



STUDIJŲ KOKYBĖS VERTINIMO CENTRAS
CENTRE FOR QUALITY ASSESSMENT IN HIGHER EDUCATION

COMMUNICATION FIELD OF STUDY

Šiaulių valstybinė kolegija (ŠVK)

EXTERNAL EVALUATION REPORT

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I. INTRODUCTION

1.1. OUTLINE OF THE EVALUATION PROCESS

The study field 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 study field.

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 a HEI; 2) a site visit of the review panel to the HEI; 3) the external evaluation report (EER) prepared by the review panel 4) accreditation decision taken by SKVC and its publication; 4) follow-up activities.

The main outcome of the evaluation process is the EER prepared by the review panel. The HEI is forwarded the draft EER to report 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 a HEI is not happy with the outcome of the evaluation, HEI 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).

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. Bradley Wiggins
2. Academic member: Prof. dr. Anastassia Zabrodskaia
3. Academic member: Asst. Prof. Lars de Wildt
4. Academic member: dr. Andželika Bylaitė
5. Social partner: Svajūnė Marcinkevičienė
6. Student representative: Viktorija Lankauskaitė

1.3. SITE VISIT

The site visit was organised on 25 April 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)
- Team responsible for preparation of the SER
- Teaching staff
- Students
- Alumni and social stakeholders including employers.

There was a need for translation during the meeting with various members of the HEI.

1.4. BACKGROUND OF THE REVIEW

Overview of the HEI

Following the reorganisation of higher education technical and medical schools, Šiaulių valstybinė kolegija (hereinafter – ŠVK) was established in 2002 and continues to offer first cycle higher educational degree programmes to students in the region of Šiauliai. Two academic units house the entirety of ŠVK's degree programmes, namely the Faculty of Health Care (three departments) and the Faculty of Business and Technologies (5 departments). The Management and Communication Department, located in the Faculty of Business and Technologies, offers the degree programme under review. The Bachelor of Social Sciences in Corporate Communication and Marketing was initially launched in 2011, when it was originally called Organisation Communication Management; it has its current name since 2020.

Overview of the study field

Motivated by a desire to strengthen the competitiveness of Lithuanian society, to create new knowledge and innovations, and to prepare future professionals to compete internationally, the Faculty of Business and Technologies, which houses the Corporate Communication and Marketing degree programme, developed the programme due to clear external needs for communication professionals in Šiauliai and beyond. ŠVK's mission is "to create personality-growing experiences in the higher education area by conducting multi-directional studies focused on practical activities and future competencies available to current and future professional leaders" (ŠVK SER, 2023, p. 12). Accordingly, its programme in Corporate Communication and Marketing prepares current and potential students to enter the workforce with a broad range of skills and deep yet practical skills relevant to communication.

Previous external evaluations

Several times in the SER, the document includes references to previous external evaluations and the recommendations made by the reviewing experts and ŠVK's responses. The first international expert evaluation took place on August 31, 2017, and was later extended. The main outcomes include improvements in acquiring and maintaining relations with international partners, enhanced opportunities for studies in English, and considerations of the impact of social media on the study field and degree programme.

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*
- *Information about Erasmus+ and BIP courses*

Additional sources of information used by the review panel:

The review panel used no additional sources of information.

II. STUDY PROGRAMMES IN THE FIELD

First cycle/LTQF 6

Title of the study programme	Corporate Communication and Marketing
State code	6531JX017
Type of study (college/university)	College studies
Mode of study (full time/part time) and nominal duration (in years)	Full-time - 3 years; Part-time - 4 years
Workload in ECTS	180
Award (degree and/or professional qualification)	Professional Bachelor's Degree in Social Sciences
Language of instruction	Lithuanian
Admission requirements	Secondary education
First registration date	30 May 2011

III. ASSESSMENT IN POINTS BY CYCLE AND EVALUATION AREAS

The first cycle of Corporate Communication and Marketing study field at ŠVK is given a **positive** evaluation.

No.	Evaluation Area	Evaluation points ^{1*}
1.	Study aims, learning outcomes and curriculum	4
2.	Links between scientific (or artistic) research and higher education	3
3.	Student admission and support	4
4.	Teaching and learning, student assessment and graduate employment	4
5.	Teaching staff	4
6.	Learning facilities and resources	3
7.	Quality assurance and public information	4
Total:		26

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.

III. 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

In the SER, ŠVK cited several sources to provide ample evidence for the strong need for programmes in communication. They also cite the Lithuania's Progress Strategy "Lithuania 2030", among other external inputs, as reasons for the development and design of the Corporate Communication and Marketing degree programme, and how it aligns with social and professional needs as students enter the workforce. In discussions with alumni, social partners and employers, it became quite apparent that having ŠVK on the resume is a plus because it indicates a person with practical knowledge. While marketing and communication can seem like two different areas, regional companies are looking for such specialists, and the Corporate Communication and Marketing degree programme clearly aligns with the needs of social partners and employers thus serving Šiauliai and the larger Lithuanian society.

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

ŠVK's stated aims and learning outcomes were designed to be in line with their stated mission, which is fundamentally to create and foster personality-growing experiences within higher education and focusing on practice-oriented studies to anticipate the future skills and competencies needed as the students enter the professional workforce. In the development of the Bachelor programme in Corporate Communication and Marketing, ŠVK certainly provides strong evidence for aligning its programme with the mission. In addition, ŠVK's continued work with social partners and employers, involving them in giving guest lectures, getting their feedback about the curriculum, thesis topics, defences, internships, and more, clearly shows the alignment of aims and learning outcomes with ŠVK's mission, goals, and strategy.

ANALYSIS AND CONCLUSION (regarding 1.1.)

Overall, the Bachelor of Social Sciences in Corporate Communication and Marketing at ŠVK addresses and serves the needs of current and potential students, especially those with professional goals of working within Šiauliai and the larger Lithuanian region.

- 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

Tables 1 illustrates the compliance with the legal requirements. The programme is viewed as in *full* compliance with the requirements.

Table 1. Compliance of the programme Corporate Communication and Marketing with general requirements for *first cycle study programmes (bachelor)*

Criteria	General legal requirements	Corporate Communication and Marketing
Scope of the programme in ECTS	180, 210 or 240 ECTS	180 ECTS
ECTS for the study field	No less than 120 ECTS	Is above 120 ECTS (138 ECTS)
ECTS for studies specified by University or optional studies	No more than 120 ECTS	Does not exceed 120 ECTS
ECTS for internship	Not less than one-third of the study programme scope	81 ECTS
ECTS for final thesis (project)	No less than 9 ECTS (for college level studies)	9 ECTS (lower than general legal requirement)
Contact hours	No less than 20 % of learning	Minimum of 20% contact work
Individual learning	No less than 30 % of learning	Minimum of 30%

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

ŠVK clearly developed the programme in Corporate Communication and Marketing in alignment of overall programme aims, learning outcomes, teaching/learning and the ways these are assessed. Assessment tools and learning outcomes demonstrate variety and complexity in terms of ŠVK's rigorous development of the programme and its emphasis on practical training. Assessments are conducted through various means, including but not limited to cumulative assessments, surveys, criteria-based results, student progress and feedback analyses, cooperation between and among teaching faculty and administrative support.

