



STUDIJŲ KOKYBĖS VERTINIMO CENTRAS
CENTRE FOR QUALITY ASSESSMENT IN HIGHER EDUCATION

COMMUNICATION FIELD OF STUDY

SMK Aukštoji mokykla (SMK)

EXTERNAL EVALUATION REPORT

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Report prepared in 2024
Report language: English

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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: Prof. dr. Ana Gaio
2. Academic member: Dr. Alberto Luis García García
3. Academic member: Prof. dr. Toni-Matti Karjalainen
4. Academic member: Skaistė Kalininaitė
5. Social partner: Artūras Olšauskas
6. Student representative: Adrian-Vasile Lăzărescu

1.3. SITE VISIT

The site visit was organized on 22 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 meetings with Teaching staff and Alumni and Social partners.

1.4. BACKGROUND OF THE REVIEW

Overview of the HEI

SMK Higher Education Institution (SMK), formerly (until 2023) SMK University of Applied Social Sciences, is a non-state HEI established in 1994. Headquartered in Klaipeda SMK has branches in Vilnius and (since 2018) also in Kaunas. With an overall ca. 4370 students registered in 2023, SMK is one of the largest non-state 'HEIs' in the Republic of Lithuania.

Overview of the study field

The Digital Communications (DC) and Creative and Entertainment Industries (CEI) first cycle study programmes are the two Vilnius-based Communication field programmes which at 229 students boast the largest communication cohort of the three SMK sites. Launched respectively in 2003 and 2012, both programmes have evolved over time reflecting trends in the sector – the DC programme evolved from Public Relations in recognition of digital and the breadth of functions (internal and external) involving communication professionals nowadays; CEI reflects the global entertainment industry and its evolving trends. The two programmes are part of SMK's suite of College Studies programmes offering a Professional Bachelor's qualification. Covering 13 areas of study, these are delivered across 21 study programmes and are offered in Lithuanian (Informatics; Nursing and Midwifery; Design; Cosmetology; Law; Management; Business; Communication; Finance; Tourism and Recreation; Marketing; Software Systems; Media Arts; Creative and Entertainment Industries; Digital Communication); and in English (Tourism and Recreation; International Business; Marketing and Advertising Development; Programming and Multimedia; General Nursing; Video Production and Media). Both DC and CEI programmes are currently offered in Lithuanian.

Previous external evaluations

The Professional Bachelor in Digital Communication's last evaluation took place in 2013. The outcome of the evaluation was positive and accreditation renewed for 6 years.

The Professional Bachelor in Creative and Entertainment Industries (Vilnius) was last evaluated in 2015 and was given a positive evaluation and accreditation renewed for 6 years.

Documents and information used in the review

The following documents were 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 following additional sources of information have been used by the review panel:

- Analysis of the 2020-2023 employment survey of graduates of the field of communication studies (Komunikacijos studijų krypties absolventų įsidarbinimo apklausos analizė 2020-2023 m.m.)

II. STUDY PROGRAMMES IN THE FIELD

First cycle/LTQF 6

Title of the study programme	Creative and Entertainment Industries	Digital Communication
State code	6531JX011	6531JX012
Type of study (college/university)	College studies	College studies
Mode of study (full time/part time) and nominal duration (in years)	Full-time, 3 years Part-time, 4 years	Full-time, 3 years, Part-time, 4 years
Workload in ECTS	180	180
Award (degree and/or professional qualification)	Professional bachelor in Social Sciences	Professional bachelor in Social Sciences
Language of instruction	Lithuanian	Lithuanian
Admission requirements	<p>The following minimum requirements applied to SMK entrants applying for state non-funded study place (snf): non-funded study place (snf):</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. For persons who completed secondary education up to and including 2017, the minimum requirement is – not lower than secondary education. 2. Persons who completed their secondary education in 2018, 2019 and 2020 must have passed at least 1 state final examination and have at least upper secondary education 	<p>The following minimum requirements applied to SMK entrants applying for state non-funded study place (snf): non-funded study place (snf):</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. For persons who completed secondary education up to and including 2017, the minimum requirement is – not lower than secondary education. 2. Persons who completed their secondary education in 2018, 2019 and 2020 must have passed at least 1 state final examination and have at least upper secondary education
First registration date	2012-03-05	2003-06-09
Comments (including remarks on joint or interdisciplinary nature of the programme, mode of provision)		

