined in the *Regulations for the Student Admission to Kaunas University of Technology*. The *Strategic Communication* programme is taught only in Lithuanian so there are no international admission requirements presented.

Application procedures for students willing to get a state-funded position relies on *Description of the Procedure for Competition for Admission to State-Funded Study Positions in Higher Education Institutions*.

In practical terms, in 2022 the number of student applications to the first-cycle study programme was the lowest (266) in comparison to 2020 (278 students) and 2021 (302 students). The number of students admitted are: 80 in 2023, 85 in 2022 and 73 in 2021. In terms of competitive score statistics, in 2022 average competitive score was the highest - 7,03. BA study programme tends to attract more and more international students each year: the number has risen from 7 in 2020-2021 to 36 students in 2022-2023.

As for second-cycle submissions, 11 students have joined the MA programme in 2022 and 15 in 2023.

3.1.2. Recognition of foreign qualifications, periods of study, and prior learning (established provisions and procedures)

Recognition of foreign qualifications is made by the KTU International Studies Office. A list of documents and additional information are available on the university website.

Guidelines for the Recognition of Learning Outcomes (for partial studies) and *Guidelines for the Evaluation of Learning Achievements and the Acknowledgement of Competencies Acquired via Non-Formal and Informal Learning* are uploaded on the university website, where the stages of the learning outcomes recognition and fees (paid in case of recognition of competencies acquired via non-formal and informal learning) are determined.

The stages of the recognition process are 1) information stage (so that students get to know about such opportunities, their financial particularities, and principles of the evaluation); 2) consultation (students are assisted by lecturers); 3) evaluation (assessors conduct analyses of the required competences); 4) recognition of competences (decision-making and mark-putting processes). Activities that students can submit for recognition include; work or volunteering activities, non-formal adult education, traineeships, courses, seminars, projects and individual learning.

ANALYSIS AND CONCLUSION (regarding 3.1.)

Student selection and admission criteria for first-cycle are adequate and available for applicants on the website. Students who conducted first-cycle studies at KTU demonstrated their interest in continuing studies here. Previous evaluation group recommendations were taken into consideration, thus, now the university offers MA applicants additional studies in communication. However, information on the requirements and admission procedure of second-cycle applicants without communication background is neither available on the KTU website nor in the rules of student admission to KTU.

The procedure of students' recognition of prior learning is clear and transparent. All the requirements and procedure description are up-to-date and published on the KTU website.

3.2. There is an effective student support system enabling students to maximise their learning progress

FACTUAL SITUATION

3.2.1. Opportunities for student academic mobility are ensured

Opportunities for studies and internships abroad and other mobility events are shared on the university website. They include Erasmus+ programmes, traineeships abroad, *Intercultural Learning Course for Exchange Programme Participants,* seminars and workshops (e.g., *How to find traineeship abroad – traineeship offers* and *Studies, Traineeship and Research opportunities abroad*). In addition, students are informed about academic mobility opportunities via social media and the university academic system. Reminders are frequently sent to students' emails so that they do not miss deadlines and other application details. The BA programme has a twin programme agreement with the University of Twente (Netherlands), where students can spend one semester and gain experience of academic mobility via a similar process to the Erasmus+ application.

Students are stimulated to propose workplaces, use their own networks, be proactive in the process, and can approach the director of studies or the support centre (the Head of Study Programme Committee for Communication Studies). At the focus group meeting examples of first-cycle students doing their internships abroad (e.g., Germany) were mentioned.

According to the statistics presented in the SER, the total number of outgoing students increases through the years (5 students in 2020-2021, 7 in 2021-2022 and 11 in 2022-2023). Focus-group meeting participants had a pleasant experience of academic mobility, no examples of administrative or other issues were mentioned.

3.2.2. Academic, financial, social, psychological, and personal support provided to students is relevant, adequate, and effective

Students are informed about upcoming events, mental, spiritual, financial help opportunities, academic exchange and internship options including further details via the university website, emails (Outlook), KTU academic system, social media (Facebook, Instagram), communication with KTU Students' Association and the Students' Association of the Faculty of Social Sciences.

In terms of academic support, there are a bunch of programmes launched at the university (KTU GUIDed mentorship programme, KTU GIFTed Talent Academy programme, KTU TALENTed directed to develop student skills in research and business areas, KTU SKILLed for motivated students eager to deepen their knowledge in a particular field). However, KTU students studying communication pointed out a lack of proper information regarding GIFTed and SKILLed programmes and another noted being rejected which might explain the lack of participants in these programmes from the communication field of study.

Students are generally supported by their lecturers through email, Moodle and additional free consultations (the schedule of these meetings is available in the KTU Academic Information System). There are also bridging courses (in mathematics, information technologies, chemistry, physics and English) provided for freshmen.

As for financial support, the variety of incentives and scholarships is wide and the application details are available on the university website. There are one-time incentives, talent and sponsor scholarships that students can apply for. They can also get state support, accommodation grants, citizens of Lithuanian descent and expatriates support, co-financing the participation in national and international events and apply for tuition fee exemption. The information on the university website on this is detailed and users can find contacts and application requirements for each type of financial support. Information on funding opportunities for study projects can be also found on the KTU website.

Psychological support is provided with the help of peer mentors, tutors (student volunteers who can help to catch up with studies) and 2 psychologists working at the university (students can register for free personal/group meetings). As for other events on mental health, students do not frequently take part in them and admit that information dissemination can be improved. As for now, emails and booklets are used. Meditations and meetings with therapists are accessible for refugees from Ukraine. Spiritual support is also provided (there are two active chapels, a chaplain and a coordinated group of pastoral care).

Other non-formal personal types of support are provided via university programmes such as WANTed (for improving career competencies), TALENTed, GUIDed (for getting a peer mentor, an academic advisor, a career mentor and a tutor), UNITed (for participating in the activities of KTU student organisations), INSPIRed (for developing skills in dance, music, photo etc.), ACTIVATed (for doing sports). The expert panel learned

from the SER that GIFTed is useful for acquiring competencies needed for research. KTU SKILLed seems to be useful only for technical fields of study, but a new specialised additional education programme regarding artificial intelligence was launched in 2022 which could be beneficial and maximise communication students' learning progress.