1.2.3. Curriculum ensures consistent development of student competences

The SER prepared by ŠVK clearly demonstrates how "the content and arrangement of the subjects of the Programme in the study plan ensures consistent development of students' competences" (ŠVK SER, 2023, p. 17). They accomplish this by creating learning modules that build upon each other sequentially. They emphasise the principle of consistency as driving much of the design of the Bachelor programme in Corporate Communication and Marketing.

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

The degree programme is designed to allow for students to individualise their learning experience through a variety of means. Students can choose an additional 15 ECTS to deepen their understanding of an aspect of the programme; in addition, through ŠVK's international collaboration with the NEOLAiA Alliance, students can choose 9 ECTS as freely elected subjects. Also, students can choose to study abroad through the Erasmus+ network of colleges and universities, and they further develop their independent research and practice-based competencies through professional opportunities, such as the internship.

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

The final thesis, its development, presentation and defence, represents the final stage of completing the degree programme at ŠVK. As a way to internationalise the thesis, which ŠVK refers to as a 'graduation paper', students are required to include a certain amount of references in English. Students also may align the topic or thematic area of the thesis with a professional company which may have activities which the students wish to acquaint themselves with. Students' thesis topics originate from alignment with learning outcomes and must be relevant to organisational/corporate communication and marketing studies. Also, students conduct research aspects of the thesis in collaboration with an approved company. These points underscore that the final thesis (graduation paper) is in full compliance with the relevant field descriptors and cycle requirements.

ANALYSIS AND CONCLUSION (regarding 1.2.)

Overall, ŠVK has developed a rigorous and thoroughly practical programme in Applied Communication. Students, faculty, stakeholders, social partners, and employers create a synergy of interaction to continuously develop and improve aspects of the programme as it is delivered at ŠVK. Clearly, the aims and learning outcomes of the Professional Bachelor of Social Sciences in Corporate Communication and Marketing is in line with the needs of society and the regional labour market. There are a few areas where we propose recommendations for further improvement.

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				4	

COMMENDATIONS

1. The rebranding of the Corporate Communication and Marketing BA programme represents a viable option for the region's market.
2. There is potential for growth, not only as a BA programme and by adding a master's programme, but also literally as provided by the space available in the building.

RECOMMENDATIONS

For further improvement

1. Perhaps the ŠVK marketing efforts could emphasise the range and availability of scholarships as a way to increase the visibility of the Corporate Communication and Marketing degree programme (and indeed other programmes).
2. In the realm of publications, we recommend at the very least a gradual move away from the current focus on journals with Article Processing Charges.
 - a. We applaud the desire to produce high-quality research does not mean only seeking journals with APCs. We encourage moving away from journals with APC, but understand the decision to choose those as you progress toward a more serious goal of becoming a 'university of applied sciences' that would then allow a programme offering an MA/MSc.
3. We recommend including more such options over time, perhaps a gradual start and check it to see if changes need to be made (such as the topic of the course or perhaps when it is offered during the year or during their programme years).

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

Šiauliai valstybinė kolegija 2022-2024 Strategic Activity Plan foresees the aim – “to develop the ŠVK’s innovative activities, based on applied research, knowledge creation and application, which strengthen the integration of business, science and studies”. In order to achieve the applied dimension, the ŠVK actively creates science and business partnerships on the regional, national and international levels. It does so through the implementation of SRED, expert and consulting activities, applied, commissioned research, preparation of scientific publications, including scientific reports at international and national scientific conferences or their organisation (SER, p. 21).

Based on the Strategic Activity Plan of the ŠVK, “knowledge creation and application, carried out in different forms of study and science integration, highlights the role of the ŠVK, as the centre of applied research, in the region”. In 2021-2023, scientific applied activity in the ŠVK is carried out in accordance with the fields of applied scientific research approved by the Academic Board. Teachers of the Field course units prepared 57 articles within the period under evaluation. Approximately 32 percent of articles in the communication and information science field are in foreign scientific journals. Within the analysed period, teachers of the Field course units also prepared and gave 67 presentations in national and international conferences. 48 percent of the reports were presented abroad.

During the visit teachers confirmed that the ŠVK develops scientific potential of teachers. They are encouraged and motivated to continue their scientific activities by being paid bonuses to their salaries. Priority is given to participation in high-level scientific events (conferences) with a possibility to publish one’s publications in Clarivate Analytics or Scopus reviewed scientific journals. Though the payment for publication is paid from the ŠVK funds, teachers primarily search for possibilities to publish in scientific journals that do not have APC (Article Processing Charges).

For the implementation of scientific activity, teachers have a scientific coordinator, who consults, gives advice on where and how to publish scientific articles, etc. During visit with teachers, the latter noticed, that a lot of teachers can’t publish autonomously but coordinator help such colleagues to get the publications needed for promotion through co-authorship. Regardless, according to Appendix 5 in SER, the number of scientific production since 2021 has increased by only 7 publications.

The submitted Appendix 5 of the SER shows that the ŠVK works closely with social stakeholders by implementing commissioned research, but the number of commissioned research in 2023 decreased in comparison with 2021.

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

Evaluating linking of the content of the ŠVK studies with the latest achievements in science, art and technologies, the SER emphasises inclusion of the topics aimed for mastering achievements in the latest technologies in the content of course units. (SER, p. 21). Moreover, on the basis of scientific topics, analysed in scientific articles, conference reports and commissioned works, new subtopics are integrated in the course unit contents and lists of recommended literature are updated by new publications. Guest lecturers and their seminars, open lectures or implemented projects with students provide conditions to integrate the latest knowledge of communication and information in the study content.

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

The Strategic Activity Plan 2022-2024 of the ŠVK indicates as a strength “a growing interaction between science and studies through student involvement in the knowledge triangle (studies, scientific research and innovations)”. During the visit teachers, organisers, administration confirmed that the ŠVK actively involves students in scientific activity. 2021-2023 Appendix 8 to the SER presents only 12 student reports, including 9 presented in an international conference in Lithuania (5 locally and 5 only in Vilnius University of Applied Sciences).