III. ASSESSMENT IN POINTS BY CYCLE AND EVALUATION AREAS

The first cycle of Communication study field at SMK Aukštoji mokykla 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	4
3.	Student admission and support	4
4.	Teaching and learning, student assessment and graduate employment	3
5.	Teaching staff	3
6.	Learning facilities and resources	5
7.	Quality management and public information	4
Total:		27

1*

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

Both Digital Communication (DC) and Creative and Entertainment Industries (CEI) programmes operate in growing markets in Lithuania where communications specialists are in high demand in the job market. The industry forecasts further growth in activity and jobs whilst various European and Lithuanian studies, strategies and reports point in similar directions. The Digital Communication PB programme aims to train digital communication professionals who are able to analyse, create and manage the communication content of influential organisations and individuals. The primary aim of the Creative and Entertainment Industries programme is to train creative communication professionals able to develop and produce products, services and projects for the creative and entertainment industries. The market for these is flourishing – especially after the pandemic and given the growth currently experienced by the digital media and creative/entertainment sector; adding to which the creative industries and innovation are central aims of Vilnius 2030 Strategic Development Plan.

SMK's graduate employment survey shows that between 2020-2023 70% and 72% respectively of CEI and DC graduates had found employment which shows that the learning outcomes of both programmes are clearly defined, deliver a mix of practical and theoretical skills that are relevant to the industries' needs. Both programmes are comparable to similar educational offerings elsewhere.

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

The aims and learning outcomes of the communication programmes support SMK's mission to 'unlock and empower people's full potential for continuous personal development and meaningful and rewarding careers' insofar as they deliver a range of learning opportunities and in flexible, physical and virtual environments. The 2030 vision as 'an ecosystem of educational, business, social organisations and community connections' is realised through the extensive collaborations of both programmes with social and community partners. The priorities to promote study that is grounded on 'experiential learning and applied research' and is 'based on business and science cooperation' are supported by both programmes' aims and outcomes.

ANALYSIS AND CONCLUSION (regarding 1.1.)

Both the DC and CEI programmes address the needs and current trends of their respective media and communications industries and labour markets both in Lithuania and at global level. Relevance to society and the labour force is demonstrated by the fact that aims and learning outcomes of the programmes respond to the needs of the industry and as per SMK's own research. Closer to home, their aims also meet the vision of the city of Vilnius for 2030 which includes innovation and creative industries as two of its key priorities. They also align and effectively deliver SMKs mission and strategic priorities.

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

Both programmes are compliant with the relevant collegiate study regulations as shown on Tables 1 and below.

Table 1. PB Digital Communication compliance with legal requirements for collegiate study programmes

Criteria	Legal requirements (ECTS)	Programme compliance (ECTS)
Total programme workload	180–240 ECTS	180 ECTS
Study field	No less than 120 ECTS	168 ECTS
Studies specified by the HEI (including optional study)	Remaining ECTS	12 ECTS
- Final thesis	No less than 9 ECTS	9 ECTS
- Internship	No less than 30 ECTS	33 ECTS
Contact hours	No less than 20% of learning	35.4%
Individual student learning	No less than 30% of learning	64.6%

Table 2. PB Creative and Entertainment Industries compliance with legal requirements for collegiate study programmes

Criteria	Legal requirements (ECTS)	Programme compliance (ECTS)
Total programme workload	180–240 ECTS	180 ECTS
Study field	No less than 120 ECTS	168 ECTS
Studies specified by the HEI (including optional study)	Remaining ECTS	12 ECTS
- Final thesis	No less than 9 ECTS	12 ECTS
- Internship	No less than 30 ECTS	30 ECTS
Contact hours	No less than 20% of learning	35.1%
Individual student learning	No less than 30% of learning	64.9%

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

The relationship between programme aims, intended learning outcomes and teaching and learning and assessment and how these work in constructive alignment to deliver student achievement are well thought-through. They are informed by a widely applied framework (Bloom's Taxonomy) in Higher Education, and are framed by SMK's study outcomes assessment guidance. Of particular interest is the SMK's own Experiential Learning Methodology focusing on the development of students as young professionals whereby lecturers and field professionals help them engage with real world problems, allowing them to experiment, trial and error, as well as learn how to think critically and in collaboration with team members. A variety of

assessment types, individual and group, creative, practical and more theoretical, are also offered which are in alignment with relevant subjects, teaching and learning methods.

