



STUDIJŲ KOKYBĖS VERTINIMO CENTRAS
CENTRE FOR QUALITY ASSESSMENT IN HIGHER EDUCATION

COMMUNICATION FIELD OF STUDY

Kauno kolegija (KK)

EXTERNAL EVALUATION REPORT

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CONTENTS

I. INTRODUCTION	3
1.1. OUTLINE OF THE EVALUATION PROCESS	3
1.2. REVIEW PANEL	4
1.3. SITE VISIT	4
1.4. BACKGROUND OF THE REVIEW	5
II. STUDY PROGRAMMES IN THE FIELD	6
III. ASSESSMENT IN POINTS BY CYCLE AND EVALUATION AREAS	7
III. STUDY FIELD ANALYSIS	8
AREA 1: STUDY AIMS, LEARNING OUTCOMES AND CURRICULUM	8
AREA 1: CONCLUSIONS	10
AREA 2: LINKS BETWEEN SCIENTIFIC (OR ARTISTIC) RESEARCH AND HIGHER EDUCATION	12
AREA 2: CONCLUSIONS	14
AREA 3: STUDENT ADMISSION AND SUPPORT	16
AREA 3: CONCLUSIONS	19
AREA 4: TEACHING AND LEARNING, STUDENT ASSESSMENT, AND GRADUATE EMPLOYMENT	20
AREA 4: CONCLUSIONS	24
AREA 5: TEACHING STAFF	26
AREA 5: CONCLUSIONS	28
AREA 6: LEARNING FACILITIES AND RESOURCES	30
AREA 6: CONCLUSIONS	31
AREA 7: QUALITY ASSURANCE AND PUBLIC INFORMATION	33
AREA 7: CONCLUSIONS	35
IV. SUMMARY	36

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

1.3. SITE VISIT

The site visit was organised on 24 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 HEI representatives.

1.4. BACKGROUND OF THE REVIEW

Overview of the HEI

Kauno kolegija, hereafter KK, is a multidisciplinary state institution of higher education that was established in 2000. It received its first accreditation in 2005, and underwent international expert evaluation with accreditation received in 2014 and 2022. The programme under review, the Bachelor of Social Sciences in Applied Communication, has not yet been reviewed by external evaluators, and started in 2017. KK is one of the largest higher education institutions in Lithuania, with a student population of about 4,600 students, 765 employees, and over 35,000 graduates. At KK, studies are implemented in 4 faculties (the Faculty of Business, the Faculty of Technologies, the Faculty of Medicine, and the Faculty of Arts and Education) in Kaunas and, there is also a regional subdivision in Tauragė. Students considering studies at KK have the choice of 51 study programmes in 34 fields of study that all lead to the awarding of a Professional Bachelor Degree.

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, which houses the Applied Communication degree programme, developed the programme due to clear external needs for communication professionals in Lithuania and beyond. KK responded to the results of various reports, analyses and surveys about future career development needs by creating this programme in Applied Communication. It prepares students with soft skills and digital literacies in order to anticipate career changes and technological challenges such as those presented by artificial intelligence.

Previous external evaluations

As noted above, KK underwent institutional accreditation in 2005, 2014 and 2022, but the programme currently under review has not previously been submitted for external evaluation since its inception in 2017. The SER notes that internal working groups performed self-assessment of the degree programme ahead of external review.

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*

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	Applied Communication
State code	6531JX021
Type of study (college/university)	Collegial
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)	Professional Bachelor in Social Sciences
Language of instruction	Lithuanian
Admission requirements	Secondary education
First registration date	2017-05-22

III. ASSESSMENT IN POINTS BY CYCLE AND EVALUATION AREAS

The first cycle of Applied Communication study field at KK 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	4
7.	Quality assurance and public information	3
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, KK cited several sources to provide ample evidence for the strong need for programmes in communication. One such reference comes from the Lithuanian Employment Service which “forecasts that the need for communication and information professionals will increase by 10 per cent between 2022 and 2027, significantly higher than the projected growth in the number of workers in all occupations (4 per cent)” (KK SER 2023, p. 4). In discussions with social partners and employers, it became apparent that KK’s programme in Applied Communication has a good reputation and successfully prepares students to become working professionals in the Kaunas region and larger Lithuania. KK’s learning outcomes for the Bachelor programme in Applied Communication are designed to serve the needs of Lithuanian society and labour market.

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

KK’s stated aims and learning outcomes were designed to be in line with their stated mission, which is fundamentally to implement practice-oriented higher education studies and expand applied scientific and art activities that are significant for the development of society. In the development of the Bachelor programme in Applied Communication, KK certainly provides strong evidence for aligning its programme with the mission. In addition, KK’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 KK’s mission, goals, and strategy.

ANALYSIS AND CONCLUSION (regarding 1.1.)

Overall, the Bachelor of Social Sciences in Applied Communication at KK addresses and serves the needs of current and potential students, especially those with professional goals of working within Kaunas 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 Applied Communication with general requirements for *first cycle study programmes (bachelor)*

Criteria	General legal requirements	Applied Communication
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
ECTS for studies specified by University or optional studies	No more than 120 ECTS	Does not exceed 120 ECTS
ECTS for internship	No less than 15 ECTS	36 ECTS
ECTS for final thesis (project)	No less than 9 ECTS (college level studies)	9 ECTS
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

KK's approach to aligning programme aims, learning outcomes, teaching/learning and how these are assessed in practice is multifaceted and represents many levels of assessment. In addition, KK notes that the study methods used to achieve the learning outcomes are "are activity-based and ensure the acquisition of knowledge and the development of cognitive abilities" (KK SER 2023, p. 7). 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. In addition, KK notes in the SER that student assessment represents a broad range of types and often depends on the learning outcomes and the module during which the assessment takes place.

1.2.3. Curriculum ensures consistent development of student competences

KK's involvement with social partners and employers in the development and delivery of the Applied Communication programme demonstrates its commitment to fostering student competencies. KK also ensures student research competences through a variety of practical conferences, training sessions, workshops and blended immersive programmes. During the internship, students at KK gain practical experience with professional work environments and are also able to develop their competencies in line with the learning outcomes.

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

Students have several opportunities to personalise their study programme at KK. This includes taking the whole or part of a given study module. Students may select the topic of both their final thesis and internships, often in communication with faculty and/or relevant social partners and employers. Students also consult directly with teaching faculty, and they have opportunities to express their opinions about the programme, the assessments, course content, delivery of teaching, and more in student evaluations of teaching and surveys.