In 2021-2023 the ŠVK itself has been organising an international student scientific-practical conference “Business, New Technologies and Smart Society” for several, where students of the Field make their reports, mostly prepared on the basis of final thesis. However, when asked during the visit, how many foreign students participate in this conference, how the international level of the conference is maintained, the teachers mentioned that internationality is maintained only thanks to Erasmus students of the ŠVK. For example, on 11 May 2023, at the international annual student conference "Business, New Technologies and Smart Society" in 6 sections there was not a single report from foreign students (only 5 reports from foreign students in the plenary session). Furthermore, the programme of the conference showed there were no students from other Lithuanian higher education institutions on the national level as well. 62 reports only from Šiauliai valstybinė kolegija. Moreover, 12 of the presentations were supervised by one teacher of the Field.

During the visit both teachers and students confirmed that research competences of the ŠVK students are also developed in other ways: through a course unit, aimed for applied research methodology, library, that organises trainings for 1-3 year students on how to use international databases and where to find other useful scientific sources when writing a final thesis (3rd year students are also introduced to plagiarism – how to ensure the authenticity and originality of written content). However, when Alumni were asked about how they managed to apply research competences in their workplace, only one of the graduates could confirm that she had possibilities and knew how to apply her research competencies at work. All this shows that the development of student research competences needs more attention. This was also confirmed by social partners, who stated that research competencies are necessary and that it is one of the ways to develop their critical, analytical thinking, which is extremely important in the modern media, which is full of lies and all kinds of propaganda.

ANALYSIS AND CONCLUSION (regarding 2.1.)

Though the scientific activity of the ŠVK is characterised by the variety of forms and has an international aspect, the quantitative scientific indicators show that there was no significant increase in the number of scientific publications during the analysed period. Only 25 articles were registered in the Field of Communication and Information Science. This means that in 3 years, one teacher in the Communication and Information Field in the ŠVK has 1.19 scientific articles. Though 5 articles of the teachers of the Field course units are published in Scopus peer-reviewed journals, however, in general, the involvement of teachers in

scientific research activity must be increased. Scientific activity on both national and international levels is not characterised by the number of publications in the higher or highest level scientific journals. There is also a visible lack of larger-scale scientific works, such as synthesis works, monographs, etc. Furthermore, all these scientific products should be improved by cooperating with other Lithuanian and foreign scientists. A decreasing trend is also observed in the number of reports made by the teachers of the Field course units at national and international conferences. There should be more dissemination of scientific research from the teachers at foreign conferences.

Evaluating the involvement of students in scientific activities, it should be noted that participation of the ŠVK students in conferences with reports and their distribution in the Republic of Lithuania is small. Although the ŠVK itself organized an international student conference "Business, New Technologies and Smart Society" during the analysed period, especially last year conference does not maintain the dimension of internationality. This situation shows that it is necessary to strengthen the level of student conference internationality. Poor teachers of the Field leadership in the preparation of students' reports for conference demonstrate that the active involvement of teachers in encouraging students to participate in scientific activities is questionable.

AREA 2: 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			3		

COMMENDATIONS

1. Integration of scientific research and teaching: ŠVK effectively integrates research results, knowledge and latest achievements in the fields of science, art and technology into its study programmes. This approach ensures that students are exposed to current information, techniques and tools, preparing students for career success.
2. ŠVK has strong partnerships with social partners, who provide students with real-world experiences and opportunities to work on projects with practical applications. This hands-on approach helps develop students' essential skills for their future careers.

RECOMMENDATIONS

To address shortcomings

1. More attention should be paid to the spread of scientific research of the Field teachers in foreign conferences.
2. Although the students of the Field actively participate in the international student scientific-practical conference "Business, New Technologies and Smart Society" organised by the ŠVK, the conference

does not reach an international level (in 6 sections there is not a single report from foreign students). This situation shows that it is necessary to strengthen the level of student conference internationality.

3. A limited number of teachers of the Field are available to supervise student reports and publications. In this case, it is recommended to improve the procedure for encouraging or motivating teachers in the ŠVK.

For further improvement

1. ŠVK's strategic measures cannot ensure that teachers and students fully participate in scientific research activities. There is a lack of the number of publications in higher or highest level scientific journals. Especially there is a visible lack of larger-scale scientific works, which should be improved by cooperating with other Lithuanian and foreign scientists.
2. It is important to ensure that as many students as possible realise the benefits and applicability of researched competencies in the study process and in future professional activities. In this case, it is recommended to include real business challenges in the study process as practical tasks, the solution of which would not be possible without the use of research competencies or to improve the results of Organizational communication or Digital communication practices, etc.

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 Šiauliai valstybinė kolegija admits students in two ways: through a joint admission, carried out by Lithuanian Higher Institutions Association for Organizing Joint Admission (LAMA BPO), with state funded places available, or through a direct admission, with only non-state funded places available.

The competitive score consists of the following: 1) the score of the maturity exam of Lithuanian language and literature (0,4 of the competitive score); 2) the score of the maturity exam or the annual grade of History, or Mathematics, or Information Technology, or Geography (0,2 of the competitive score); the score of the maturity exam or the annual grade of any subject that does not coincide with the other subjects already counted (0,2 of the competitive score); the score of the maturity exam or annual grade of the Foreign Language or History (0,2 of the competitive score).

Additional points can be added for activities such as national or international competitions, completed basic military training, or others, based on the criteria set by the Ministry of Education, Science and Sports. Šiauliai valstybinė kolegija also gives additional points to applicants who have completed *Lithuanian Junior Achievement* secondary education programme “Economics and Business”. The minimum competitive score for applicants to state funded studies was 4.3 in years 2020, 2021, 2022 and 2023, as clarified during the site visit. The same for non-state funded places in 2020, 2021, and 2022, but it was lowered to 2.0 in 2023. The discussions during the site visit revealed that the competitive score was lowered to give more opportunities for students with lower marks but were able to study. It was indicated that the lowered competitive score did not affect the quality of students.

The number of applicants has been decreasing over the evaluated period: there were 36 applicants in 2020, 29 applicants in 2021, 23 applicants in 2022 (to full-time and part-time studies), and 21 applicant in 2023 (to full-time and part-time studies) with first priority; and 78 applicants in 2020, 79 in 2021, 75 in 2022 (to full-time and part-time studies), and 20 in 2023 (to full-time and part-time studies) with remaining priorities. Out of these, there were 11 signed agreements in 2020, 14 in 2021, 11 in 2022, and 10 in 2023 to state funded places, and 19 in 2020, 18 in 2021, 10 in 2022, and 17 in 2023 to non-state funded places (with 30, 32, 21, and 27 students in total respectively). A slight decrease in student numbers from 2022 is attributed to the decreasing numbers of eligible candidates for studies, as poor results in mathematics maturity exam is posing difficulties and prevents the students from enrolling into state funded places. The SER also noted the trends and student numbers as indicative for the Šiauliai region, as the majority of students come from here. Selection of the programme for their first priority, according to SER shows the local need of the field study programme.