1.2.3. Curriculum ensures consistent development of student competences

Both programmes offer an educational journey that supports student progression from foundational knowledge to application to industry relevant practice. General college and core subjects promote integrated understanding of a range of foundational subjects e.g. communication, economics, management, marketing, social sciences, followed by subject specific study and competences in specific areas of professional activity. Professional practice is integral to collegiate studies and students undertake at least 30 ECTS of professional training through 2 (educational and final) internships in collaboration with relevant industry social partners whereby student develop work experience as e.g. a producer, content developer in digital media etc.

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

Both programmes provide the opportunity to students to personalise their study pathways. Students can select a number of general competences and interdisciplinary subjects but can also study optional subjects that meet their personal interest or career objectives. The range of optional subjects available every year is refreshed and newly approved each academic year which is an example of good practice helping to ensure the currency and industry relevance of the curriculum. Moreover, additional optional study subjects can be added at the request of students e.g. entrepreneurship subjects. The internationalisation dimension is catered for by a range of language and other subjects which students can also take e.g. English, Russian, Spanish, Global Career Management (taught in English); and in this instance the panel seconds the team's development pledge to encourage students to take alternative and optional subjects in a foreign language.

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

Around 10 final thesis topics are commissioned by the social partners every academic year. The thesis process is regulated by law and dedicated SMK regulations which provide an appropriate structure (including research methods in semester 3) and support for students through their research and writing work and eventually defence. In the DC programme the final thesis is worth 9 credits, in CEI this is 12 credits. The thesis titles provided in the SER (Table 7) illustrate the applied nature and industry relevance of the final theses submitted by SMK students; though the panel is happy to endorse the team's own improvement pledge on the SER to increase the number of theses as commissioned projects with a regional impact.

ANALYSIS AND CONCLUSION (regarding 1.2.)

The need for both Professional Bachelors Digital Communication and Creative and Entertainment Industries programmes is supported by industry- and market research, external and internal. The programmes comply with the relevant national and institutional regulations. Both programmes' aims and learning outcomes are delivered at the appropriate level and offer a diverse but relevant range of subjects and a consistent learning experience to their students. Students benefit from engagement with the industry (and social partners) in a variety of ways.

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				X	

COMMENDATIONS

1. The renewal of optional subjects available to students is refreshed and newly approved every academic year which ensures the currency and industry relevance of the curriculum for students. The system is, moreover, also responsive to students' requests.
2. The focus on professional training and graduate employability.

RECOMMENDATIONS

To address shortcomings

1. Not identified.

For further improvement

The panel supports the team's own pledge for improvement to

1. Encourage students to take alternative and optional subjects in a foreign language.
2. Increase the number of theses as commissioned projects with a regional impact.

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

Research within the study field of communication is widely integrated in the organisational environment of SMK and various scientific development activities are consistently undertaken. Strengthening scientific activities is explicitly mentioned as one of the strategic directions for the period under evaluation, more notably in 2021-2025. This particularly concerns strengthening the scientific potential and research capacity of the organisation. There are development activities in place to increase the scientific output in selected strategic research areas, in R&D networking, as well as in the processes of academic and practice-driven dissemination. SMK has adopted several research indicators, including the number of scientific publications in peer-reviewed journals and international databases, the numbers of scientific events and related

dissemination measures, the number of researchers in-house, the number of outsourced studies, and the number of collaborative research action.

Moreover, development activities are ongoing with international researchers and institutions. These indicators generally demonstrate that the level and progress of research activities are solid, and that the SMK's study and research activities are compatible with the profile of the higher education institution. In terms of development, the clear definition of applied research areas and the creation of a special body called Research Activity Group have both increased the number and quality of research publications. Scientific articles by the staff are published in esteemed platforms such as EBSCO, Scopus, and Web of Science databases. Other forms of individual collective articles and monographs are also regularly published. The staff members present their research at national and international conferences.

SMK research is strongly practice-driven. The institution is ranked high by the Ministry of Education, Science and Sport of the Republic of Lithuania in terms of R&D activities. There are a large number of national and international projects, training occasions, business events, conferences, forums as well as other science- and business-related dissemination events organised. SMK also offers good learning opportunities for different external target groups – such as educators, youth, businesses, the public sector, and the general public – and also has adopted more systematic lifelong learning activities.

There are clear incentives in place to support the research activities within the organisation, resulting in a high motivation for the staff to publish their research, organise events, as well as publish their artistic work. Such measures include an implementation of explicit procedures for motivating teachers in academic activities as well as for payment procedures for scientific, methodological, creative and other academic activities that contribute to the institution's strategic goals.