3.2.3. Higher education information and student counselling are sufficient

Once students enter KTU, they are consulted on study, professional and extracurricular opportunities. A study programme guide is shared via email; however, Bachelor students pointed out the need to update the study programme description. Students' first semester of studies contains an *Introduction to Speciality* study module. Vice-dean for studies and SPC work towards providing students with a clear understanding of the study programme aims and study process aspects by organising meetings. Lecturers share information about study modules (including assessment methods) during the first lesson. Afterwards, the information is available in the Academic Information System and on Moodle.

The Faculty Students' Association and the Students' Association of the Faculty of Social Sciences, Arts and Humanities represent the students' voice at KTU, provide support, and work towards building a strong bond between students and university administration.

ANALYSIS AND CONCLUSION (regarding 3.2.)

KTU offers a variety of opportunities for studies and internships abroad, application information and contact information are available and transparent. Students reported positive experiences in studying at partner university (University of Twente) which was similar in process to the Erasmus+ programmes.

KTU also launched many outstanding programmes (WANTed, TALENTed, GUIDed, UNITed etc) which should be very helpful in achieving spectacular results in studies, career, research, art and sports. However, students are either unaware of them or have applied and were rejected and therefore have limited possibilities to implement the competences offered by all these programmes into the communication field of study. Thus, it would be useful to not only popularise them but also to give an explanation on how communication students in particular can access and engage with them.

It is noticeable that the university supports students studying communication in many ways. They are assisted financially, personally by staff (especially the Head of the Study Programme Committee for Communication Studies) and Faculty Students' Association, mentally and academically by lecturers, by the Study Centre and through bridging courses throughout their studies at KTU. Mental health support is mostly given via private consultations, however, it can be also useful to organise more interactive group meetings such as seminars, informal activities etc. Informing on events can be improved.

AREA 3: CONCLUSIONS

AREA 3	Negative - 1 Does not meet the requirements	Satisfactory - 2 Meets the requirements, but there are substantial shortcomings to be eliminated	Good - 3 Meets the requirements, but there are shortcomings to be eliminated	Very good - 4 Very well nationally and internationally without any shortcomings	Exceptional - 5 Exceptionally well nationally and internationally without any shortcomings
First cycle			████		
Second cycle			████		

COMMENDATIONS

1. Partnership with the University of Twente assures the availability of additional opportunities to study abroad (in addition to Erasmus+ programmes).
2. Regulations for *Student Admission to Kaunas University of Technology* are publicly available and include general information about admission for all study levels in one document which helps applicants with different countries/study backgrounds to find study programme qualification details, admission procedure stages, information about fees, competitive scores descriptions and minimum admission requirements in one place.
3. A variety of financial support opportunities are available.

RECOMMENDATIONS

To address shortcomings

1. First-cycle students should be properly informed about the advantages of KTU GIFTed and KTU SKILLed opportunities (which assure academic support) for the communication field. This information should include support for the application process.
2. Information regarding additional studies for MA applicants who have insufficient credits in Social Sciences should be published on the KTU website so that future applicants with former qualifications in a different field of study can get acquainted with ways to conduct their studies in the communication field at KTU.

For further improvement

1. Some actions can be taken in order to involve students in group sessions on mental health through more informal events.

AREA 4: TEACHING AND LEARNING, STUDENT ASSESSMENT, AND GRADUATE EMPLOYMENT

4.1. Students are prepared for independent professional activity

FACTUAL SITUATION

4.1.1. Teaching and learning address the needs of students and enable them to achieve intended learning outcomes

Study programmes are offered in both full-time and part-time formats, encompassing a range of instructional methods, including lectures, practical work, laboratory sessions, seminars, and site visits. These programmes are available on-campus, remotely, or mixed.

Encouraging Active Participation: KTU employs a variety of active learning methods to engage students and encourage creativity. These methods include design thinking, challenge-based learning, problem-based learning, creative workshops, inquiry-based learning, and case study analysis. Group work is a common requirement for enhancing students' teamwork skills. Visual presentations, concept mapping, and video analysis are also utilised to develop conceptual thinking.

Assessment methods in the communication field include traditional and innovative approaches. Traditional evaluations, such as laboratory work defence and project reports, are complemented by methods like portfolios, problem-solving tasks, activity reflections, and self-evaluations. Evaluation rubrics, which describe qualitative standards for different levels of work, guide the assessment of student achievements. Additionally, the Turnitin Feedback Studio feature is used for evaluating written works.

Practical Applications and Interdisciplinary Learning: The *Product Development Project* module (BA) is an integral part of the first-cycle study programme. This module allows students to apply theoretical knowledge in practical, interdisciplinary team projects. It focuses on developing field-specific and entrepreneurial competencies, emphasising the creation of innovative products in collaboration with business and public sector representatives.

KTU actively participates in the ECIU University initiative, encouraging student involvement in real-life challenge-based learning. This initiative offers flexible learning pathways, micro-credentials, and integration of advanced technologies such as artificial intelligence and virtual reality. It facilitates collaboration across various scientific disciplines, enhancing the educational experience through a shared European infrastructure. Though detailed participation statistics are limited, the initiative provides numerous opportunities for student engagement.

Evaluation and Individual Work: KTU employs an accumulative evaluation system to ensure consistent student effort throughout the semester. Final module evaluations combine intermediate assessments and final exams, weighted by predetermined coefficients. Intermediate assessments, chosen by the module coordinator, can include examinations, colloquiums, and laboratory work defence, with an additional evaluation component for active participation.

Individual work is organised to align with module aims and learning outcomes. Students are informed about module structures via lectures and the Moodle platform. Case study analysis is a common individual task,

particularly in the Master's programme, involving the investigation of specific situations. Teamwork is also emphasised, with group projects and presentations fostering collaboration and leadership skills. The *Product Development Project* (BA) module, for example, involves interdisciplinary team efforts under faculty guidance.

Internships are mandatory for both Bachelor's and Master's students, integrating real-world experience into their academic training. Each student follows a personalised internship plan, supervised by both the internship organisation and university faculty. The final thesis, a significant individual work component, involves extensive research and culminates in a defence. This project represents 15 ECTS credits for Bachelor's students and 30 ECTS credits for Master's students, marking the culmination of their studies.

Further Study Opportunities: Graduates have multiple pathways for further study. Bachelor's graduates can pursue Master's programmes at KTU or other universities, both in Lithuania and internationally, facilitated by the university's credit transfer system. The new Master's programme *Strategic Communication* offers expanded options. While doctoral studies in Communication are not available at KTU, graduates can pursue doctoral studies in related social science fields at KTU or other institutions.