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

Preparation for the final thesis includes the practical component of internship work done in an organisation and the resulting data are used to develop the final thesis. Students propose topics for the final thesis working together with faculty, stakeholders and social partners/employers. This process occurs approximately a year before the student's planned graduation. To ensure relevance to Lithuanian social and professional needs, the theses include practical applicability and seek solutions to issues relevant to the region and country.

ANALYSIS AND CONCLUSION (regarding 1.2.)

Overall, KK 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 KK. Clearly, the aims and learning outcomes of the Bachelor of Social Sciences in Applied Communication 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. There is consistently high praise for multiple categories, such as students with disabilities, preparedness of students to enter both internships and the professions, from alumni, social partners, and employers.
2. KK's reputation appears quite strong, and evidence for this is, among other points, based on the input that employers, upon seeing KAUKO on a CV or resume, immediately know that the applicant is strong, ready, has soft skills, and can basically start on day one.

RECOMMENDATIONS

For further improvement

1. Schedules could be announced longer in advance: in other words, students and alumni both reported that the lateness of receiving schedules just a week before the start of the module, especially for working students, causes difficulties in their own personal lives regarding scheduling, etc.
2. Students should not only participate in a conference or write a bachelor thesis and know methodology (they do that very well), but should also know the importance and usefulness of these skills in the labour market.

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

One of the aims in the KK Strategy until 2025 – to expand society development orientated applied science and art activities on both national and international levels. In order to implement it, the KK Applied Science (art) Activity Programme foresees research fields, teachers integrate into researcher groups, funding sources for applied science and art activities as well as assessment criteria for the activity results are foreseen.

Applied science activities in KK include ongoing research, publications, publishing activities, consultations, artistic creative activities. In 2021-2023, 226 scientific article was published in Communication and Information as well as Management Science Fields in reviewed scientific publications, registered international databases; 108 scientific reports were presented; 320 applied research were carried out, including 12 percent commissioned research. 216 commissioned consultations, courses and seminars were implemented. EUR 702950 funds were attracted during the implementation of scientific commissioned/consulting activities within the analysed period.

During the visit, the teachers of the Field noted that most of their articles are interdisciplinary. By the way the SER shows that the research of the Field would be published in high-ranking scientific journals (e.g., included in international databases, such as Scopus, Web of Science) or in scientific publications of larger volumes (scientific monograph, scientific study, scientific synthesis papers and etc.).

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

KK Study and Applied Science and Art Activity Policy emphasises practical applicability of the results of scientific research, interdisciplinarity, integration in studies, internationality.

Therefore the applied scientific activity and research carried out by the Field researcher groups and teachers, are closely related to the update of the content of the teacher lectures, introduction of new topics, variety of practical and independent work tasks. New achievements in science and technologies are also introduced in the integrated project tasks in AC SP (Applied Communication Study Programme) study modules. In 2018-2023 the Faculty had a Business Centre, that provides non-formal adult education and consultation services to the external organisations based on market demand, and it has also a significant impact on the update of the study content, development of general and subject competences of teachers. Also, for new projects and creative problem-solving ideas, the college develops cooperation with new additional Lithuanian and foreign social partners every year. Student final theses, prepared on the orders of companies, social partners, make 24 percent of the number of the prepared works.

Integration of the study content with the latest scientific research and technological innovations helps the College to successfully involve students in applied scientific research, deepen their research, entrepreneurship and internationality competences. As evidence of this fact, the SER account provides multiple examples of student involvement in scientific activities: the participation of students in interactive

workshops led by Marlen Wehner, a Positive Leadership and Business Coach from Germany, in remote practical training sessions of Vera Wamsteeker, the founder of the Dutch Marketing Agency "AnGoen" and other format initiatives, such as meetings with video blogger Linas Marcišauskas, lecturer Isabelle Laporte and etc. Students actively participate in research projects, business challenge activities, thanks to which they can get acquainted with the most advanced technologies, professional tools, research methodologies and develop their competences by performing experimental and innovative tasks.

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

SER account states that Applied Communication (AC) SP students successfully carry out applied research in Communication and Information as well as Management science fields, prepare articles and present their reports in international events, student conferences organised by their and other higher education institutions. During the analysed period, students of the above mentioned fields published 50 scientific articles, presented 49 scientific reports and 18 students performed commissioned final theses. The College organises annual conference "Business Issues from the Future Specialists' Point of View" and etc. Once a year the Faculty publishes a compilation of articles from student scientific practical conference "Business Issues from the Future Specialists' Point of View". However, after reviewing the content of the publication of this conference, it was noticed that in 2021-2023 period articles in English there is a minority.

ANALYSIS AND CONCLUSION (regarding 2.1.)

KK is actively developing scientific activities. Teachers are encouraged and motivated to continue their scientific activities by being paid bonuses to their salaries. Scientific activity is strictly planned for 5 year in each study programme. Though the payment for publication is paid from the College funds. Teachers also publish free (in science journals without APC) as well.

Although there is a sufficient amount of scientific articles published in the fields of Communication and Information as well as Management Science in reviewed scientific publications (including scientific journals, that have a citation rate IF CA JCR and (or) SNIP SCOPUS, science monograph parts and other science articles published in reviewed publications in internationally recognized science and other publishing houses), however, in Applied Communication Field the College has to promote more scientific research from their full-time teachers. It is a lack of scientific articles of the Field teachers published in English or another foreign language, encompass broader (European) scope research, not only local ones. All this would help the College raise the level of the quality of scientific publications, establish a broader scientific networking in Lithuania and abroad, deepen knowledge and understanding of the Field teachers of their subject areas, and improve the level of foreign language knowledge. This experience of teachers has a direct and irreplaceable value for students. Such publications would contribute to the ambition expressed during the College visit - in 2028 to become a University of Applied Sciences.

When evaluating students' involvement in applied scientific activities, these are sufficient and purposeful. The College has created suitable conditions for the systematic cooperation of students and teachers in scientific research activities (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, plagiarism system, participation in student scientific-practical conferences and etc.). These activities help students develop critical, analytical thinking, creative leadership and other soft skills. However in order to develop research and language competences of students it is

needed to encourage students to prepare publications in a foreign language, to promote participation with scientific research in other Lithuanian and foreign student conferences.

The College has successful practical and industry collaboration. Due to this collaboration by actively involving students in scientific research projects and activities, integrating innovative technologies and the results of the latest scientific research into the study content and taking into account international perspectives, ensures that students receive a comprehensive and modern education that prepares them for future challenges in the professional area.

The clear and consistent publication of both students' and teachers' scientific activities on the College's website is commendable.

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 Research and Teaching: The Applied Communication study programme at KK effectively incorporates research outcomes, knowledge, and the latest advances in science, art, and technology to provide students with current information, methodologies, and tools, helping them prepare for professional success.
2. Practical Application and Industry Collaboration: College partnerships with industry leaders, providing students with real-world experiences and opportunities to work on projects with practical applications. This hands-on approach helps students gain valuable insights into the industry and develop essential skills for their future careers.