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

There are procedures to ensure that the content of studies is linked to the latest developments in science, arts, and technology. In specific, the content of the study subjects is constantly updated in close cooperation between teachers and social partners. Furthermore, the staff participates in trainings and seminars organised by social partners and arranges practical assignments where students can learn about the creative sector's innovation activities in an integrated way. Studies also involve lots of project-based assignments that help students apply innovative thinking and means of the communication sector. Moreover, there are various forms of applied research projects, independent work in lectures, and eventually the final theses, where students are closely integrated with the scientific, artistic, and technological developments.

The lecturers have an active role in ensuring the integration by other means as well. Students are constantly encouraged to use the subscription databases, the latest information resources, and participate in outgoing and visiting lectures. This is also to help them to learn about the infrastructure available to social partners that they may actively become after graduation. SMK is also active in various associations and networks, works closely with ten European applied research universities in order to create an European University Alliance that further helps SMK to integrate research, innovation, and applied science with the curriculum.

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

SMK students are actively involved in the research activities of the SMK staff. For example, students apply elements of scientific research in the study subjects "Theoretical Research Methodology" and "Empirical

Research Methodology". They also have possibilities to collaborate with teachers in the context of specific research-oriented independent projects, often in collaboration with businesses, and naturally in their final theses. Students are attending scientific conferences and competitions where they can present their theses and projects. Students are also writing and publishing research papers, for example in student scientific-practical conferences that SMK has organised. There are co-publication activities between students and teachers. As an indicator of activity, during the review period, ca. 30 percent of teachers in communication studies were involved in preparing scientific publications with students and preparing students for scientific conferences. Students also take active part in national and international events and projects for instance in the areas of creativity and entrepreneurship.

ANALYSIS AND CONCLUSION (regarding 2.1.)

The SER and site visit demonstrates that status and development of research activities within the study field in SMK are generally solid. Higher education at SMK effectively integrates the latest developments in scientific and artistic research and technology and clearly enables students to develop skills for research. There are numerous impactful research processes and activities in place, from the strategic level to implementation. Strategic objectives and research lines are set. There are established research groups and research and artistic activities are clearly integral to effective implementation of the curriculum. SMK has various applied research activities, and they are consistently planned and managed. Clear performance indicators and an effective incentive system is in place. This ensures the involvement of the academic community in research and development within the field of study in sufficient manner.

The Curriculum is linked to the latest developments in science, art, and technology through practical and versatile means. Study content is linked with applied research, teachers and student have access to relevant scientific and methodological literature and databases, the participation of SMK staff in national and international research associations is strong, and the cooperation between lecturers, students and social partners works in effective fashion. Teachers are involved in the implementation of R&D activities, conduct research in the field of communication, and successfully integrate the results of their research activities into study subjects.

There are good working relationships between SMK and the field of practice, and the list of collaborators includes partners from versatile fields. The students also have wide and impactful possibilities to engage in research consistently through the study cycle. Students are actively involved in scientific activities and participate in various national and international projects.

One minor recommendation concern the intellectual property rights that may be more carefully considered to further motivate student participation in practice-based research projects.

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				X	

COMMENDATIONS

1. The staff gets highly encouraging organisational and peer support and rewards for research activities.

RECOMMENDATIONS

To address shortcomings

1. Not identified.

For further improvement

1. To further increase the involvement of teachers in the preparation of publications in higher-level scientific journals and in the preparation of larger scientific publications in cooperation with international partners.
2. To make sure that intellectual property rights are carefully considered and defined to allow more motivation for students to participate in practice-based research projects.

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

Admission to the Study Programmes in Communication Study Field is organized in accordance with the Republic of Lithuania Law on Science and Studies and other laws. The minimum admission requirements and the structure of a competitive score by study fields are announced by the Ministry of Education, Science and Sports of the Republic of Lithuania two years in advance. Based on these requirements, admission conditions and the principles of forming a competitive score are specified every year. Admission to the study programmes in Communication Study Field is implemented only in state non-funded study places, according to Lithuania's laws.

The requirements for admission to the study field programmes are very clear and it is very easy to find them on site. As indicated on SER, within the period under evaluation (2020-2023), admission to the study programme in Communication Study Field was implemented in the SMK Klaipeda Department, Kaunas and Vilnius Branches.

In Vilnius, SMK had more than 400 applicants in 2020 (and 122 students admitted) 262 applicants in 2021 (and 55 admitted), 330 applicants in 2022 (and 64 admitted) at Creative and Entertainment Industries. Comparing the numbers of those who signed agreements in Digital Communication SP, the number of students has remained constant in the evaluated period.