The highest competitive score of the admitted students ranges from 6,45 in 2021 to 8,92 in 2023 for state funded places, with values in between for other years. The competitive scores for non-state funded places have a higher fluctuation, from 4,22 in 2022, to 7,75 in 2020, with values in between for other years. The lowest competitive scores range from 4,56 in 2020 to 6,47 in 2022 for state funded places. The lowest competitive scores for non-state funded places are lower but a difference between highest and lowest values is different, ranging from 3,22 in 2022 to 4,59 in 2020. The averages of these scores are 6,21 in 2020, 5,51 in

2021, 5,3 in 2022, and 5,9 in 2023. The SER emphasises the averages not being lower than the minimum competitive score of 4,3, but a look at individual numbers, such as 3,22 in 2022, informs about an uneven preparation of certain students which can create challenges for the group to reach the same academic level. Although during the site visit it was stressed that there are no significant differences or challenges posed, the teachers provide additional consultations and put in extra effort if necessary.

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

The ŠVK credits the learning outcomes according to the *Description of the Procedure for Crediting Learning Outcomes of Partial Studies (2023)* that states that partial studies or internships done according to the agreed study content are credited without restrictions. Individuals who have studied in or graduated from other Lithuanian HEIs or abroad, can have their subjects credited but can cover no more than 75% of the intended study programme. The final thesis is not credited.

The SER states that during the evaluated period, the learning outcomes were credited as follows: for 1 student in 2020, 2 in 2021, 5 in 2022, and for 6 in 2023. Erasmus+ learning outcomes were credited for 5 students during the evaluated period. 25% of the credits were not recognised for the students returning from mobility because of negative assessment, but the students were given the opportunity to study the same subjects at home later.

The ŠVK also recognises non-formal learning achievements and can assess and credit work experience, seminars and other learning events, volunteering activities, and other types of non-formal learning based on the *Description of the Order of Assessment, Recognition and Crediting of Academic Achievements Acquired by Non-formal Education and Informal Learning (2018)*. According to SER, no competencies gained through non-formal and informal learning were credited during the evaluated period.

ANALYSIS AND CONCLUSION (regarding 3.1.)

The admission procedures are clear and adequate to the study field. The student numbers are decreasing, but since the study programme caters to the region, some fluctuation and smaller groups of students are expected.

A concerning factor is the situation regarding the competitive scores of students and their lowest and highest values, indicating uneven academic preparation of students which might make it more difficult to reach the same academic level at the end of each course. Related to that is the instance of lowering the minimal competitive score from 4.3 to 2 in 2023 (as learned in the site visit, but the SER and the competitive score data indicates 2022 for that), which risks creating an even bigger gap between students. Although the academic staff and the administration stress the actions available to decrease that gap, such as additional academic consultations, more attention should be paid to ensure that the consultations are effective and reach the desired effect.

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

Šiauliai valstybinė kolegija provides opportunities for student academic mobility under the Erasmus+ programme, allowing students to participate in study exchanges and internships abroad. The SER states that the ŠVK has around international cooperation partners in 12 EU countries, and around 10 partners in other countries. Information about these opportunities is published on the official website of the ŠVK, on social media platforms, as well as is disseminated by email and in printed format in the open spaces at the ŠVK.

During the years under evaluation, there were no full-time students in the Field coming from abroad. In terms of partial studies, there were 3 outgoing students over the analysed period, with 1 more student participating in a short-term mobility – a Blended Intensive Programme (BIP), and 1 going for an Erasmus+ internship. Although the numbers are low, considering the total number of students in the field, the SER indicates a 6,8% share of students participating in international mobility, which is higher than their set goal of 4%. Additionally, the mobility opportunities can only be used by students starting from their 2nd year, and in full-time studies, thus the percentage could be even higher, according to the SER.

The increasing popularity of the BIP is expected to increase the number of students participating in academic mobility. The site visit revealed that the majority of students are employed or have family commitments which prevents them from participating in long-term mobility, so short-term opportunities might be more popular among busier students.

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

The ŠVK provides support to students in various areas. Academic support includes consulting students about study processes, individual study plans, mobility opportunities, development of their academic competencies. Academic consultations are available following the official timetables published on the ŠVK website. Students can also be consulted remotely, by email, telephone, or other virtual communication tools. In the feedback assessment, around 85% of the students report having an opportunity to consult with the teacher.

Financial support covers the one-time and incentive scholarships available to students for learning outcomes, high achievements in research, cultural, and social activities, or upon individual request. Students studying in non-state funded places are able to get scholarships as well. Social support includes accommodation services for students, available in two renovated dormitories, with 393 places.

State funded scholarships and study loans are also available and students are informed about them by the Study Record and Student Support Unit. Nominal scholarships, funded by organisations or individuals are also available to students for significant results in academic, research, or social activities.

During the evaluated period, 19 students of the field received incentive scholarships (2 in 2020, 5 in 2021, and 12 in 2022), 42 students received one-time scholarships (13 in 2020, 14 in 2021, and 15 in 2022), 14 students received social scholarships (4 in 2020, 4 in 2021, and 6 in 2022). Three (1 each year) students received financial aid as persons with disabilities. Two students received nominal scholarships in 2022, funded by Šiauliai District Municipality.

The ŠVK provides psychological support to students and informs about the services available in Šiauliai city, which includes individual and group psychological consultations. According to the SER, the projects “Improving the Psychological Well-being and Mental Health of the Students of the ŠVK” and “Improving the Learning Environment and Mental Health of the Students of the ŠVK” are being carried out in 2022 and 2023, with about 10% of the field students participating. The projects are based on the study investigating the

mental well-being of students after the pandemic. The SER reports student participation in seminars about tolerance and inclusion, related to the project, which should provide both support to students and develop their own competencies to provide support to others. Additionally, a relaxation area was established in 2022 to improve the mental well-being of students.

Other types of support include the possibility to engage in different artistic, cultural, sports, and research activities. Students Representative Body not only helps students deal with various academic issues, but also organises events and various initiatives. For development of personal competencies, the ŠVK organises open lectures and seminars on entrepreneurship and creativity. Consultations on career development and internships are also offered by The Student Admission and Career Centre. The Centre also consults students and organises seminars about preparing for the labour market, career management, and further education opportunities.