4.1.2. Access to higher education for socially vulnerable groups and students with individual needs is ensured.

KTU aims to create an environment encouraging respect for personal dignity so that every community member is treated equally. Nevertheless, the university adapts to students' special needs. Those who need to adjust their studies can make an appointment with the Social Welfare Coordinator. Afterwards, it is decided by the faculty management how the studies of this particular student should be adjusted (e.g., provision of flexibility regarding assessment methods/deadlines etc.).

Guidelines for emotional and social well-being can be found on the KTU intranet. KTU website informs about actions that can be taken by a student in case of illness, emotional difficulties (stress, anxiety, fear, etc.), and communication/relationship problems. University psychologists' contacts, their working hours along with the consultation online registration form are published on the KTU website.

The procedure for making adjustments to the study process for students with disabilities or individual learning needs, possible adaptations list (regarding lectures conduct, classroom availability, regulations on the assessments etc.) and useful software in this regard are clearly determined on the KTU *Emotional and Physical Health* webpage. Students can approach the Social Welfare Coordinator of the Student Affairs Department via personal letter and survey (link for the survey and email of the Social Welfare Coordinator are publicly available on the above-mentioned webpage).

Lecturers are actively participating in training and are advised on students with needs; there were events for teachers on how to adjust studies for students with autism, and hearing disabilities, e.g., how to prevent others from asking why a student is treated specially; as well as discussions, e.g., on how to organise space for students with anxiety disorders.

During the 2022–2023 academic year, there were no students with special needs in the communication programmes. During the focus group meetings, it was revealed that the Faculty Council addressed how buildings meet (or do not meet) the needs of students with special needs, and there are concerns that need to be addressed because the faculty building is under protection and that causes a challenge. While the

review group understands the technical restrictions on altering buildings as a consequence of those buildings being historically protected (or similar), that does not absolve the university of responsibility for making equal access possible.

ANALYSIS AND CONCLUSION (regarding 4.1.)

KTU offers study programmes in both full-time and part-time formats, using various instructional methods, such as lectures, practical work, laboratory sessions, seminars, and site visits. These programmes are available on-campus, remotely, or in a mixed format. The university employs active learning methods, including design thinking and challenge-based learning, to engage students and foster creativity.

Assessment methods combine traditional evaluations with innovative approaches like portfolios and self-evaluations, effectively measuring student achievements. Modules enable students to engage in practical projects, developing both field-specific and entrepreneurial skills. Participation in initiatives like the ECIU University promotes real-life, challenge-based learning and interdisciplinary collaboration, while an accumulative evaluation system ensures consistent student effort throughout the semester. Individual work aligns with module aims, and internships provide practical experience under university and organisational supervision. Various departments and initiatives offer additional activities and research opportunities, ensuring that graduates have multiple pathways for further study.

Students with special needs can meet with the Social Welfare Coordinator to adjust their studies. The university website offers information on actions students can take in case of illness or emotional difficulties, and provides contacts of university psychologists. Procedures for adjusting the study process for students with disabilities are clearly outlined, and lecturers regularly receive different kinds of training on how to accommodate these students.

To ensure access to higher education for socially vulnerable groups and students with individual needs, KTU puts efforts to provide a supportive environment. However, during the visit panel members learned that there are some challenges, especially regarding the accessibility of the Faculty of Social Sciences, Arts and Humanities building. Thus, KTU meets Aim 4.1.1. *Teaching and learning address the needs of students and enable them to achieve intended learning outcomes*; however, does not fully meet Aim 4.1.2. *Access to higher education for socially vulnerable groups and students with individual needs is ensured*. This factor means that the score for evaluation area 4 (as a whole) must be a 3, as this issue needs to be remedied.

4.2.	There is an effective and transparent system for student assessment, progress monitoring, and assuring academic integrity

FACTUAL SITUATION

4.2.1. Monitoring of learning progress and feedback to students to promote self-assessment and learning progress planning is systematic

KTU employs a systematic approach to monitoring student progress and gathering feedback, involving various university levels and stakeholders, including faculties, institutes, administration, educators, researchers, and students. This process includes annual surveys, round table discussions, and dedicated infrastructures for continuous information collection. At the module level, student surveys are conducted post-completion, and educators provide feedback on student work through Moodle.

The Department of Academic Affairs prepares an annual report on student learning outcomes, which is presented to the KTU rectorate. This report includes indicators such as student progress, repeated exams, the effectiveness of new quality assurance measures, reasons for study termination, attendance, academic ethics violations, and results from bridging modules. The data from this report is used by faculties to improve modules, scheduling, and related issues. Similar questions are analysed at the faculty level, guided by the overall report structure and processes.

The Study Programme Committee continuously monitors student achievements using the Academic Information System (AIS), tracking grade point averages, intermediate and final assessments, and class attendance records. For Communication study programmes, the committee addresses conflicts, provides educator guidance, and holds regular meetings to discuss student progress, with additional meetings organised if necessary.

KTU has regulations to identify student learning achievements and redistribute state-funded study places annually. Student achievements are evaluated after each semester according to the *Regulations on the Assessment of Study Modules*, which also govern student attendance procedures. Educators can report systematically absent students in the AIS, and this information is forwarded to the Early Warning System. This system monitors attendance and assessment indicators, analyses individual student situations, and communicates with students to address and justify absences. The system aims to identify students at risk of terminating their studies and take action to support their academic success with the help of mentors.

KTU provides support for Bachelor's students through continuous supervision while preparing their final theses. Supervisors monitor progress according to a project calendar, with interim defences organised in the 12th week of the semester. These defences allow students to present their work and receive feedback, with results recorded in the AIS. For Master's students, progress in the *Research Project* module and the *Master's Degree Final Project* is regularly monitored by supervisors. A seminar is organised before starting the final project to aid in preparation.

Round table discussions are held each semester, where students voluntarily provide feedback and suggest improvements for study programmes or modules. Post-module surveys also gather student opinions through the AIS. Recent infrastructure developments include an eye-tracking laboratory and a new computer class, along with partnerships like those with the University of Twente and Mediaskopas. Over recent academic years, there has been a notable change in student evaluations. In the 2022-2023 academic year, 23% of first-cycle students and 50% of second-cycle students rated their studies as 'Good', while a significant portion also rated their studies as 'More good than bad'.

4.2.2. Graduate employability and career are monitored

The university recognises that students and graduates are integral to its community, and the values and skills they acquire during their studies reflect the quality of education at KTU, as well as the excellence of its staff and infrastructure. By maintaining connections with alumni through both university-level and faculty-level initiatives, the institution ensures a long-term feedback loop to maintain the relevance and quality of its study programmes.