In Vilnius, in 2020 the highest competitive score in the programmes of Communication Field was 7.58 (CEI SP) and 7.72 (DC SP), in 2021 – 7.39 (CEI SP), 7.08 (DC SP), in 2022 – 7.60 (CEI SP) and 6.94 (DC SP). The lowest

competitive score in 2020 was 1.15 (CEI SP) and 4.32 (DC SP), in 2021 – 1 (CEI SP), 4.09 (DC SP), in 2022 – 2.77 point (CEI SP) and 4.60 point (DC SP).

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

SMK has procedures that consistently implements recognition of qualifications, periods of studies as well as the previous informal and self-contained learning. All the information is available on the institution's site. The learning outcomes were credited to all students who participated in Erasmus+ programme for periods of study/internship, in accordance with the credits and subjects acquired in their programmes.

According to the SER, in 2020-2023, 8 persons used the approved Order for assessing and recognizing competences acquired in an informal and a self-contained manner and continued their studies in the SMK.

ANALYSIS AND CONCLUSION (regarding 3.1.)

The university follows the national guidelines and procedures for student admission that are clear and well outlined. The requirements for the admission score are also in line with the national regulations and the goals of the study programme and pose no specific issues to the applicants.

Moreover, some students might have been less academically ready than others since there was a big gap between the lowest and highest admission scores (in Vilnius were admitted students with 1.00 score in 2021).

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

Students can participate in mobility and exchange programmes in two ways: for studies and/or for internship. All information about Erasmus opportunities is given on the institution's site but also former participants in Erasmus+ programme are also involved in the sharing of the information of Erasmus+ opportunities.

According to the SER, 27 students were involved in Erasmus programmes in the evaluated period. SMK has not any foreign student to come for periods of study in Communication Study Field during the period under evaluation.

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

SMK provides students academic, social, financial, psychological and personal support. Regarding academical support, once a month, there is a meeting between the Head of Study Programme and its supervised students, to discuss the most important study issues. As revealed in the site visit, students appreciated the academical support.

Financial support for students is expressed by scholarships awarded by social partners and the SMK. The most progressive and active students of the SMK can get study scholarships In the period under evaluation, the

SMK awarded 7 study scholarships for students in Communication Study Field which consisted of a discount of study price between 20% and 80%.

Also, according to the SER and students, they have the possibility to receive reimbursements from the State Studies Foundation for the price paid for studies. In 2020 7 students and in 2021 – 6 students of Communication Study Field received this reimbursement.

The SMK students are also provided with psychological support. Information on psychological counselling is given in the SMK. Open lectures/seminars on psychological topics are also organized for the SMK students.

3.2.3. Higher education information and student counselling are sufficient

All the information for students on study system, course of studies, ways of informing and instructing students is given during the lectures of Introductory week of studies. Students are also informed about course units studied, schedules, the order of assessing learning outcomes, independent work and consultations, possibilities of selecting course units, requirements for final thesis preparation and the order of organizing internships, library usage rules.

To evaluate the efficiency of the consultations and the sufficiency of studies information, the SMK implements surveys (quantitative) for collecting students feedback. The questionnaires given to students enable to evaluate whether the SMK students get sufficient information on studies, the process of study organization, sufficiency of counselling

During the visit, students mentioned that they have continuous counselling services from teaching staff and from administrative staff regarding any aspect related to student life.

ANALYSIS AND CONCLUSION (regarding 3.2.)

The academic, social, financial, and personal support is sufficient, and meets the needs of students. The evaluation visit also revealed that the students are well informed about the types of support available to them, as well as know whom to ask for additional information.

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				X	

COMMENDATIONS

1. Information about Erasmus is detailed on site and easy to find.

RECOMMENDATIONS

To address shortcomings

1. Not identified.

For further improvement

1. Attract foreign students to come in Erasmus exchange at SMK.

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 discussions during the site visit demonstrated that the administrative and teaching staff strive to meet the students' needs, from technical solutions (continuously updated learning spaces) to content challenges (even internal debates on changing the study title). It is encouraging to see that they are also not trying to ignore a difficult subject of artificial intelligence and its role in the future (creating Artificial Intelligence Working Group in 2023).

The curriculum development is based on efforts to incorporate feedback from various stakeholders including students, alumni, employers, and industry experts.