RECOMMENDATIONS

To address shortcomings

1. Research and language competencies of students should be developed by encouraging students to prepare publications in a foreign language and to promote participation with scientific research in other Lithuanian and foreign student scientific-practical conferences.

For further improvement

1. The number of scientific publications of the Field in high-ranking scientific journals (e.g., Scopus, Web of Science) or in scientific publications of larger volumes (e.g., scientific monograph, scientific study and etc.) should be increased.
2. The awareness and internationalisation of scientific research of the Field should be increased by publishing more scientific publications in English or another foreign language, and encompassing broader (European) scope research, not only local ones.

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 admission to Kaunas College adheres to the legal acts approved by the Minister of Education, Science and Sport of the Republic of Lithuania, and to the *Rules of Students' Admission to KK*, approved by the Academic Council. The admission is carried out nationally, together with the rest of Lithuanian HEIs and administered by the Association of Lithuanian Higher Schools for General Admission (LAMA BPO).

The students are admitted to the field study programme based on their competitive score which consists of: 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 Technologies, or Geography (0,2 of the competitive score); the score of the maturity exam or the annual grade of any other subject that does not coincide with the first, second, and fourth subject (0,2 of the competitive score); the score of the maturity exam or the annual grade of Foreign Language (0,2 of the competitive score). The minimal competitive score is 4.3.

Additional points can be given for a mark higher than 9 for the state school-leaving paper, completed basic military training, awards at national and international competitions, volunteering, or previous work experience in the field.

The information about the requirements and the admission process is available on KK website, LAMA BPO website, presented at study fairs, during visits to schools and other events.

In 2020 there were 85 applicants with the field study programme as a first priority, in 2021 – 55, in 2022 – 71, and in 2023 – 66. For the remaining priorities, there were 406 applicants in 2020, 304 applicants in 2021, 329 in 2022, and 312 in 2023. In terms of the admitted students, there were 13 agreements signed for state funded (SF) places and 35 for non-state funded (NSF) places in 2020, 16 for SF and 37 for NSF in 2021, 6 SF and 46 NSF in 2022, and 22 SF and 32 NSF in 2023. The SER notes the fluctuating numbers of applications (with a bigger decrease visible in 2021, as compared to 2020 and 2022), but the numbers of signed agreements remain similar.

In terms of the competitive scores of the admitted students, the highest score has been decreasing over the evaluation period from 2020 to 2022, with a slight increase in 2023 and in 2022 for NSF places: **9,46** in 2020, **7,12** in 2021, **5,89** in 2022, and **7,73** in 2023 for SF places, and **8,99** in 2020, **7,16** in 2021, **7,51** in 2022, and **6,97** in 2023 for NSF places.

The lowest competitive score has been fluctuating more: **5,15** in 2020, **4,85** in 2021, **4,96** in 2022, and **5,02** in 2023 for SF places, and **4,3** in 2020, **4,35** in 2021, **4,48** in 2022 and **4,46** in 2023 for NSF places. A positive trend can be seen in the slight increase over the years for the lowest competitive score in NSF until 2023. Based on these, the average score has been decreasing over the years as well, with a slight increase later: **6,52** in 2020, **5,70** in 2021, **5,30** in 2022 and **6,00** in 2023 for SF places, and **5,67** in 2020, **5,18** in 2021, **5,55** in 2022, and **5,51** in 2023 for NSF places.

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

Kauno kolegija has the right to carry out academic recognition of education and qualifications related to higher education obtained abroad. The SER states that during the evaluated period, 34 individuals applied for recognition of foreign qualifications in 2021, 79 applied in 2022, and 110 in 2023 (by 1st of September).

Partial studies are credited in accordance with the *Procedure for Crediting Learning Achievements*, where studies based on an agreement (such as for international mobility) or achievements from previous studies can be credited. The decision is based on whether the achievements align with the outcomes of the study programme, and no more than 75% of the study programme can be credited. It is also noted that the final thesis cannot be credited.

During the evaluated period, 5 students in the field study programme applied to have their learning achievements in partial studies credited, and they were positively assessed.

Kauno kolegija can additionally assess and recognise the skills and knowledge gained through non-formal learning. The recognition of such qualifications follows the *Description of the procedure for assessing and recognising competencies acquired in non-formal education and self-study as learning outcomes in KK*, and includes competencies gained through work, volunteering, in-service training, non-formal education or self-study. In this case as well, no more than 75% of the study programme can be credited. During the evaluated period, no applications for crediting non-formal learning were received.

ANALYSIS AND CONCLUSION (regarding 3.1.)

The admission procedures and requirements are adequate for the study field. Although there are fluctuations in the number of applications to the study programme, the numbers of signed agreements differ slightly less, delivering similar results for each year.

A more concerning issue is the decreasing competitive score of the admitted students; a similar trend is noticed nationally with regards to the exam results of prospective students, especially when it comes to mathematics. Lower exam results influence the competitive score, thus a downward trend is expected. Related to that, however, there is a gap between highest and lowest scores. Some students with lower competitive scores might have been just unlucky in their exams, but some attention in this area could be of benefit.

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

Kauno kolegija provides academic mobility opportunities for students, organised under the programmes of Erasmus+ and Nordplus, as well as bilateral agreements. Information about the mobility opportunities is available on the official website of KK and on social media platforms. Additionally, meetings are organised where students can learn about the Erasmus+ experience from returning students. Presentations to students about the mobility opportunities are also given by the International Coordinator of the Faculty.

During the evaluated period, there were 12 students in the field study programme who participated in Erasmus+ exchange for partial studies (2 in 2021, 2 in 2022, and 8 in 2023). In terms of the incoming students, there were only 2.

The SER notes the additional effort put in to encourage students to participate in academic mobility more, but since many of the students are employed, the numbers remain low. For this reason, short term mobility, Blended Intensive Programmes are becoming popular. This opinion has been expressed in the site visit as well, as the students indicated not wanting to lose their work placement.

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

The college provides various types of support for students. Academic support covers academic consultations related to their studies and study processes, international mobility, library services, and other services that students can use to develop their academic skills.

Financial support covers scholarships available to students. Incentive scholarships are awarded to students based on their academic achievements. One-off grants can be awarded for successful participation in international projects, research conferences, results in applied research and other activities. Social grants and financial assistance to the disabled offered by the State Study Fund are also available to students. Additional financial and social support includes dormitories available to students, and a 40% discount on dormitory fees available to orphaned students.