3.2.3. Higher education information and student counselling are sufficient

The students admitted to the study programme are introduced to the ŠVK system and study processes during the introductory days, organised for first-year students. Students are informed about the possibilities of changing their funding type and moving to SF study places according to their academic results. Group curators inform the first-year students about the study plans, schedules, exam sessions, electives, and other study procedures.

ANALYSIS AND CONCLUSION (regarding 3.2.)

International mobility seems to pose a slight challenge, but with the lower student numbers, part time studies and commitments the students have, the situation is not surprising. The rising popularity of the Blended Intensive Programmes should open more ways to students to claim the benefits of international experience.

The support ŠVK provides is adequate when it comes to finances, social, academic and personal support. Psychological support poses no significant challenges at the moment, but the ŠVK seems to put a lot of responsibility for psychological support on students themselves, such as mentoring, attending seminars to be prepared to support not only oneself but others, and so on. Building students' psychological competencies is commendable, yet professional help and its availability should be the main focus. Although information about where to find certain help was disseminated in the premises in the form of various brochures. Psychological support for international students is commendable too.

Due to the interdisciplinary nature of the study programme educating the professionals ready to take on a number of communication and marketing tasks in smaller businesses, which requires a wide array of skills and might lead to a lot of multitasking, stress in the workplace, working over time, and difficult work-life balance, additional attention could be paid to psychological support for the students of the field not only in terms of helping them deal with any arising issues currently, but develop the skills that would benefit them long term, such as time management, crisis management, and dealing with stress.

AREA 3: 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				4	

COMMENDATIONS

1. Implementation of Blended Intensive Programmes in response to lower international mobility numbers.
2. The importance of mental health is clearly recognized, providing psychological resources to students, including Erasmus+ students.

RECOMMENDATIONS

For further improvement

1. Overview of psychological support available, because while it is there, it appears that a lot of it falls on students themselves as well. There should be more attention paid to this situation in the interest of the students.
2. Working on evening out the academic preparedness of students is needed, making sure the competitive score fluctuations does not influence the study experience of the whole group.

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

Students, alumni and employers note that Šiauliai valstybinė kolegija prepares specialists for small regional companies. During the conversation, it was emphasised that in the regions, companies cannot allocate large budgets to communication and marketing specialists, so their competencies must be extremely broad. This is exactly what this specialty of Šiauliai valstybinė kolegija responds to. As a mandatory subject, the workers singled out visual management - the ability to work with special programmes such as canva or photoshop. Specialists with a very wide profile are being prepared for practice. During the course of studies, teachers and students have to regularly discuss the success or problematic aspects of the implementation of student-centred studies (student workload, progress, student learning outcomes, achievement feedback, participation in discussions, etc.).

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

The ŠVK aims to ensure social integration, human rights and equality for all, and to eliminate discriminatory segregation of individual groups. The ŠVK has a Study Record and Student Support Unit, which provides consultations to students with special needs. Considering individual abilities of students with special needs (visual, auditory, mobility impairments and other), appropriate methods are used in the study process, such as increasing the font size, speaking at a slower pace, increasing the assessment time, individual consultations are provided, timetable or teaching (learning) environment is adjusted. During the evaluation period, there was one student with special educational (learning) needs.

Students can also seek psychological help if they experience emotional difficulties, difficulties in learning, anxiety, loneliness, sadness, lack of motivation when there is disagreement with others, difficulty in making decisions, depressing thoughts, etc.. In 2023, during the "Project on Improving the Psychological Learning Environment and Mental Health of the Students of Šiauliai". an electronic system was created - student to student. Students supported each other. The students were indeed very positive about this project.

ANALYSIS AND CONCLUSION (regarding 4.1.)

Teaching and learning address the needs of students and enable them to achieve intended learning outcomes. The NWC ensures social inclusion, human rights and equal opportunities. Provides opportunities for students with special needs.

Students are satisfied with their study programme. They have a positive attitude towards the subjects in the study programme. They see them as practically useful. Despite the opportunities for mental and emotional health and support, there is a risk of burnout when working as a communication and marketing specialist. Accordingly, ŠVK should think about how to protect current students and therefore future alumni from burnout.

Šiauliai valstybinė kolegija of Applied Sciences clearly stands out in that it trains specialists for small regional companies. Professionals need to be able to manage a wide range of competences. Particular emphasis is placed on social media management, public speaking and video content management, and visual production.

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

Feedback takes various forms: comments are written in the student's work or works are commented in generalised manner to all students with the possibility to consult individually with the teacher at the end of the lecture or during consultations; during the semester the student is given the information about what progress or regression he/she is making. During lectures, demonstrations, discussions, group learning, etc., when information is provided to learners, the teacher makes sure that the students understand the information provided, while encouraging students to ask questions and discuss. Each interim assessment (control tasks, tests, etc.) is followed by discussing learning outcomes. During review the strengths of students' works and mistakes are discussed as well as essential aspects and guidelines to avoid mistakes and inaccuracies are given. Students are given feedback, teachers advise on further studies.

4.2.2. Graduate employability and career are monitored

The ŠVK systematically collects and analyses data about employability of graduates. Contacts with graduates are maintained; they are inquired about their employment and their success in the labour market. Career monitoring of ŠVK graduates is based on interactive data from the Career Management Information System (KVIS, <https://karjera.lt/>), the Employment Service and the Government's Strategic Analysis Center (STRATA). From 2023, career monitoring data will be available in the Educational Management Information System (EMIS), which includes comprehensive career monitoring data available in Lithuania.

The professional activities of the majority of Field graduates meet the expectations of employers and demonstrate good participation of prepared professionals in the labour market. Ties with the Field graduates are constantly maintained, regular gatherings are organised on purpose *to evaluate graduates satisfaction* with the Field, to find out their opinion about the study quality, what general and (or) professional skills they lack when gaining a foothold in the labour market. Graduates can see the events organised by the Department, comment, make suggestions on a *Facebook* page created by the Department.

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

In the first year, students sign the Student Integrity Declaration (Annex 2 of the Code of Academic Ethics. Members of the academic community are guaranteed academic freedom, as well as the obligation and responsibility to comply with the *Code of Academic Ethics* (2021). Faculty or ŠVK administration staff, responsible specialists in units, academic group curators and lecturers explain legal provisions to students and provide consultations. *The Code of Academic Ethics* sets out in which instances of dishonesty a teacher

must respond in a principled manner and report to the Academic Ethics Committee. Penalties to students for cheating, plagiarism and dishonesty during assessment are applied in accordance with *the Study Regulations and Description of Procedure for Awarding Incentives and Imposing*

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

The order of appeals and complaints application and investigation is governed by the *Student Appeals Regulations (2020)*. They define a transparent, objective process: the possibility for the student to appeal against decisions of an administrative / academic nature taken by the subject teacher or the learning outcomes credit coordinator. The administrative staff and teachers of the Faculty in which appeal was submitted must ensure that the student who submitted the appeal does not suffer in any way in this regard. During the self-assessment period, no appeals and complaints were received from the students of the Field.