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

The institution has adopted inclusive practices within its educational framework. The analysis from the Self-Evaluation Report (SER) and the site visit confirms some key areas. SMK has made its admission rules welcoming and may provide extra help for applicants from socially vulnerable groups. Additionally, SMK might offer different ways to learn that suit students' different needs, making it easier for them to manage their studies along with their personal situations. All these measures collectively contribute to informal support services tailored to the needs of students.

ANALYSIS AND CONCLUSION (regarding 4.1.)

The factual situation indicates that SMK Higher Education Institution has made efforts to ensure that teaching and learning activities are aligned with the needs of students and the market.

SMK is also designed to ensure access to higher education for socially vulnerable groups and students with individual needs. These include tailored admission policies, comprehensive support services, and curriculum flexibility.

However, there is a room to increase the availability of internship opportunities and guest lectures to enhance real-world exposure and facilitate networking. These initiatives are crucial for bridging the gap between academic knowledge and practical experience, preparing students for successful careers.

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

The SER presents constructive information on the monitoring of study progress of students, providing numbers that show study progress in the Communication Study Field during the last three years. The process of assuring feedback to students is presented in detail, illustrating with real examples.

HEI presents different methods of monitoring the employability of graduates. However, in SER there's no presentation of the actual numbers of graduates' employment (this information was provided after the meeting at the HEI). However, the SER explains in detail what initiative has the HEI started to prepare future graduates for the labour market and how graduates are involved in the study of quality assurance.

HEI presents procedures for defining the principle of academic integrity, tolerance and non-discrimination which are introduced to students at the beginning of every school year. At the HEI a lot of attention is paid to train both students and teachers on ethics, non-discrimination, integrity, tolerance, etc.

The process of appeals and complaints is formalised and applied.

FACTUAL SITUATION

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

SMK carries out regulated monitoring of students' study progress and provides feedback.

Monitoring of students' study progress is carried out at different levels, starting from the highest. The monitoring of students' study progress at SMK consists of several systematically planned stages, which are carried out by the teacher, the study department, and the head of study programs.

The SER states that the results of student progress monitoring are used to reduce student dropout and promote studies motivation and continuous improvement, improving the study process, etc. To fix the declining progress meetings with student groups are organised, teacher consultations are held.

Both in meetings with teachers, administration, students, and in self-analysis, it was emphasised that feedback is provided to students continuously, throughout the academic year. The only difference is the nature of information provided to students by different personnel:

- 1) teachers – "give the student the specifics of his work advantages and areas to be corrected, provide arguments and similar examples that help the student to improve faster and easier. Feedback provided by the teacher throughout the semester is both verbal and written in the "E-learning" environment, close to the student uploaded independent works".
- 2) Study program managers "provide feedback to students that is related to the student's achievements and grades in the exam session. The head of the SP contacts students with academic debts or who are not making progress (after each exam session) in order to find out the reasons for the lack of progress and offer certain solutions".

4.2.2. Graduate employability and career are monitored

In its SER, SMK states that data on the employability of graduates of higher education institutions are particularly important for quality assurance. The employability of the HEI graduates is monitored using such tools as: Graduate Career Monitoring Program, Education Management Information System.

In SER, it is stated that "according to the data of the EMIS, about 70 percent CEI SP and DC SP 72 percent graduates who have completed their studies, have successfully found employment.", but specific numbers are not provided. More detailed information on the employability of graduates was requested during the meeting and was presented later.

HEI compares the data about the skills and knowledge assessment coming from graduates of the field of Communication studies and their applicability in the labour market not only from the perspective of students, but also from the perspective of employers.

In the SER it is stated that "Analysing the opinions of employers and company practice managers regarding the professional preparation of graduates of the field of communication studies, acquired competences after graduation and the ability to integrate into the labour market, the following data emerges: employers positively assess students' preparation for the labour market".

Monitoring the employability of graduates is not the only thing that the institution does in order to prepare existing students for successful integration into the labor market. SMK created the brand HeyReady, with the help of which it aims to help "build productive and effective professional relationships between students and students, students and the business community, and alumni." Graduates are also included in the field of Communication studies as social partners, and are also actively involved in ensuring the quality of studies and improving it through participation in the decision-making and management processes of the SMK.

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

SMK students are guaranteed the opportunity to participate in various events, projects, workshops on the topic of academic ethics, which are organised both by SMK itself and by other institutions, such as the Office of the Ombudsperson for Academic Ethics and Procedure. During the meetings, both with the administration of the institution and with the teachers, the importance and significance of academic ethics was emphasised.