According to SER, there were 27 incentive scholarships, 63 one-off grants, 8 social grants and 21 State funded loans given to students in 2021, 34 incentive scholarships, 58 one-off grants, 18 social grants and 18 state funded loans given in 2022, and 32 incentive scholarships, 26 one-off grants, 7 social grants, and 21 state funded loans given in 2023 (until December 13). The site visit revealed that the students are aware of the scholarships available to them, but are not sure about the possible amounts or how difficult or easy it might be to get a scholarship.

The college students also have psychological consultations available to them, with three professionals working at the institution. The consultations can be provided in Lithuanian, English, or Russian. The support can also be provided by phone, with a phone number indicated on the college website, or by email. Although the students in the site visit noted that there is a waiting list for psychological consultations, they were aware of their availability.

Other types of personal support to students include career planning services, where students can get individual consultations on career management, CV writing, public speaking, practice job interviews, and gain other skills to navigate the job market successfully. The Wellness and Sports Centre at the college is also available to the students of Applied Communication as well, and they can engage in sports and cultural activities.

3.2.3. Higher education information and student counselling are sufficient

The students admitted to the field study programme are first introduced to the academic environment during the introductory week. The organisational structure of the college, study procedures, schedule, examination sessions, internal rules, scholarships, appeal procedures, library services, study programme and its plan, elective subjects, Moodle and other relevant information is presented to the students during the first days of their first year of study. Additionally, as indicated in the SER, a course on Moodle for first year students is available, covering study calendar, academic writing guidelines, and other relevant information. The first-year students also have tutors who are usually a lecturer and a senior student of the programme.

At the beginning of each module, the academic staff introduces the module, its learning outcomes, study and assessment methods and criteria. Throughout the module, the students are consulted about preparing interim and final projects, writing papers and other study related activities. According to the SER, the consultations are provided at specific times noted in the timetable. The consultations can take place on Moodle and by email as well. The students in the site visit confirm the practices and reflect on getting enough feedback, consultations about their studies, and know who to address if any change is necessary.

The sufficiency of such consultations and study information is evaluated in the meetings between academic groups, student representatives and administration. Regular meetings are organised for administration and first-year students after their first semester

ANALYSIS AND CONCLUSION (regarding 3.2.)

The time dedicated by the teachers to consult students and constantly be available is impressive. Although a waiting list for psychological consultations has been mentioned, it does not appear to pose any challenges for now. Personal support available for students, ranging from career consultations to sports activities is commendable as well. While students are not eager to participate in international mobility, the rising popularity of Blended Intensive Programmes seems to offer a solution for a certain level of internationalisation without causing inconvenience to students.

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. KK offers structured support to students, especially academic and personal.
2. There are great efforts at implementing Blended Intensive Programmes.

RECOMMENDATIONS

For further improvement

1. Attention should be paid to making sure the academic preparedness of enrolling students is on a similar level.

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

The balanced structure of the Applied Communication study programme at KSC forms the competences typical of the first cycle of studies: multidisciplinary, integrated knowledge of professional activities, aimed at the development of professional competences in conducting applied research, identifying problems in the field of the activity under study and making complex decisions, working in a team and individually, developing creativity, independence, responsibility. The intended learning outcomes meet the requirements of the labour market for the preparation of professionals, are developed in a coherent and progressive manner, from cognitive abilities to practical skills and competences, and constitute a set of competences and abilities necessary for the award of a professional bachelor's degree in communication studies.

The methods of assessing student achievement shall be applied in accordance with the principles of objectivity, reliability and clarity and shall be selected in accordance with the intended outcomes of the study module and its components, and shall be determined by the integrity of the study module concept.

A good example is that software needs are discussed in collaboration with stakeholders. A study area committee consisting of alumni, students and staff who discuss together what software is relevant and needed in the field now. In addition, surveys are sent to interns. This ensures feedback and learns what skills students lack and how they feel about the labour market. Students are satisfied with their studies. They appreciate and are happy with the acquired knowledge and practice. Final projects and internships are a good opportunity to learn from experts. The students were happy with the teachers in practice. Also international opportunities. Alumni and social partners singled out the students of Kaunas College as responsible and hardworking. They were also happy that they develop creative thinking at the College, learn and constantly improve public speaking, are excellent at presenting ideas, and have critical thinking.

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

KK organises its activities in accordance with institutional values, the Law on Equal Opportunities, the Law on Equal Opportunities for Women and Men, and creates an environment that promotes integrity, respect for human dignity and rights, tolerance, fairness and professional responsibility.

Creating a democratic, safe, respectful and rewarding professional and academic environment. As part of the implementation of the KK 2025 Strategy, an Equal Opportunities and Diversity Programme⁷⁵ has been developed and implemented. The programme includes measures to develop a framework for students' individual learning needs and to implement teaching/learning activities that respond to the different needs of students.

Support is provided for socially vulnerable groups and students with special needs. In accordance with the

provisions of the KK Study Procedures , a student with a child under 3 years of age, a student on maternity leave, a student with a disability or a chronic illness is provided with a free study schedule.

Kaunas College's support for students with disabilities and special needs is exemplary. This can be recommended to other universities. Kaunas College continuously increases the accessibility of its resources (both digital and physical). For example, it has recently purchased equipment to assist student(s) with visual impairments and is listening to the needs of its students (including those with disabilities). This has been confirmed by the students.

ANALYSIS AND CONCLUSION (regarding 4.1.)

In summary, the intended learning outcomes meet the labour market requirements for the training of professionals, are consistently and progressively developed from cognitive skills to practical skills and competences, and constitute the set of competences and skills necessary for the award of the Professional Bachelor's Degree in Communication Studies.

The methods of assessing student achievement shall be applied in accordance with the principles of objectivity, reliability and clarity, shall be chosen in the light of the expected outcomes of the module and its components, and shall be guided by the integrity of the concept of the module of study.

A welcome example is that software needs are discussed in cooperation with stakeholders. Feedback is provided at all times to find out what skills students lack and how they feel about the labour market.

After the interviews, it became very clear that the students are satisfied with their studies. They value and enjoy the knowledge and practice they have gained.

Practical final projects and internships are good opportunities to learn from experts. The social partners confirmed that the College develops creative thinking, studies and continuously improves public speaking, excellent presentation of ideas and critical thinking.

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

The KK organises its activities in accordance with institutional values, the Law on Equal Opportunities, the Law on Equal Opportunities for Women and Men, and creates an environment that promotes integrity, respect for human dignity and rights, tolerance, fairness and professional responsibility.

Creating a democratic, safe, respectful and rewarding professional and academic environment. Support is provided for socially vulnerable groups and students with special needs.