ANALYSIS AND CONCLUSION (regarding 4.2.)

ŠVK has an effective and transparent system for assessing students thereby ensuring the achievement of learning outcomes. ŠVK's systematic collection of data on the employability of its graduates as well as ŠVK's regular communication with graduates serves to inform its own internal processes and addresses ways to update or improve the programme to respond to market fluctuations in the workforce. The ŠVK systematically collects and analyses data about employability of graduates. Contacts with graduates are maintained; they are inquired about their employment and their success in the labour market. The Šiauliai valstybinė kolegija implements a policy of academic integrity, tolerance and non-discrimination. It also has effective procedures for appeals and complaints

AREA 4: 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				4	

COMMENDATIONS

1. The Šiauliai valstybinė kolegija provides psychological and pedagogical support to students.
2. It is great that the administration and lecturers of the ŠVK provide individual feedback and support to students, such as the HEI's efforts to address psychological factors or students with special needs, for example.
3. The support of the social partners is also very much felt. The social partners have confirmed that the receiving resumes from graduates of Šiauliai valstybinė kolegija typically indicates a person who is ready for the profession.
4. The great thing is that the ŠVK systematically monitors graduates' employability and career development.
5. Students are introduced to and trained in plagiarism detection technologies.

6. Šiauliai valstybinė kolegija fosters a culture of integrity, responsibility and respect.

RECOMMENDATIONS

For further improvement

1. Despite the opportunities for mental and emotional health and support, there is a risk of burnout when working as a communication and marketing specialist. Accordingly, ŠVK should think about how to protect current students and therefore future alumni from burnout.

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

The Self-Evaluation Report states, that the qualification and number of teachers, working in the Study Programme *Corporate Communication and Marketing* in Šiauliai valstybinė kolegija are adequate. The Field has 21 teachers, including 7 associate professors and 10 lecturers who teach course units of the Study Field. The average age of teachers, who teach course units of the Field - 48 years. 82 percent of the course units of the Field are taught by permanent teachers, who work at least part-time and more than 3 years. In 2023-2024 full-time workload of a teacher was 1524 hours. The ratio of the number of teachers and students in the Field is 1:4.

The Šiauliai valstybinė kolegija ensures appropriate conditions for the teachers to develop their didactic, professional and scientific competences. Therefore the Šiauliai valstybinė kolegija has implemented a system of teaching and developing qualifications of permanent staff. Qualification and fields of scientific interests of the Field teachers comply with the content of their taught course units and provide favourable conditions for the achievements of the learning outcomes foreseen in the SP. 71 percent of the teachers of the Field course units have 15 and more years experience of teaching. The knowledge of English of 50 percent of the Field teachers is at least B2 level. During the visit also a part of the teachers spoke Lithuanian. Living in a global and multicultural society and training a specialist in communication, foreign language skills are necessary. 13 percent of the course units in the Field can be taught in both Lithuanian and English. During the visit, a teacher from Spain confirmed that students are very happy when they have no opportunity to speak Lithuanian during his lectures, they have “to get out of the comfort zone” and this situation practically develops their foreign language abilities.

Some teachers are social partners, who are highly qualified and have expert practical experience in the area of the taught course unit and in the supervision of internships of professional activity. During the period under evaluation foreign teachers also gave lectures. 47.1 percent of the Field course units were taught by teachers, who have a doctor degree and demonstrate scientific competences (made reports in conferences, published scientific articles etc.).

During the visit, teachers very clearly and detail reasoned the new change of the Programme title, which showed that qualification of the teachers is appropriate for the achievement of the learning outcomes of Corporate Communication and Marketing Study Programme and for training a specialist for the labour market, especially for Šiauliai, as one of the regional cities, where small and medium businesses are dominant and for the business it is more economical to have one specialist, who knows both communication and marketing.

ANALYSIS AND CONCLUSION (regarding 5.1.)

Evaluating the structure of the academic staff of the Field, it was noticed that the structure of the academic staff is balanced. The majority of teachers are between the ages of 46 and 60. Nowadays, it is common that

highly qualified researchers and teachers of a younger age are encouraged to work in higher education institutions due to their work efficiency. In Šiauliai valstybinė kolegija, age limit does not influence professional abilities, the principle of equality with regard to the working age is ensured. No discrimination, mobbing, etc. were observed against teachers or other staff.

The Šiauliai valstybinė kolegija provides teachers with possibilities to go on secondments, take part in project activity, seminars, trainings, internships and other ways to raise their qualification both in a formal and in informal way. A lot of attention is paid not only to subject or professional competences, but also to scientific ones. Priority is given to scientific internships and/or conferences with a possibility to publish in Claritive Analytics or Scopus reviewed journals. This is funded by the Šiauliai valstybinė kolegija, however this activity should be specifically planned in advance. Scientific activity is mostly implemented by teachers who have a doctorate degree and/or associate professors.

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 Self-Evaluation Report states, that Šiauliai valstybinė kolegija provides all teachers of the Field course units with equal opportunities to take part in academic mobility activities: make presentation in foreign conferences, learn or teach and share their good practice with foreign higher education institutions. The latter activity is implemented in the selection to Erasmus+ programme. The ŠVK has taken care that the outgoing teachers both in the ŠVK and foreign organisations have coordinators, who help on organisational as well as document handling for international exchange issues.

During the period under evaluation, 17 teachers took part in the academic mobility programme of the ŠVK, including 8 outgoing teachers who implemented 31 mobility, 9 teachers arrived and had 14 visits.

According to teachers, during a semester they go 1-3 times by way of competition, which is organised by the International Relations Office. Erasmus+ mobility enables them to deepen English knowledge, to teach in English, gain new academic experience, establish new partnership relations, which increase the academic mobility of incoming teachers in the ŠVK. This was also confirmed by a Spanish teacher, who participated in the conversation with experts. In May a teacher from Tunisia is coming. During the evaluated period the Programme had teachers who came from Latvia, Albania, Portugal, Italy, Turkey, Dominican Republic, etc. also, according to teachers, joining the NEOLAIa Alliance contributes to academic mobility. Thanks to this Alliance the ŠVK has developed cooperation with other partner universities and international co-authors in the area of scientific products and in project activity.