Currently, annual surveys of KTU staff and round table discussions with students are organised. Additionally, there is a dedicated infrastructure in place to continuously gather information. At the module level, students complete surveys after finishing each module. Furthermore, after internships, employers from host

organisations provide written feedback on the students and the study programmes. The monitoring structure is comprehensive, collecting valuable insights about graduate employability.

4.2.3. Policies to ensure academic integrity, tolerance, and non-discrimination are implemented

KTU has implemented a system to ensure academic integrity, tolerance, and non-discrimination across all university levels, including faculties, institutes, departments, students, academic staff, administration, and other personnel. This unified approach ensures consistent application of policies regardless of administrative changes or resource variations, eliminating the need for additional structures at lower levels. The KTU administration oversees compliance with the *University's Statute and Academic Regulations*, while the Board of Academic Ethics ensures adherence to the *Code of Academic Ethics*. Community members can report academic violations to this board via the Academic Information System or directly, and the board can initiate investigations independently.

Students commit to academic integrity by signing learning agreements and declarations that require adherence to the *University's Code of Academic Ethics* and internal regulations. The *Guidelines for the Organisation and Performance of the Study Modules Assessment* aim to ensure the integrity, transparency, and quality of assessments. Preventative measures include identity verification during exams, handwritten assessments, invigilator commissions, yearly updates of exam tasks, and independent presentations of laboratory or semester work. Academic staff receive training to create tasks that uphold academic integrity.

Examination monitoring is conducted by assessment monitoring groups, and cases of academic violations are handled by the Commission for Settlement of Academic Violations, which includes KTU employees and a student representative. Students must follow methodological requirements for written works, including proper citation and reference list preparation, and can access modules on these topics via Moodle. The library staff also provide training on copyright, plagiarism prevention, citation, and reference list preparation.

KTU's *Guidelines for Plagiarism Prevention* regulate similarity checks and plagiarism detection, using the Turnitin system to ensure the originality of final projects and other written works. Similarity is reviewed to determine plagiarism, with checks integrated into Moodle for various student submissions. If a violation is identified, it is documented, analysed, and decided upon by the Dean or the Commission for Settlement of Academic Violations. Penalties for first violations include strict reprimands, while repeated violations result in expulsion. In cases of tolerance or non-compliance by staff, reprimands may also be issued.

During the investigation period, five cases of academic dishonesty were recorded in the communication field, all involving first-cycle students and related to plagiarism in semester papers or final projects. Sanctions included module debits or disqualification from project defence.

KTU promotes tolerance and non-discrimination through its *Equality and Diversity and Violence Prevention Policy*, ensuring equal opportunities for all employees, students, and applicants, regardless of personal characteristics. Complaints about discrimination, harassment, or other violations of equal opportunities can be submitted confidentially through an electronic system or email. These complaints are reviewed by the Commission of Equal Rights, which is appointed by the Rector and operates under specific regulations. The process ensures confidentiality and a thorough investigation of all submitted reports.

4.2.4. Procedures for submitting and processing appeals and complaints are effective

KTU follows established guidelines for the submission and processing of students' appeals and complaints, as mandated by Lithuania's unified application system for higher education institutions. Students can submit complaints if they believe their rights or legitimate interests related to the quality of studies have been violated. A special commission is tasked with investigating and making final decisions on these matters. During the period evaluated, KTU received only one student complaint regarding a final exam grade. The commission, including student representatives, reviewed the complaint and upheld the original evaluation. Before filing an appeal or complaint, students are encouraged to familiarise themselves with relevant documents and consult with the Vice-Dean for Studies if necessary. Attempts to resolve issues directly with the involved party are recommended.

Appeals and complaints are forwarded to the appropriate head responsible for the area of concern, who then establishes an interim board or commission for resolution. Decisions are made within ten working days and communicated to the involved parties. Students dissatisfied with the commission's decision have the option to appeal to the University's Dispute Settlement Commission within the same timeframe. In the reporting period, only one student appeal was filed in KTU's communication programmes, contesting an assessment decision, which the Appeals Commission ruled against. There were no student complaints during this period.

The faculty prioritises the prevention of appeals and complaints through effective communication. Lecturers emphasise clear communication of requirements, conduct surveys and round table discussions, and periodically meet with student group leaders to address concerns. Verbal and written communication channels, including email, are utilised to inform students of procedures and practices and address any questions or dissatisfaction. In complex situations, the faculty dean's office, study centre, and programme heads act as mediators to facilitate resolution.

ANALYSIS AND CONCLUSION (regarding 4.2.)

The external review committee considers that KTU meets Aim 4.2.1. *Monitoring of learning progress and feedback to students to promote self-assessment and learning progress planning is systematic*, Aim 4.2.2 *Graduate employability and career are monitored*, Aim 4.2.3. *Policies to ensure academic integrity, tolerance, and non-discrimination are implemented* and Aim 4.2.4. *Procedures for submitting and processing appeals and complaints are effective*.

KTU employs a comprehensive and structured approach to monitoring student progress and gathering feedback, involving multiple levels of the university and various stakeholders. This process includes regular surveys, discussions, and continuous information collection, ensuring that feedback is systematically used to improve educational outcomes. The university utilises an information system to track student achievements and attendance, identifying students who may need additional support. Regular meetings and supervision provide continuous oversight and guidance, promoting self-assessment and planning.

KTU maintains strong connections with alumni and stakeholders to monitor graduate employability and career progression. Through various feedback mechanisms, the university gathers insights about the career outcomes of its graduates, ensuring that its programmes remain relevant and of high quality. This ongoing engagement helps align educational offerings with labour market needs and enhances the employability of graduates.

To ensure academic integrity, tolerance, and non-discrimination, KTU has implemented comprehensive policies and procedures. These include codes of ethics, preventive measures against academic dishonesty, and systems for detecting plagiarism. Training for academic staff and clear guidelines for students promote a culture of integrity and respect. The university also has policies in place to address discrimination and ensure equal opportunities for all members of the community.

KTU has established effective procedures for submitting and processing student appeals and complaints. Clear guidelines and dedicated commissions ensure that complaints are investigated thoroughly and resolved fairly. The university emphasises clear communication and mediation to prevent issues from escalating to formal complaints.