Kaunas College's support for students with disabilities and special needs is exemplary.

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

The College has developed and applies a system of student achievement assessment, which is regulated by the KK Study Procedure and the Study Achievement Assessment Procedure. In assessing study outcomes, lecturers are guided by the principles of clarity, objectivity, impartiality, openness of the assessment procedure and mutual respect and goodwill. A variety of methods of assessing student achievement are used to obtain feedback: oral assessment methods (survey method, individual oral questioning, presentation method), written assessment, graphical and visual assessment methods (knowledge and skills testing, mind and concept mapping, etc.), cumulative and integrated assessment methods (case studies, projects, etc.).

During the first lecture, the module coordinator acquaints students with its aims, anticipated learning outcomes, content; cumulative assessment system, assessment criteria, etc. Only the knowledge, abilities, and skills defined in the learning outcomes specified in the module programme are assessed. Module learning outcomes are assessed by the academic staff teaching the module. The evaluation of learning achievements is based on cumulative assessment, so learning achievements are assessed by interim assessments.

To enhance students' motivation, communication between the academic staff and students is maintained: public chats and discussion forums are held on the VLE *Moodle*, and students are encouraged to reflect on module assignments, the methods applied and teaching by completing feedback forms. When a student submits an assignment, report or project on VLE *Moodle* or *Turnitin*, the academic staff assess it and provide feedback comments that are accessible to the student. This allows the lecturer to give arguments and the student to know what mistakes led to a specific evaluation. The comments and recommendations indicate how the assignment or paper could be improved.

The provision of feedback to the student on his/her study achievements and progress monitoring is ensured by the procedure for organising studies and assessing students' achievements. The VLE *Moodle*, SMS and email are used for this purpose, and the academic staff provide contact consultations.

Partnerships are really important and collaboration between business and science is a really useful thing. Kaunas College also knows the needs of the market. Feedback from social partners and employers is excellent. Cooperation is systematic. Cooperation includes job fairs, guest lectures. Collaboration is a plus. As for the study programme, there are lectures, students can see how companies work. Gets a lot of inquiries about interns.

4.2.2. Graduate employability and career are monitored

The note in SER that monitoring the employment and careers of KK graduates involves collecting objective and subjective data on the employment of KK graduates. Half a year after graduation, the Student Affairs and Career Unit, in cooperation with the Departments, conducts a graduates' survey to determine graduates' employability rates.

Graduates are involved in the activities of the SPAC and are invited to share their knowledge and experience. The members of the *Association "Kaunas College Alumni Club"* share professional experience, career and employment opportunities, development of professional activities and provide professional guidance. Meetings with practitioners incentivise students to strive to achieve learning outcomes and successfully enter the labour market after graduation.

Feedback from alumni is very good. Alumni confirmed that Kaunas College employees always ask for feedback about their careers. There is an Alumni Facebook group and an alumni club. Once a year, before Christmas, there is a special gathering of the alumni community. Which is great networking. Alumni networking works great in a Facebook group. However, there is no information about alumni communication on LinkedIn. According to graduates, Facebook is more interactive and attractive.

There is a connection between the students and the teachers, the teachers really care about the students, how they feel and whether they are able to cope with the tasks. For example, a student came to defend his bachelor thesis after a 2-year break, but professors and other students were worried about him. Got support from everyone. The academic community remembers the students and continues to support them.

Students are working, so it is important for them to create work schedules. Late, changing schedules are a huge challenge for students. However, the College is very flexible with regard to unannounced, late submission of schedules, for example, no lectures on Fridays. They also have an alumni representative who organises alumni activities.

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

KK follows the principles of transparency of the study and research processes, academic integrity, equality, non-discrimination, justice, protection of intellectual property and other universally recognised principles. Each member of the KK community undertakes to comply with the provisions of the *KK Code of Academic Ethics* and not tolerate its violations.

KK has a plagiarism detection system, which includes documentation regarding the application of plagiarism detection tools and procedures; tools for plagiarism prevention in the study process. Study papers are checked by the text-matching tool Turnitin in the *Moodle* environment. All KK students' Final theses are obligingly checked with this tool. The Theses can be defended publicly only if no text overlaps can be interpreted as plagiarism. The staff KK Library and Scientific Communication Centre annually organise practical seminars for students "*I found, I write, I cite*" on using information sources in studies and research papers, the rules and possibilities of citing sources, copyright, academic ethics, and plagiarism prevention.

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

The *Procedure for assessing learning achievements at KK* establishes how to handle appeals. Within 3 working days from the announcement of the final result (the announcement date is not included in this term), students/unclassified students can appeal to the Dean of the Faculty regarding non-compliance of the evaluation of learning achievements with the criteria pre-specified in the course description. The appeal is written in a free form, stating the arguments and reasons for disagreeing with the final evaluation of the course studies. The received appeal is examined by a Board of Appeal formed by the Dean of the Faculty, which, within 15 working days after receiving it, makes one of the following decisions: to reject the appeal; satisfy the appeal and verify another final evaluation; satisfy the appeal and allow retaking/taking the examination or another final assessment. The student/unclassified student is informed of the decision of the Board of Appeal. No appeals were received.

ANALYSIS AND CONCLUSION (regarding 4.2.)

It is important to note when KK systematically monitors learning progress and provides feedback to students. In assessing the results of studies, lecturers are guided by the principles of clarity, objectivity, impartiality, openness of the assessment procedure, mutual respect and goodwill. A variety of methods of assessing student achievement is used to obtain feedback.

The assessment of learning achievements at KK is based on cumulative assessment and therefore learning achievements are assessed through interim assessments.

Communication between academic staff and students is maintained in order to increase student motivation. The provision of feedback to the student on his/her academic performance and the monitoring of his/her progress shall be ensured by the arrangements for the organisation of studies and the assessment of student performance.

Kaunas College is also aware of market needs. Feedback from social partners and employers is excellent. Cooperation is systematic.

Feedback from graduates is very good. There is an alumni Facebook group and an alumni club. Once a year, before Christmas, a special alumni community meeting is organised.

Policies to ensure academic integrity, tolerance and non-discrimination are in place.

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 great thing is that KK administration and lecturers always provide individual feedback and support to students. Students always feel supported. Collaboration with lecturers and detailed feedback from lecturers help students to understand their strengths and to improve those that need improvement.
2. There is a cumulative assessment system which helps students to monitor their own achievements.
3. KK systematically monitors graduates' employability and career development. It organises an alumni meeting once a year. This shows KK's active approach to ensuring the relevance and effectiveness of educational programmes.