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

Šiauliai valstybinė kolegija provides with appropriate conditions for developing teacher competences. The need for the development of teacher competences is planned in accordance with annual plans of departments, plans of full-time workload of teachers as well as a wish expressed by a teacher to develop qualification. The expenses for qualification development are funded by the funds from the state budget, the income of the ŠVK, Erasmus+ programme and other funds attracted by the ŠVK.

Additional attention is paid to those who want to study for a doctorate. For example, one of the teachers, studying for a doctorate degree, confirmed that she published only one article a year funded by the ŠVK, other articles were published in free scientific journals.

In 2021-2023, the ŠVK teachers developed their general, subject, teaching (learning), research, practical activity competences in the following ways: training, seminars, conferences, international exchange, practical qualification internships, involvement in project activity.

In order to evaluate the efficiency of competence development and ensure feedback, the improved teachers share their best practices at Department meetings or other events of the ŠVK community. Final evaluation of the activities of teacher competence development is carried out during the ŠVK Teacher Certification and certification of Admission Committee for the term of office.

ANALYSIS AND CONCLUSION (regarding 5.2.)

The number of teaching staff in the Field is sufficient for conducting quality studies. The teaching staff of courses in study program is well structured. Their competencies in courses taught are linked with their scientific research interests and/or practical experience in Communication and Marketing field.

ŠVK ensures teachers the possibilities to raise their qualification. Teachers are provided with conditions to carry out scientific activity, go on secondments, to conferences, etc. The ŠVK covers qualification development costs. However, teachers do not abuse that, every activity is planned with the Head of Department in advance.

Also Šiauliai valstybinė kolegija provides teachers with possibilities to take part in Erasmus+ exchange. Despite the fact that only a part of the teachers know a foreign language at the B2 level, the academic mobile activity of the teachers of the Field is sufficient and clearly planned.

AREA 5: CONCLUSIONS

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

COMMENDATIONS

1. The qualification and number of teachers working in the Study Programme *Corporate Communication and Marketing* in Šiauliai valstybinė kolegija are adequate. There is a satisfying ratio between teachers and students.
2. A lot of attention is paid to subject, professional or scientific competencies of teachers. Funding for the improvement of teachers' competences is carried out.
3. The teachers are continuously and systematically encouraged to submit applications via Erasmus+ for long- and short-term visits abroad for teaching and learning. According to the Erasmus+ program, the Faculty also attracts enough teachers of the Field from abroad for teaching and learning purposes.

RECOMMENDATIONS

For further improvement

1. Although the turnover of teachers as staff in the study program is low, 48 years is the established average age of the staff, due to the rapidly innovations in the labour market, it is recommended to present the newest trends in Communication and Marketing field practise by giving a chance for new teachers, young researches to join the existing academic staff.
2. Although the ŠVK pays considerable attention to improving the competences of teachers, there is still a lack of foreign language knowledge among teachers. Due to the low level of English, the aspect of internationality is not sufficiently ensured in scientific activities. In this case, it is also recommended to renew the existing academic staff or invest in periodically foreign language training for teaching staff.

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 ŠVK provides 17 rooms for instruction as well as a 95-workplace library (of which 31 computerised). Some rooms are adapted to hybrid learning, and the ŠVK has invested in webcam equipment (such as Meeting Owl Pro) and other hardware like headphones, speakers, and projectors to facilitate students who may not be able to physically attend.

The ŠVK provides essential software like Office and Google, although it currently lacks qualitative analysis software. The equipment available for students includes copying and printing facilities. Following a need for hybrid and remote learning, the ŠVK utilises the virtual learning environment Moodle for the organisation of teaching and to offer self-study material.

The field study programme could benefit from the use of the audio-visual lab available at the premises of the ŠVK, but currently mainly used by the media students. The students expressed interest in advancing their audio-visual content creation skills and gaining more practical knowledge in general, and similar opinion was expressed by social partners, stressing the need for professionals able to work with audio-visual material. Such addition to the skillset of the future communication and marketing professionals would be beneficial for those planning to work with audio-visual content more, as well as for the ones who would only be outsourcing such services, as the knowledge of the area would help them communicate their ideas better to other professionals and ensure they invest and produce quality content.

In terms of accessibility, the library provides accommodations for students with visual impairments. The ŠVK has made an effort to accommodate students with physical disabilities despite the building not being originally designed for it; and offers free parking for all students.

The ŠVK recognizes the importance of mental health, with 10 percent of students benefiting from psychological resources. Erasmus+ students also receive psychological assistance tailored to the needs of intercultural communication. To that end as well, infrastructure is adapted, providing relaxation areas.

The library offers access to common and necessary databases (including EBSCO, Taylor & Francis, etc.), electronic resources, and a frequently updated collection of books. The collection contains 36 533 copies and 15 144 titles of documents, with more than 2000 titles dedicated to the Communication field. The library system is self-service, promoting independent learning among students. In terms of e-sources, more than 40 500 electronic journals are available in open access databases as of 2022 and more than 351,000 eBooks, as stated in the SER.

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

New software and literature is frequently acquired with the intention of using it for a five-year period. Already acquired software is updated twice a year. Teachers can request literature according to their subject.

Acquiring and updating of software and infrastructure takes place as required for each academic year, based on the yearly budget, or for longer periods based on ongoing projects, taking into account planned activities, and Faculty's strategic objectives.

A new Moodle update to 4.0 is planned, as well as a change from ASES to TurnItIn plagiarism software. Although Moodle is not automatically translated into English; specific courses have to be created for international students.

ANALYSIS AND CONCLUSION (regarding 6.1.)

Software and literature needs are based on lists submitted for approval by lecturers and final-year students. Nonetheless, we were informed that there was "no need" for qualitative analysis software.

While 20% of students find the available materials insufficient, this was clarified to be about specific miscellaneous software that cannot be realistically purchased until the need for such software is more widely shared.

The upcoming update to Moodle may present difficulties, on top of the potential problems already presented by the (open-source) platform (including expensive expansions, security issues, lack of developer documentation, and notably cumbersome updating processes). To address this, the ŠVK has permanently employed IT-workers familiar with Moodle and ready in case of crises, changes, or security issues. Backups are performed annually.

A more impactful problem, especially in light of internationalisation, is that Moodle does not automatically support English for foreign students, leaving the translation efforts largely to the teaching staff. In addition, students indicated a desire for more courses or course options taught in English. We recommend including more such options over time, perhaps a gradual start and check it to see if changes need to be made (such as the topic of the course or perhaps when it is offered during the year or during their programme years).