AREA 4: CONCLUSIONS

AREA 4	Negative - 1 Does not meet the requirements	Satisfactory - 2 Meets the requirements, but there are substantial shortcomings to be eliminated	Good - 3 Meets the requirements, but there are shortcomings to be eliminated	Very good - 4 Very well nationally and internationally without any shortcomings	Exceptional - 5 Exceptionally well nationally and internationally without any shortcomings
First cycle			██		
Second cycle			██		

COMMENDATIONS

1. The monitoring structure is comprehensive, collecting valuable insights about graduate employability.
2. Teachers actively participate in training on vulnerable students' support so that they demonstrate excellent awareness of teaching/assessment methods that can be implemented to support students with individual needs.
3. Student progress is well monitored, and the teaching tools employed help the students to achieve their goals.
4. Course evaluations were systematic, and the students made clear in interviews that faculty were open to contract and communication.

RECOMMENDATIONS

To address shortcomings

1. There is an accessibility of students with needs issue because the Faculty of Social Sciences, Arts and Humanities building cannot be fully equipped due to its protected status. Actions must be taken to provide reassurance that the infrastructure of KTU (especially the faculty building) is fully ready to accommodate students with movement disorders, visual impairment etc.

For further improvement

No recommendations for further improvement were identified

AREA 5: TEACHING STAFF

5.1.   Teaching staff is adequate to achieve learning outcomes

FACTUAL SITUATION

5.1.1.   The number, qualification, and competence (scientific, didactic, professional) of teaching staff is sufficient to achieve learning outcomes

There are 19 members of staff on the faculty website and 48 in the SER which reflects the interdisciplinary nature of the courses (SER, visit). Staff from the faculty of informatics and other disciplines are included due to the integral nature of their modules for the first cycle programme. These include product development and statistics. The ratio of staff to students is within the normal boundaries and the qualifications and competencies are appropriate to achieve the learning outcomes of both the first and second cycle programmes. 81% of first-cycle teachers hold a PhD and 86% of second-cycle teachers hold a PhD.

Staff hold a variety of contracts from invited speakers to full-time permanent staff. Around 25% of those listed in the appendix are permanent staff (SER) which equates to around 15 however there is sufficient stability to achieve the learning outcomes consistently (visit). It was noted during the visit that gaining and retaining fully qualified staff in the field was challenging due to the relatively recent emergence of the field in the Lithuanian context.

Staff have the option of specialising in research or teaching (visit) providing flexibility in approach and specialisation. This flexibility is reflected in workload allocation for different aspects of the role. All staff have opportunities to engage in continual professional development in relation to their chosen track, for teaching this is supported by the EDU_Lab.

ANALYSIS AND CONCLUSION (regarding 5.1.)

The panel found staff to be amply qualified and equipped to teach at all levels of study to achieve the learning outcomes. The levels of research demonstrate a connection to current thinking and developments in the field at the levels of practice, industry needs and thinking.

The panel found the teaching staff to be passionate about their teaching and research with a clear willingness to integrate the two where possible although this has not been fully transmitted to students to date (section 2). The development of the EDU_Lab provides opportunities for ongoing experimentation and development of pedagogical and didactic aspects of their role whilst engagement with social partners generates knowledge that informs curriculum development through the module leaders.

Staff can choose to specialise in teaching or research providing flexibility and the opportunity for expertise to flourish across a range of relevant areas.

5.2.	Teaching staff is ensured opportunities to develop competences, and they are periodically evaluated

FACTUAL SITUATION

5.2.1. Opportunities for academic mobility of teaching staff are ensured

The opportunities for mobility are primarily served through the Erasmus + programme however staff also engage in international conferences that are funded by the institution. This is supplemented with guest teachers who work with staff and students remotely.

13 members of staff engaged in Erasmus + in 2023 showing a marked increase from previous years (SER). The increase is significant and an evaluation of the reason for the success would support continued development opportunities.

The workload model requires early career staff to undertake more teaching hours than more established members of staff. The panel learned from the visit that this creates an additional pressure on early career staff who have less time to develop or engage in research activities that would lead to mobility that is more aligned with their research aspirations.

5.2.2. Opportunities for the development of the teaching staff are ensured

There is a strong developmental programme, particularly in relation to teaching roles primarily provided through the EDU_Lab. The Lab provides a range of training programmes including public speaking, design thinking, teamwork, development of digital competencies and more. 43% of teaching staff have taken part in training over the last 3 years. Teaching staff are active in pedagogical developments. New members of staff are required to engage in a training programme. There is also a 'follow-up' programme to develop learning activities for study modules with experts and the university gives awards to teaching innovations.
In addition employees may enrol on courses and take English Language modules. The latter is included in working hours, the former is not.

The research development programme is more incentive based in which staff can earn extra income by taking additional hours to work on a research project and/or gaining additional salary through research outputs. Both routes require staff to work beyond the usual working hours as per the EU working time directive. There is also a 'writing clinic' at the Faculty of Social Sciences, Arts and Humanities to assist with writing skills for developing publications.

KTU is a member of the European Consortium of Innovative Universities which provides (unspecified) opportunities for academic staff to participate in events organised by partner institutions to develop scientific and didactic competencies.

During the visit the panel learned that developmental opportunities are taken from the 'expert' portion of the workload allocation which is less well defined and as a result can include a wide range of activities and requirements that may go beyond contractual working hours. There is funding available for conferences and external training, funding allocations are decided by the Dean.

ANALYSIS AND CONCLUSION (regarding 5.2.)

The panel found that there is an excellent programme for the development of teaching through the EDU_Lab. This is a little weighted on particular methods (design thinking) that are not evidently considered with a critical lens but nevertheless the support for teaching and the development of pedagogical approaches through the EDU_Lab is considerable and invites creative and innovative approaches to teaching and learning.

Beyond teaching there are programmes to improve writing skills for publication and funds are distributed to research groups for dissemination (SER).

The Erasmus + scheme provides good opportunities in teaching and development through engagement with international institutions and the provision of funds for conferences enables the dissemination and integration of developments in the academic field more broadly.

The variable ways in which staff at different levels can access funding for development, particularly in relation to research development (through grant bids, publications etc) could disadvantage certain groups who are unable to work additional hours without pay or lack domestic support that might assist in taking additional time to complete the activities. It is also unclear how staff maintain income stability if they are reliant upon grants to top-up income through working up to 60 hrs a week.