4. By conducting surveys and organising post-graduation meetings with alumni, KK demonstrates its commitment to continuously evaluate and improve its study programmes to meet the changing needs of the labour market.
5. The multifaceted approach to promoting academic integrity is also commendable. The use of plagiarism detection technology and the cooperation with relevant services underline Kaunas College's commitment to ethical standards.
6. By fostering a culture of integrity, responsibility and respect, KK ensures the integrity of its academic programmes and the credibility of its graduates.
7. Establishing clear procedures for appeals and complaints reflects Kaunas College's commitment to transparency and accountability. By informing students of their rights and providing guidance on the appeals process, Kaunas College ensures that students' concerns are dealt with efficiently and fairly, thereby contributing to a positive learning environment.
8. The AC organises its activities in accordance with institutional values, the Law on Equal Opportunities, the Law on Equal Opportunities for Women and Men, and creates an environment that promotes integrity, respect for human dignity and rights, tolerance, fairness and professional responsibility.
9. Kaunas College's support for students with disabilities and special needs is exemplary. Kaunas College continuously increases the accessibility of its resources (both digital and physical).

RECOMMENDATIONS

To address shortcomings

1. Recommendation for correction: Students would like to receive the timetables well in advance and would also like them to remain unchanged. Students are working, so it is important for them to have work schedules.

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

During the visit, the College administration and SP preparators expressed an ambitious vision – to become a university in 2028. The number, qualification and competencies of teachers, who work in Applied Communication Study Programme, ensure the achievement of aims and learning outcomes of the study field. This also complies with the qualification requirements foreseen under the Republic of Lithuania Law on Science and Studies, Order of the Minister of Education and Science of the Republic of Lithuania “On the Description of the General Requirements for Study Implementation”, and in the requirements of KK for teaching positions during a term. 20.67 percent of teachers in the Study Programme in 2021-2024 are scientists, including 7.4 percent Associate Professors. 3.7 percent of lecturers study in doctoral studies. 85.2 percent of teachers have at least 3 year experience of practical work in the area of the taught study module. Currently the AC SP (Applied Communication Study Programme) has 27 teachers, including 17 (63 percent) work more than half-time. To achieve the learning outcomes foreseen under the Programme, an appropriate and adequate ratio of teachers to students is ensured. Teachers are provided with conditions to raise their professional qualification through participation in seminars, courses, conferences, internships.

A lot of attention is given to newly recruited academic staff. Kaunas kolegija Higher Education Institution organises introductory trainings (during the first two months of work), experienced teachers are appointed for subject-specific and pedagogical consultations on the issues of study process organisation and etc., the necessary consultations are also provided by the Head of the Department and Administration of the Faculty of Business. During the visit, the teachers unanimously praised the flexible and efficient system for recruiting new colleagues, and the teachers also asserted that they are given the opportunity to improve their didactic and scientific competences and study in doctoral studies according to their personal needs or the recommendations of the Head of the Department as well as the suggestions made by the KK.

Evaluating teachers’ scientific competencies, the data in the Self-evaluation Report show that only 45 percent are given to these competences, and 76 percent to subject and pedagogical competencies. Scientific research and publications are mostly prepared only by the teachers who have a doctor or associate professor degrees. During the visit, the teachers confirmed the interdisciplinarity of their scientific research and publications, however, when asked to present the best examples in the area of scientific research of the Communication Field, the teachers couldn’t name.

ANALYSIS AND CONCLUSION (regarding 5.1.)

The academic staff that implements the Applied Communication Study Programme, meets the requirements of the legal acts, the qualification and numbers of the teachers are suitable for achieving the learning outcomes foreseen in the AC SP. Though the SP has 30 percent of teachers with a doctorate and only 6 permanent teachers – associate professors, including one visiting associate professor, aiming at a University

status, the College needs the number of permanent associate professors or professors in the Communication Field.

The teaching staff includes full-time and part-time teachers. This mixed recruitment of teachers guarantees extensive up-to-date and relevant business experience, however, from the experts' point of view, the College should ensure the number of full-time teachers, because otherwise, there is a risk of losing the consistent culture of the Department and the coherence of the teaching programme.

In 2021-2023, the scientific research carried out by the teachers of Applied Communication SP and articles in scientific publications, international databases are oriented towards the following fields of applied research: Communication and Information (S008), Management (S003), Economics (S004), Political Sciences (S002), Philology (H004). This shows that teachers of the Study Programme carry out interdisciplinary research and publish research of similar nature, however the number of scientific research in the Communication Field is small.

Development of competences ensures the quality of professional growth of teachers and the links with the taught module and the field of scientific interests. Although the college has created suitable conditions for raising the competence of teachers, it was noticed that more attention could be paid to the development of scientific competences.

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

Mobility of teachers of Kaunas kolegija Higher Education Institution is organised in accordance with the provisions of the description of the procedure for organising the mobility of KK staff under international exchange programmes. Participation in mobility activities is assessed during teacher certification.

Mobility takes place with the aim of teachers or other employees to at other foreign higher education institutions or companies and participate in trainings or internships, establish or develop scientific or project networking, disseminate research results, improve communication skills, improve foreign language skills and increase KK internationality. In 2021-2023 19 teachers of Applied Communication SP participated in academic mobility programmes. During the period under evaluation, the College ensured conditions not only for outgoing, but also for incoming of the teachers of the Field. In 2021-2023, 33 foreign lecturers came in accordance with international exchange programme. They gave lectures to students and shared their experience. The mobility of foreign teachers in accordance with international exchange programmes is implemented in the KK in accordance with the Description of the Procedure of Admission of Foreign Teachers and other Members of Staff, Coming to the KK.

During the visit, the greatest aspiration of the KK administration, AC SP preparators and teachers was named – to improve the international competitiveness of the College when starting and developing a long-term structural and strategic as well as sustainable cooperation between higher education institutions in the alliances of European universities. This would increase possibilities not only to teach, to exchange good

practice, but also to carry out and develop the general scientific and project activities, and improve the awareness of the College abroad.

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

KK provides teachers with appropriate conditions for developing competences. This development is implemented in accordance with the set requirements of legal acts for higher education, taking into account the need of the lecturers themselves, as well as in accordance with the data of self-evaluation reports on the activity of teachers, heads of departments, academic divisions, etc. The KK Human Resource Service organises internal training workshops in accordance with the annually approved and, if necessary, supplemented plan of events for KK staff competences. Each development event is publicized via email, intranet and information screens. The KK teachers are also provided with opportunities to raise their competences by going to secondments and internships both in Lithuania and abroad. The activities of developing teacher competences are funded by KK funds. Additional EUR 38900 were allocated for the development of teacher competences during the period under evaluation.

ANALYSIS AND CONCLUSION (regarding 5.2.)