In the SER, it is also stated that "SMK Descriptor of the Order of Preparing, Defending and Storing Final Theses" establishes the provision that a student prepares FT honestly and independently, without violating the Law on Copyrights and Related Rights of the Republic of Lithuania, following the SMK Code of Academic Ethics, the SMK Descriptor of the Order of Preparing, Defending and Storing FT and Methodological Instructions for Preparing Final Thesis. Already in 2009, on the common agreement of the members of the SMK academic community a decision was made to submit an Integrity declaration in a FT as a proof of an independently performed work".

HEI personnel are also provided with the opportunity to participate in training courses / seminars to ensure compliance with the provisions of academic honesty and tolerance.

"In 2018 the SMK approved the Descriptor of Equal Opportunities Policy and the Order of its Implementation. It aims at ensuring equal status of all employees of the SMK and persons applying for employment both until and after signing a contract, despite gender, race, nationality, language, origin, social status, religion, beliefs or attitudes, age, sexual orientation, disability, ethnic dependence". The institution evaluates whether all the mentioned procedures are working by conducting surveys of both students and employees.

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

The procedure for appeals and complaints about the study process is formalised in the SMK, and the appeals and complaints about the study process procedures are regulated.

During the analysed period, the Appeals Commission of SMK received appeals from 19 students concerning the assessment of final achievements of course units. Final assessments of course units were changed to 5 students. For 5 students, the final grade of the subject was changed.

During the analysed period, the Dispute Solving Commission resolved disputes submitted by 4 students. Disputes submitted by 2 students was resolved in their favour.

The grounds for appeals are clearly stated.

ANALYSIS AND CONCLUSION (regarding 4.2.)

The HEI has developed and applied a systematic approach to the monitoring of the student study process. In the 2020-2023 year presented in the SER The table (No. 15) of the progress (scores) of students enrolled in the field of communication studies shows that the progress of students in the Creative Entertainment Industries study program (in all departments) decreased in the second year of study, while in the third year of study the progress improved even compared to the first year of study. In the Digital communication study program, the situation is similar, with minor differences. This decrease of scores during the second year of studies seems a bit strange, however, it could be the effect of pandemic times and complete lockdown. Nevertheless, the HEI should keep a close eye on study process scores and analyse why (and if) the scores are dropping at all the branches of the institution.

During the site visits (meetings with teachers and students) it was assured that the Heads of study programmes are working closely with students when it comes to support or help, or finding out the reasons why the progress is slowing down. It was also mentioned that students are motivated not to drop out of studies with the help of conversations, it is noticed that the students do not attend lectures they called and asked if everything is good.

The HEI gives students feedback on different levels (surveys two times a year, quality meetings at least once a year, meetings with the Heads of students groups, collaboration with Students Council). In this way, the student always knows what to pay attention to, and feedback given in written form has a greater lasting value. It is evident, though, that during the last three academic years in the "E-learning" environment at SMK feedback is provided to students by 95-97 percent teachers, which is somewhat strange in the field of Communication Studies. During the site visits the matter of personal contact with the students was pointed out: the desire to delve deeper into the situation, the display of empathy which creates a rather close relationship between the teacher or study program managers and the student, which was also confirmed during the meeting with the students and made it possible to feel that friendly atmosphere.

In the analysis of the 2020-2023 employment survey of communication studies graduates, it is indicated that "During the analysed period (2020-2023), 314 graduates completed their studies in the field of Communication studies (198 in the Vilnius branch, 91 in the Kaunas branch, 25 in the Klaipėda branch). On average, about 50% of communication study graduates participate in the survey. Graduates of the Kaunas branch participate in the survey only from 2021, as the first graduate program in Kaunas was published only in 2021 in June", so it is difficult to confidently say that the survey shows the real situation, since the data comes only from (at best) half of the graduates. The information presented in table 16 ("Employment figures and positions held by students of the field of communication studies") corresponds to reality only partially,

as it does not include any employment figures, which is why (as mentioned earlier) the institution was asked to provide additional information.

On the other hand, the fact that institution performs a comparison in assessing the skills and knowledge acquired by graduates of the field of Communication studies and their applicability in the labor market not only from the perspective of students, but also from the perspective of employers is quite a positive insight, as this allows a more objective assessment of the real situation and taking into account the necessary changes in the study program. Furthermore, during the meeting with social partners, it was also confirmed that the students develop necessary skills to work effectively in the field of Communication during the study process and those skills meet the requirements of today's market.