A revision of workload models and specific provision to assist early career researchers by balancing their teaching load and ensuring that all staff have access to equal opportunities in developing research and teaching within normal working hours would assist in mitigating the challenges faced by particular groups such as early career staff and carers, particularly those without external means of support. This would also support the strategy to develop research and quality of outputs in the faculty and increase international visibility.

Overall, the panel found that all the aims in this section were met to a very good level with some broader considerations for future developments.

AREA 5: CONCLUSIONS

AREA 5	Negative - 1 Does not meet the requirements	Satisfactory - 2 Meets the requirements, but there are substantial shortcomings to be eliminated	Good - 3 Meets the requirements, but there are shortcomings to be eliminated	Very good - 4 Very well nationally and internationally without any shortcomings	Exceptional - 5 Exceptionally well nationally and internationally without any shortcomings
First cycle				▰	
Second cycle				▰	

COMMENDATIONS

1. The EDU_Lab is an innovative initiative that develops teaching pedagogies and the new spaces offer potential opportunities for developing collaborations.
2. The commitment to developing research and increased engagement in research activities.

RECOMMENDATIONS

To address shortcomings

> *No shortcomings were identified*

For further improvement

1. Create a clear developmental path for early career researchers that provides sufficient time for them to fully engage in research activities within the norms of the EU working time directive. Training should be taken from the teaching portion of the contract if it is aligned with teaching activities.
2. Consider the impact on staff to consistently work above the EU working time directive in order to engage with research, particularly for those with caring responsibilities. Is it possible to engage with research without consistently working excessive hours but without sacrificing the financial benefits that supplement income? This may assist in attracting international scholars.

AREA 6: LEARNING FACILITIES AND RESOURCES

6.1.	Facilities, informational and financial resources are sufficient and enable achieving learning outcomes

FACTUAL SITUATION

6.1.1. Facilities, informational and financial resources are adequate and sufficient for an effective learning process

The communication programmes primarily utilise the premises of the Faculty of Social Sciences, Arts and Humanities. These facilities include classrooms with seating capacities ranging from 13 to 60 students, computer labs equipped with specialised software, and a Design Thinking Lab. The university library, including the Multifunctional Centre, offers extensive resources with 422 workspaces, electronic databases, and access to over 40,000 copies. KTU's library system spans multiple locations, offering a combined total of 916 workspaces with various amenities and resources tailored to students' needs. The Library of Social Sciences and Humanities provides a decent collection and services, including access to electronic information sources, team workrooms, and facilities for users with special needs. Collaboration between academic personnel and library staff ensures the acquisition of relevant literature and research sources. Moreover, teaching staff regularly review new publications in the field of Communication and request acquisitions accordingly. The availability of online subscription services enhances accessibility to up-to-date resources.

Students have access to specialised software such as statistical analysis tools and content creation software like Adobe Creative Cloud products. The Design Thinking Lab and Audiovisual Lab provide additional resources for practical assignments and projects. KTU also offers access to media monitoring and analysis platforms and modern eye-tracking equipment for research purposes. Most study materials are accessible online through the Moodle learning environment, facilitating continuous communication and collaboration between students and teachers. Remote classes are conducted using virtual communication tools like Zoom and MS Teams.

Furthermore, KTU ensures inclusivity by adapting premises, instruments, and equipment for students with special needs, including ergonomic furniture, assistive technologies, and accommodations for visual, hearing, and mental disabilities. Students have ample opportunities for internships in various organisations, including marketing agencies, media outlets, private companies, and public institutions, both locally and internationally. The WANTed programme aids students in career development and links them to future employment opportunities. KTU's commitment to providing quality education and inclusive learning environments fosters student success and prepares them for professional endeavours.

There is an issue, however, with the layout of the campus. Having different areas of the university in different locations could be seen as impacting the quality of the learning process. While the external review group understands that these are often issues outside of the power of the department (or even the faculty), it is nevertheless our view that attempts should be made (as far as possible) to unify the teaching and informational locations as much as possible in the near future.

6.1.2. There is continuous planning for and upgrading of resources.

The planning and upgrading of resources for field studies at KTU follow established procedures for identifying and addressing needs. The Field Study Programme Committee submits resource requirements to the Dean's Office annually, with adjustments made as necessary throughout the academic year, such as during emergencies like the COVID-19 outbreak in March 2020. Feedback from lecturers and students gathered through online questionnaires and informal round table discussions, informs resource planning. These resources encompass books, online subscriptions, software, and classroom facilities, which may be renewed or acquired at various levels within the university structure.

KTU implemented a full costing model in 2014 to enhance financial sustainability and transparency. The budget management process involves planning, review, approval, implementation, and analysis, overseen by the Department of Finance and faculty administrators. Funding sources for study programmes primarily include state appropriations and student tuition fees, with a focus on salaries and other operational needs.

Teaching staff also receive financial support from Faculty Research Groups for activities such as attending scientific conferences, developing partnerships, and participating in qualification improvement events. Each year, the faculty develops an infrastructure renewal plan based on input from faculty members. The budget allocated for infrastructure development covers purchases of computers, multimedia, software, and other essentials. The COVID-19 pandemic prompted significant adjustments to teaching methods, with most lectures conducted remotely via various platforms like MS Teams, Big Blue Button, Zoom, and Adobe Connect. Additional resources were procured, including commercial Zoom licences, headphones for remote lectures, disinfection items, and upgraded classroom equipment like auto-tracking cameras and interactive LCD touch screens.

ANALYSIS AND CONCLUSION (regarding 6.1.)

KTU meets the aim of ensuring that facilities, informational, and financial resources are adequate and sufficient for an effective learning process. The programmes utilise the Faculty of Social Sciences, Arts, and Humanities premises, including varied classrooms, computer labs with specialised software, and a Design Thinking Lab. The university library offers extensive resources, including electronic databases and over 40,000 copies. KTU's library system spans multiple locations, providing 916 workspaces with various amenities. Collaboration between academic personnel and library staff ensures the acquisition of relevant literature, with online subscription services further enhancing access to up-to-date resources.

Students benefit from specialised software like Adobe Creative Cloud and statistical analysis tools. The Design Thinking Lab and Audiovisual Lab provide additional resources for practical assignments. KTU also offers media monitoring and analysis platforms, and modern eye-tracking equipment for research. Study materials are accessible online via Moodle, facilitating continuous communication between students and teachers. Remote classes are conducted using tools like Zoom and MS Teams. KTU ensures inclusivity by adapting premises and equipment for students with special needs, including ergonomic furniture and assistive technologies. Internship opportunities are abundant, supported by the WANTed programme which aids in career development.