The teachers of AC SP in Kaunas Higher Education Institution take part in various mobility programmes. This activity enables them to start and develop cooperation with higher education institutions, expand their didactic and professional knowledge, improve skills of intercultural cooperation, and share good practice. The Covid-19 pandemic restricted academic mobility possibilities of the College teachers; however, since 2023 there has been growth in the mobility of both incoming and outgoing teachers in accordance with international exchange programmes. The numbers of incoming teachers are significantly higher than that of outgoing ones, which shows that the KK should strengthen the possibilities of academic mobility and variety of activities for the outgoing teachers of AC SP.

The College implements systematic and purposeful development of teacher competences. Due to the increase in the influence of information technologies during the Covid-19 pandemic and the occurrence of artificial intelligence in recent years, the College pays a lot of attention to the development of digital competences. Teachers successfully integrate the acquired knowledge and skills in the content of the taught course units, when formulating practical and independent work tasks for students, preparing or improving the descriptions of course units, etc.

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 academic staff are sufficient to achieve the anticipated learning outcomes and ensure the quality of the SPAC.
2. The integrity of academic staff with practical experience and PhDs ensures a balance between learning, practice and science, incorporating the latest science and practical experience into the study process.
3. The academic staff are provided with opportunities for academic mobility and systematic improvement of their competence.

RECOMMENDATIONS

For further improvement

1. The opportunities of teachers (not only those studying for a doctorate or those with doctor's degrees) to improve their scientific competences should be increased (now, only 45 percent are given to these competences, and 76 percent to subject and pedagogical competencies in the college).
2. Considering that the College in 2028 aims to become a University of Applied Sciences in terms of academic mobility the numbers of outgoing and incoming teachers could be higher.
3. In order to become a University of Applied Sciences Faculty and College should try to develop a long-term structural and strategic as well as sustainable cooperation between higher education institutions in the alliances of European universities for improving the international awareness and competitiveness of the College.

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 programme utilises 22 lecture rooms that are all equipped with projectors, recently updated computer equipment and cameras for hybrid teaching. For the majority of students who depend on laptop use, there is an unspecified amount of laptops available for students to borrow, otherwise they are expected to share personal laptops for group work. The campus further offers impressive recreational areas, and is overall very luxuriously equipped.

Software on offer is equally abundant, including the Google and Office suites and other essentials, as well as quantitative and qualitative analysis software for contemporary software-assisted research methodologies; and other software that is common in the industry including SurveyMonkey and Adobe software. Currently, staff and students depend on free versions of AI software. The virtual learning environment Moodle is used for the organisation of teaching and to offer self-study material.

The college displays extraordinary attention for the accessibility needs of students with physical disabilities (lifts, toilets, parking) and caters to needs for those with reduced sight and hearing. All materials are available online, and students can participate in classes in a blended online/offline setting as well as fully online. Exams and tests are the exception: they are currently all mandatorily on-site to avoid plagiarism.

Psychological counselling for students and available resources are supported by physical spaces focusing on the mental health of students and staff. A recently established meditation and prayer room available at the faculty is an example of that.

The library has 254 working places of which 37 computerised, and offers access to all the necessary and common databases for journals and e-books. The library has around 100,000 printed documents of 32,000 titles in its collection. Staff and students have access to 274,000 e-books and about 24,000 scientific journals, from 12 international subscribed databases, including EBSCO Publishing, Taylor & Francis, Springer Journals, and others. Impressively, the library software presents users with a map of where the requested resources can be found.

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

Up-to-date needs with regard to literature and methodological resources are assessed by surveying students and staff, discussed at department meetings, and implemented yearly. The college boasts a high library renewal rate.

One of the aims of the College is to further develop the programme's use of AI software, but the priority is on how to use it ethically. As stated above, such software is currently not yet supported by paid licences, relying on limited but free use instead.

ANALYSIS AND CONCLUSION (regarding 6.1.)

It is clear that the College listens to the needs of their students (including those with disabilities), and students indeed confirm this. An example is recently bought equipment to support student(s) with visual impairments. At the same time, a common complaint was that there were not enough cameras available for students to use, as well as a desire to start using photography-related resources and applied skills earlier in the programme.

Additionally, while much of the programme is accessible to students at a distance, exams and tests are currently all on-site to avoid plagiarism. This may provide a fundamental impediment for students with reduced mobility, caretaking responsibilities or other related challenges.

While the open-source virtual learning environment Moodle presents some potential problems (expensive expansions, troublesome updating processes, security issues, lack of developer documentation), the College’s IT department has permanently employed people familiar with Moodle and ready in case of crises, changes, or security issues. Software needs are assessed by a Study Field Committee which consists of alumni, students and employees, who together discuss which software is relevant and necessary in the field now. Additionally, surveys are sent out to alumni and social partners, but neither group indicated no knowledge of such surveys or other email inquiries, which may suggest a lack of reach or a need to more frequently update contact information.

With regard to the desire to further develop the programme’s use of (Generative) Artificial Intelligence software, current use is limited to free versions of Midjourney, DALL-E, ChatGPT, and similar software. This has forced some staff members to pay for their software use individually. Elsewhere, systems are in place to check plagiarism, and they will require updating to identify AI-assisted plagiarism. To this end, the library provides information about how to use such tools and its alternatives, such as how to find correct information in databases. Notably, the head of the library is part of the national group creating recommendations on how to use AI ethically; and the topic is discussed in department meetings.

Financial support for staff includes bonuses for publication with foreign partners as an incentive to publish and collaborate internationally. The publication culture leans toward publishing journals with article processing charges [APC], which is institutionally supported, leading to 10-15 publications per year. In combination with incentives for (frequent) publication, the current preference for such journals might not be the best choice, as this often means trading in quality (of peer review, and journal status by indexation and metrics) for quick publication.

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				4	

COMMENDATIONS

1. Consistently high praise for multiple categories, such as students with disabilities, receptiveness to student needs, and preparedness of students to enter both internships and the professions.

2. Facilities (library, sports, relaxation, computing, video conferencing, etc.) are quite impressive and surely add to the educational and professional atmosphere.

RECOMMENDATIONS

For further improvement

1. There is a repeatedly reported desire to develop the curriculum toward ethical AI use, but there should be greater clarity about this and how it is communicated within the HEI.
2. In light of AI-related ambitions, moving from free versions toward licensed use may encourage (ethical) use.
3. Exams and tests are currently all on-site to avoid plagiarism, which may disproportionately affect students who are otherwise accommodated for distance learning.
4. KK is recommend to be more selective about which publications (in which journal indices and with which metrics) are deserving of financial incentives to publication.