Accessibility is an issue for those with physical disabilities as lifts are difficult to find, not all areas are wheelchair accessible, and locating a disability toilet proved challenging even for the staff.

The ŠVK building has ample room for expansion, and it is evident that this space is being utilized for ongoing development

AREA 6: 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			3		

COMMENDATIONS

1. The ŠVK provides a comprehensive and accessible library system with special attention for visually impaired students, and access to necessary databases and electronic resources.
2. There is much room for expansion and it is good to see the building used accordingly.

RECOMMENDATIONS

To address shortcomings

1. However, with regard to the building, accessibility for people with physical disabilities proves to be challenging. Not all areas are wheelchair accessible, and locating disability-friendly bathroom facilities was difficult, with staff unable to indicate them (and the committee struggling to find one).
2. In light of internationalisation ambitions, more course options could be offered in English, and care must be taken to accommodate English-speaking students more easily on Moodle, which is currently by default in Lithuanian and should require (automated) translation.

For further improvement

1. Resources for media production and recording studios are typically exclusive to the media faculty and students. However, corporate communication and marketing students may desire (or even require) a basic understanding of media production skills. In line with input from employers and social partners, we recommend making the required resources more readily available for students of this programme.

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 ŠVK's internal quality assurance is based on European standards and guidelines for higher education quality assurance. The quality assurance system furthermore follows several internal documents, including study regulations, council regulations, and regulations of faculties and departments, committee and staff activities. A Communication Field Study Committee continuously monitors the study field for potential improvement, by reviewing and analysing the content of the programmes, organising and carrying out necessary updates, evaluating changes and course descriptions, and analysing survey results.

Self-assessment reports are discussed in meetings with teachers, social partners, students, representatives of the Faculty administration, Faculty Council members and Academic Council members are invited. The effectiveness of study quality assurance is discussed at least once a year, at the Dean's office (at the faculty level) and in the Directorate (at the ŠVK level).

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

Stakeholders are involved in governing bodies, the ethics committee and dispute resolution committees. Internship placements are regularly assessed and discussed, with suggestions from social partners implemented as a consequence. Employees are surveyed on the ŠVK's organisational culture.

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

Documented evaluations, decisions and changes are made available for staff through the internal document management system "Kontora," posted on the internal document (DRAC) database, and published on the ŠVK website, social media platforms, and public events. The results of (students') scientific activities, publications and presentations at conferences, participation in various competitions and funding applications are also collected, but it is unclear if and where they are published.

7.1.4. Student feedback is collected and analysed

Students are invited to send suggestions directly to the Head of Department, Dean's Office or the 'Management Representative for Quality.' Student surveys are taken each semester and published on the website. About 80% of surveyed students indicated adequate resources and materials; and 90% of first-year students indicated satisfaction with their choice of studies. Results of surveys are discussed at department and committee level; and published on the website. Finally, they are presented to students as a basis for decision-making on which student suggestions to implement.

ANALYSIS AND CONCLUSION (regarding 7.1.)

The study programme was updated in 2022, adding the marketing element. Nonetheless, students of the programme mostly seem interested in internal and external communication. The consequent consideration is that the programme needs to re-assess this recent change after the next few years, to see if students have indeed warmed up to this addition. This becomes particularly pertinent in light of the committee’s concern that becoming a specialist in both may be too much to take on.

The assessment of the programme turned out to show particularly strong involvement by local/regional companies and institutions including the municipality and police office. These external stakeholders regularly inform the programme about the role and state of social partners, how the labour market works, what skills and abilities would be beneficial for students, and what practical activities should be included in the study programme. AI turned out to be a recent topic subject to being evaluated, and is informed by students.

Another challenge requires adequate assessment of the consequences of lowering the minimum competitive score for non-state funded students. The score was lowered to give more opportunities for students with lower marks, but student outcomes do show an increased difference between lowest scoring and highest scoring groups (PT-snf 4.03 average versus FT-sf 7.33). Future assessments should closely monitor how successfully the ŠVK can accommodate this larger spread of student scores.

AREA 7: 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				4	

COMMENDATIONS

1. The programme’s involvement of external stakeholders that inform and assess the programme’s outcomes adds to the overall strong point of the programme’s ability to cater to the needs of the immediate area of the ŠVK’s region.
2. Students are structurally involved in forming the future curriculum and the use of software such as Generative AI. Laudably, feedback is given on student feedback, and they are involved in deciding what to do with their suggestions as well as (to an extent) which changes to prioritise.

RECOMMENDATIONS

For further improvement

1. ŠVK should adequately assess the consequences of the increased spread of student scores, particularly whether less well-performing students are left behind; or over-performing students are under stimulated.
2. Similarly, assessment should hopefully confirm that students have grown more comfortable with the addition of the marketing specialisation compared to current students who are mostly interested in the communication aspect of the programme.

IV. SUMMARY

Overall, the study programmes fulfil the requirements, with programme content and delivery, and the processes and student support needed to successfully provide the programmes being in place. ŠVK's programme in Corporate Communication and Marketing quite clearly aligns the learning outcomes with the institution's mission, goals, and strategy but also the needs of the general society. Considering the needs of the larger Šiauliai region, the rebranding of the Corporate Communication and Marketing degree programme represents a viable option for the market. The programme ensures that students will understand emerging communication issues and challenges in contemporary society, and also recognize their connection to social and economic processes. The learning outcomes are aligned with the modules and overall curriculum. Students have several options to individualise their learning experience, and they also benefit from practical experiences with the required internship.

In terms of facilities and support, ŠVK provides a broad array of services to its students such as a comprehensive library system with special attention for visually impaired students as well as access to necessary databases. Students' mental health is supported through psychological resources. Some challenges exist; not all areas had wheelchair accessibility, and locating the disability-friendly bathroom was difficult. Resources for media production are typically exclusive to the media faculty and students; however, given input from alumni, social partners and employers, the panel recommended that required resources be more readily available for students of this programme.

In terms of teaching staff and research, ŠVK clearly integrates research and related achievements in the fields of science, art, and technology into the Corporate Communication and Marketing study programme. ŠVK also benefits from strong partnerships with social partners and employers. Taken together, these aspects provide further evidence of the well-developed practical approach to the design and delivery of the study programme. The panel recommended, however, that teaching staff achieve publications in higher or highest level journals. In addition, students need to understand the synergies of research competencies and their own future professional activities. The panel also recognizes that the language of many if not most of the publications produced by teaching staff at ŠVK is Lithuanian; the panel recommended, however, that with respect to desires for internationality, a higher amount of teaching staff publishing in English is recommended.

It became apparent that the ŠVK staff are motivated to move in a positive direction and their motivation is clear in terms of helping the study programmes to continue to improve.