KTU also meets the aim of continuous planning for and upgrading resources. The FSPC submits annual resource requirements to the Dean's Office, with adjustments made as necessary, informed by feedback from lecturers and students. Resources, including books, online subscriptions, software, and classroom

facilities, are renewed or acquired at various university levels. KTU's full costing model enhances financial sustainability and transparency, with the budget management process overseen by the Department of Finance and faculty administrators.

However, the spread-out nature of the university's facilities impacts the student environment, creating logistical challenges and a sense of fragmentation. A more unified campus or centralised department could significantly enhance the student experience by fostering a cohesive academic community and improving accessibility to resources and support services.

AREA 6: CONCLUSIONS

AREA 6	Negative - 1 Does not meet the requirements	Satisfactory - 2 Meets the requirements, but there are substantial shortcomings to be eliminated	Good - 3 Meets the requirements, but there are shortcomings to be eliminated	Very good - 4 Very well nationally and internationally without any shortcomings	Exceptional - 5 Exceptionally well nationally and internationally without any shortcomings
First cycle				██	
Second cycle				██	

COMMENDATIONS

1. Excellent library facilities with good access to journals, texts and books.
2. Excellent spaces for creative learning, interactive design, etc.

RECOMMENDATIONS

To address shortcomings

   No shortcomings were identified

For further improvement

1. Attempt to unify the different campus locations to aid in a better overall learning environment, as there is a stark difference between the more modern teaching location and the more dated locations.

AREA 7: QUALITY ASSURANCE AND PUBLIC INFORMATION

7.1.	The development of the field of study is based on an internal quality assurance system involving all stakeholders and continuous monitoring, transparency and public information

FACTUAL SITUATION

7.1.1. Internal quality assurance system for the programmes is effective

The KTU has specific procedures to support quality assurance on various levels from study programme committees to central university bodies according to the *Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area*. Responsibilities for the development and approval of study programmes and ongoing monitoring of study programmes are clearly defined at the university, faculty and study programme level. An overview of the management of studies within the organisational structure is provided in the SER (figure 2 p. 72).

The FSPC is the main body responsible for the oversight of the internal assessment and monitoring of education quality within the university. The Senate determines the policy of studies at the university. The Department of Academic Affairs includes the University Study Quality Committee and is responsible for monitoring the implementation of the policy of studies, and the study quality at the university, supporting the continuous improvement of the competences of the teachers, and introducing innovative study methods in the study programmes (SER). The University Study Quality Committee plays an important role in the university's study strategy and policies, being responsible for formulating the university's study programme package, evaluating the quality of existing study programmes, and overseeing the development of new programmes.

The FSPC is headed by the Head of Study Programmes, who directly carries out and coordinates the activities of programme preparation, implementation, and improvement, communicates with programme students, teachers, and social partners, and searches for and organises strategic partnerships (SER). Study programmes are reviewed and updated every year taking into account the observations and suggestions of stakeholders.

Besides the extensive section in the SER on the internal quality assurance system of studies, the KTU website provides excellent overviews of their internal quality assurance system, their Study Management Model as well as the monitoring of study quality at all levels of the organisation.

7.1.2. Involvement of stakeholders (students and others) in internal quality assurance is effective

Students actively participate in governing bodies such as the Council and the Senate, as well as various committees like the FSPC in order to contribute to decision-making processes. The Communication Study Programme Committee includes 3 students and 2 social partners who work with another 6 lecturers aiming to implement best practices into the Communication study field at KTU.

KTU Students' Association (consisting of 9 Faculty Students' Associations) play a significant role in internal quality assurance by representing their students at formal meetings and students' experiences in general. Focus group meeting participants confirmed that changes had been made to course content following consultations with them during their studies (e.g., former students asked for a psychology course and now it

is included in the programme). Students appreciate the continuous improvement of programmes. One first-cycle student was involved in the SER preparation. One's responsibility was to collect data and information from students and to invite students to contribute to the external evaluation process.

As for alumni contribution, it is mainly made by virtue of personal connections between graduates and lecturers. Additionally, graduates cooperate with the university through career mentorship programmes, guest lectures and presentations where they can share experiences and make suggestions (no earlier than one year after graduation).

KTU views social stakeholders as essential to internal quality assurance activities. They help in the preparation, quality assessment, and improvement of study programmes, using their areas of expertise. Stakeholders participate in various committees, including FSPC, the Qualification Commission, and the Faculty Council. Employers contribute significantly by teaching specific topics within study modules, suggesting topics for students' final degree projects, and providing opportunities for practical work and research.

The system for gathering and implementing feedback from stakeholders on labour market needs could be more structured.

7.1.3. Information on the programmes, their external evaluation, improvement processes, and outcomes is collected, used and made publicly available

As indicated in the SER (p. 70), the data that are collected and analysed in the university's information systems, and used for continuous internal monitoring and evaluation of the study quality are: Student admission data; Student progress and results; The career path of the university's graduates; Student feedback on studies and study programmes; Data related to students; The quality of teachers' performance; Study infrastructure and teaching/learning facilities; The teachers' qualification structure and competence development; Other results of the university's performance.

From the website, it can be seen that study activities and their learning outcomes are publicised in regular meetings and discussions with the social partners, alumni, business representatives and other stakeholders including discussions of the competencies of the graduates required by the labour market. Further, it appears that the results of the external evaluation of the university's study fields and the results of the surveys on studies are published on the university's website.

The channels of *internal* communication at KTU as specified in the SER include the Academic Information System, an internal Document and Process Management System, Moodle, Office 365 and Sharepoint, websites, and newsletters. The university disseminates information in various ways, including hosting study events and open lectures, using a Google Ads account, running digital advertising campaigns on Facebook ads platform, maintaining an informative and comprehensive website, and engaging actively on social media platforms.

The university engages in external communication via: the university website that serves as a primary source of information and includes a dedicated webpage for the programme, available in both Lithuanian and English; AIKOS (an open vocational information and guidance system); printed materials such as the study

programme catalogue and programme leaflet; active engagement on social media platforms, i.e., Facebook, Instagram and YouTube to enhance the programme's online presence and engagement with the public.

In general, information about the programmes seems very well presented and widely available online via the KTU website.