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

Quality of education is regularly assessed on three levels (institutional, Faculty and Department) by management and employees, and is based on European and national standards. They assess the standards for the introduction of study programmes, the assessment and improvement of on-going study programmes, course certification, credits awarded for student work, the organisation of internships, and so on.

The emphases of this self-assessment are on (1) enrolment, graduation and employment; (2) aims and learning outcomes, and the accuracy of study module descriptions with regard to these learning outcomes; and (3) the performance of the study programme in the context of its study field (demand for graduates, dropout rates, volume of research productivity, international mobility of staff and students).

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

The assessment of the programme in Applied Communication is overseen by the Study Field Committee, which meets at least twice a year and consists of alumni and students alongside employees. There is a strong emphasis on cooperation and networking, with regular meetings and discussions held (with academics, external stakeholders and employers) to share information and best practices.

Feedback from students is assessed through surveys asking them to report on the quality of individual modules and their self-reported readiness for the professional field.

Alumni are surveyed about their employability and readiness for their careers. Alumni indicated that they were unfamiliar with such surveys being conducted at all, which may be the (easily corrected) root of the problem. More effort should be given to ensure that as many alumni take the surveys as possible given the general lack of awareness among alumni of the surveys. The results of these surveys are used to adapt the study programmes to the needs of the labour market.

Societal and industrial stakeholders who participate in the final thesis Assessment Committees are surveyed to assess the relevance and appropriateness of thesis topics to the state of the art.

The overall feedback from these various assessments is presented to stakeholders in an annual report, which should lead to the necessary improvements of the study programme's structure, curriculum, content and (practical) assignments.

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

The data gathered as described above (dropout rates, employability, staff and student mobility, etc.) is collected and compared with similar study programmes. Data on staff is stored in the Academic Staff Activity Planning System, and the data on students in the Study Management System. Data on study quality is

presented monthly to the Department and the Dean's Office; and bi-yearly to the Study Field of Communication. Resulting actions are decided on yearly. Only the data on the Study Field are available on the college website, including descriptions of the courses available in the curriculum, admission metrics, student surveys, and career opportunities.

7.1.4. Student feedback is collected and analysed

Students are surveyed in two main ways. Each lecturer of the study module evaluates the results of students' surveys conducted on their modules, to reflect on, and to be discussed with the Head of the Department, to make decisions on the improvement of the module together if necessary. Secondly, student cohorts are surveyed yearly (first-year students on their adaptation and expectations; second-year students on their on-going satisfaction; and final-year students on the overall quality retrospectively).

Students reported high average satisfaction (4 out of 5) and high quality of modules' content and teaching quality, and emphasised clear presentation of information and assignments.

Survey results are published in the college's document catalogue and website; and are discussed in several meetings (at the Directorate, Dean and Department levels), with the intent of identifying areas of improvement. Resulting changes are announced in Lithuanian and English. Any resulting changes over the past two years as well as future plans are announced on the college website under a "you said, we did"-section.

ANALYSIS AND CONCLUSION (regarding 7.1.)

The emphasis of assessing staff performance is on teaching and grading, rather than their continuing engagement with their (professional or academic) field. When research productivity is assessed as part of the *procedure for self-assessing and planning KK performance* it is in terms of volume; rather than other metrics (contribution to the field, citations, quality and type of publications, target journal).

A recurring concern is that students are reluctant to talk about problems that arise. Similarly, while there is some effort to collect data from alumni (through an alumni club and special events for alumni), both student and alumni groups show insufficient involvement in surveys. One suggestion is to consider conducting student surveys in class. Another is to more frequently update alumni contact information and to provide incentives, perhaps in relation to events.

One outcome of these evaluations has led to the college increasing their capacity to accommodate for study individualisation. Students are able to choose between different study forms enabled by online learning material, hybrid and online participation; as well as taking care to accommodate non-standard study durations. A potential concern is how to ensure that quality is not compromised, and to guarantee similar outcomes for all students: the college currently relies on standardised testing to achieve that. However, tests are currently only available on-site, unlike the rest of their studies - which may potentially risk un-doing the efforts to accommodate hybrid and remote learning.

Finally, the assessments have led to the college instituting a welfare manager, responsible for the implementation of policies on diversity, equal opportunity, and prevention of discrimination.

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			3		

COMMENDATIONS

1. The inclusion of a welfare officer as part of the implementation and re-assessment of welfare-related policies is commendable.

RECOMMENDATIONS

To address shortcomings

1. While assessment relies heavily on alumni feedback, alumni are not sufficiently aware of surveys. A more reliable and up-to-date database of contact information may be needed.

For further improvement

1. Standardised testing being mandatorily conducted on-site may diminish the gains of study individualisation for those who face challenges coming to campus.
2. Staff performance highly emphasises teaching outcomes to the detriment of (adequately) judging research and industry outcomes.

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. In discussions with alumni, social partners and employers, it was clear that KK's programme in Applied Communication has a very good reputation because its learning outcomes and delivery successfully prepares students to enter the workforce in Kaunas and the larger region. KK is also clearly invested in fostering student competencies by various means such as training workshops, blended immersive programmes, practical conferences, the required internship and related activities. It was also clear from discussions with the alumni, social partners and employers that graduates of KK's programme in Applied Communication have a reputation of being prepared and ready to start as a working professional.

The learning outcomes are aligned with the module approach and curriculum, and a significant degree of flexibility is offered to the students in terms of their study options, individualisation, and opportunities for mobility and practical experience. KK's programme in Applied Communication effectively incorporates research outcomes, knowledge and the state of the art in science and technology thereby preparing students to enter the professional workforce. It was noted, however, that KK should pay attention that the academic preparedness of enrolling students operates on a similar level moving forward. The panel also recommended that KK consider publishing the final course schedule earlier than is currently the case also to accommodate working students and/or students with families who might need to know more in advance how the schedule will impact their personal lives.

In terms of teaching staff, the panel acknowledges the qualifications and research output as adequate and demonstrates their commitment to learning experience for their students. In addition, the panel recommended that teaching staff continue to pursue publications in high-ranking scientific journals or even monographs. The panel also recommended that KK seek to increase the awareness and internationalisation of scientific research also by publishing research in English or another foreign language and also to embrace the broader (European) scope of research. The panel also noted that since KK wishes to become a University of Applied Sciences by 2028, more academic mobility among teaching staff, outgoing and incoming, is encouraged.

In terms of facilities and resources, KK consistently received praise across several categories, such as students with disabilities, receptiveness to student needs, and the preparedness of students to enter both internships and the workforce. KK also has an impressive array of facilities (library, sports, relaxation, computing, video conferencing, etc.).

KK staff seems motivated to move in a positive direction especially with regard to their motivation to help the study programmes keep improving.