7.1.4. Student feedback is collected and analysed

Twice a year round-table discussions take place aiming to collect student feedback which is sent to the Study Programme Committee. Recent student concerns and suggestions were noted regarding module descriptions: the need for more clarification of study goals and evaluation criteria was mentioned. Additionally, students are involved in answering obligatory surveys after each module in order to evaluate the professor and material of the course. During the focus group meeting with the students, the evaluation team learned that students appreciate this level of engagement; in addition to standard questions, suggestions can be made in the survey. Surveys are analysed by the Faculty Study Committee and the Field Study Programme Committee. Afterwards, results are presented and discussed at Faculty meetings.

ANALYSIS AND CONCLUSION (regarding 7.1.)

The evaluation panel found that the internal quality assurance system is very well specified, with a clear division of responsibilities and a strong commitment to quality and study management at all levels. The university has a comprehensive approach to gathering feedback and continuously improving its education quality. By incorporating input from various stakeholders through surveys, roundtable discussions, and evaluations of study modules, the university ensures a well-rounded perspective on its performance. The systematic analysis of survey results by committees and subsequent discussions at faculty meetings demonstrate a commitment to transparency and accountability in addressing areas for improvement.

Based on observations made during the visit, it became clear that although the university recognises the advantages of collaborating with stakeholders (alumni and social partners), there is still considerable room for improvement. Stakeholders indicated that enhancing cooperation could lead to more mutual value. Specific areas for improvement include formalising engagement through structures like advisory boards or committees, hosting regular round table events to foster communication and collaboration, providing opportunities for students to observe professional practices, and improving feedback mechanisms for efficiency and actionability.

Students at KTU actively participate in governance and decision-making through various bodies and committees. The KTU Students' Association plays a significant role in internal quality assurance by representing student interests. Regular feedback mechanisms, including focus group meetings and surveys, ensure continuous programme improvements. Alumni contribute through mentorship, guest lectures, and feedback. Round-table discussions and surveys gather student feedback, which is analysed and used to enhance study programmes.

The evaluation panel found that the internal quality assurance system is very well specified, with a division of responsibilities and strong commitment to quality and study management at all levels. The student specific information available on the institutional website is comprehensive and detailed, and the KTU website on their quality assurance are extensive and transparent.

AREA 7: CONCLUSIONS

AREA 7	Negative - 1 Does not meet the requirements	Satisfactory - 2 Meets the requirements, but there are substantial shortcomings to be eliminated	Good - 3 Meets the requirements, but there are shortcomings to be eliminated	Very good - 4 Very well nationally and internationally without any shortcomings	Exceptional - 5 Exceptionally well nationally and internationally without any shortcomings
First cycle				███	
Second cycle				███	

COMMENDATIONS

1. Students are actively involved in governing bodies and committees, contributing to decision-making processes.
2. Alumni contribute through personal connections, mentorship programmes, and guest lectures, providing valuable feedback and suggestions.
3. The KTU website shows overviews of the internal quality assurance system, Study Management Model and the monitoring of study quality at all levels of the organisation.

RECOMMENDATIONS

To address shortcomings

No shortcomings were identified

For further improvement

1. Communication with graduates can be formalised (organisation of more formal meetings, round-tables, workshops in addition to informal conversations with lecturers).

V. SUMMARY

The panel would like to thank everyone at KTU for engaging in the evaluation process. It is evident that these evaluations are fully considered and acted upon. It was particularly useful to engage in thoughtful dialogues with all the groups and we thank them for their time and honesty. The self-evaluation report was clear and helpful and the panel were grateful for the opportunity to see the new building and library in addition to the main faculty building. The following is provided as a guide to support future developmental initiatives and is intended as a broader overview to contextualise the individual recommendations made in the report.

The two programmes in the field are at very different stages (one well established and the other in its 2nd year) but were both well developed. This reflects the excellent EDU_Lab initiative which provides training and employs a teaching café to develop workshops and topics that address the needs as articulated by staff. This works alongside more formal training opportunities. The result is some innovative and interesting approaches and pedagogical practices and a very clear constructive alignment for both programmes.

This democratic approach is also evident in the active engagement of students in governing bodies where they are able to contribute to decision making processes that impact their studies. Students are well supported by staff in all aspects of study including support for different learning needs and the impact of personal circumstances. This alone, however, was not sufficient to effectively communicate between staff, students and the institution as a whole. Examples of this miscommunication appeared in the stated claim that all students spend time at partner institute University of Twente when the students' experience was that the procedure was the same for Erasmus +. A second example was the assumption that students had access to programmes such as 'Gifted' but the student experience was that of rejection on application. Communication between the institution, faculty members and students could be improved to ensure that everyone is able to access opportunities as they are intended. The broader administration concerning admissions, feedback and workflow is working very well and broader, external communications are clear and comprehensive for prospective students.

For staff there is a commitment to teaching and training but also research with a clear increase in engagement. To continue developing this aspect the workload model would benefit from an internal evaluation process to fully assess the barriers facing staff, particularly early career researchers. Whilst teaching experience is important it is difficult to gain expertise if there is insufficient time to engage with the wider academic community, read, discuss topics with colleagues and develop writing skills for funding bids and articles for reputable and international journals. The identification of 'mega trends' is a good initiative to encourage interdisciplinary collaborations and engage in intellectual discussions. This provides two clear benefits. Firstly, the opportunity for staff to embed theoretical and conceptual skills and critical thinking into the course more comprehensively. The development of work-based competencies is firmly established. However, a deeper connection with the theoretical and conceptual aspects of the field will align the courses more directly with the institution's mission 'to build a cohesive society' whilst encouraging students to develop their curiosity and continue their studies. A second benefit to opportunities for intellectual discussions and collaborations is that through informal conversations early career researchers can gain the confidence to develop their research, present at conferences and publish in international journals. This will increase the visibility of the University in line with its aims and increase opportunities for staff mobility.

The teaching faculty have a strong relationship with social partners and alumni which has led to new developments in the course modules and maintaining the course relevance. This again demonstrates the

collaborative approach of this teaching team. Alumni return through mentorship programmes and as a result of personal connections with staff creating a nurturing learning environment. The relationship with partners is based on guest lectures, internships and involvement in committees. This could be enhanced through greater engagement with the scientific developments in the field by which the panel is referring to intellectual developments. This would give partners the opportunity to not only hear about but engage with and think about new areas of inquiry and update them with knowledge that the students have access to. Round table discussions and other events involving social partners and alumni would facilitate this. Such an adjustment to the current approach would also foster a relationship that is less transactional in nature.

Overall, the panel found the programmes and field of study to be very good with no substantive shortcomings and a clear desire to continue developing and improving.