It is also worth mentioning that the HEI institution managed to build significantly strong relations with its graduates (alumni). As the graduates mentioned during the meeting, they feel that they have received a lot from the institution, so they feel the obligation to share everything they have learned and what they know with their younger colleagues who are still studying at the SMK. This proves that close bonding during the study years creates a specific net with the students who eventually, in the future are willing and care enough to be involved into the life of SMK and bring certain, valuable insights from their professional life into the current study process.

HEI pays a lot of attention to ensuring academic ethics, integrity, tolerance, non-discrimination, however, in the SER it was indicated that "In 2020-2023 12 lecturers applied for student failure to follow the academic integrity provisions during the preparation of independent works, FT in accordance with Clauses 4.1.1. – 4.1.3. of the Code of Academic Ethics approved by the 26 October 2018 Decision of Academic Board". It was also stated that, "During the analysed period, the Academic Ethics Commission considered 5 violations of academic ethics by SMK administration employees. The Academic Ethics Commission of SMK confirmed the academic dishonesty of 2 administrative staff and ethical violations.". The numbers may not seem large, but for an institution for which academic ethics is one of the priorities, and so much attention is paid to ensure it, such a number of violations is significant. There were also several violations of integrity and ethics from both students and administrative staff.

Students are informed about the possibilities of filing appeals, complaints and disputes during the introductory lectures. Students are introduced to the possibilities of filing appeals and complaints during the introductory lectures.

They are introduced to the main documents, regulating the order for filing and analysing appeals and complaints, disputes. All the necessary documents are available on the www.smk.lt page and in the E-learning environment.

The SER shows that the Appeals Commission of SMK received several appeals from students.

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			X		

COMMENDATIONS

1. A developed and applied systematic approach to the monitoring of the student study process.
2. Constant communication with students.
3. Regular surveys on graduates employment and insights coming from different perspectives.
4. A very close and useful relationship with graduates for improving study programmes.
5. Academic ethics, integrity, tolerance, non-discrimination – one of the major priorities at the institution.

RECOMMENDATIONS

To address shortcomings

1. Significantly reduce the number of student failure to follow the academic integrity provisions during the preparation of independent works, violations of academic ethics by SMK administration employees, academic dishonesty cases of the administrative staff and ethical violations, appeals from students concerning the assessment of final achievements of course units by strengthening the system and the information provided to students about academic integrity and ethics.

For further improvement

The program could be committed to this ongoing content innovation, even at the risk of making mistakes, because titles of the study programmes (Creative and Entertainment Industries & Digital Communication) obligate to do so.

Possible improvements for teaching and learning to address the needs of students.

1. Implement more internship opportunities and guest lectures to provide real-world exposure and facilitate networking.
2. Offer training sessions for faculty on the latest educational tools and AI methodologies to keep teaching practices innovative and effective.
3. Implement regular review sessions with students to discuss their academic experiences and suggestions for improvement.

Potential enhancements for Access to Higher Education for Socially Vulnerable Groups:

1. Partner with corporations and non-profits to create more sponsored scholarship opportunities.
2. Review online learning platforms to ensure they are fully accessible to students with disabilities.
3. Implement a comprehensive system to monitor the progress and success rates of initiatives aimed at increasing accessibility for vulnerable groups.

Other recommendations:

1. Involve more graduates in the surveys.
2. Encourage lecturers to use all the tools that institution provides, especially in giving feedback for the students.

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

According to Table 19, the teacher/student ratio is appropriate in general. In the Vilnius Branch, the ratio is 7.8 for the 2022-23 academic year, and in the Kaunas Branch, it is 9.0 for the 2021-22 academic year. The Klaipėda Department has a ratio of 1.8 teacher/student, which is in favor of the student body. This means that the degree of teacher involvement in the training of the student body is high. However, it is important to note that personal initiative and learning to work in a team are essential skills required to achieve professionals with a critical spirit and personal responsibility.

The percentage of professors with PhD degrees is balanced in Vilnius and Kaunas Branch (around 35%), while in the Klaipėda Department, it is around 14%. SMK is a College, not a University, so this ratio is justified in terms of percentage numbers. It is worth mentioning that most of the faculty members have more practical work experience than teaching experience. Therefore, the hiring system is in line with the philosophy and needs of the College. The Klaipėda Department it is around 14%. SMK is a College and not a University, so this ratio is justified in terms of percentage numbers. In this regard, it should be noted that in almost all of the faculty, the experience of years of practical work exceeds the experience in teaching hours. The hiring system, therefore, is in line with the philosophy and needs of the College.

SER applies the Experiential Learning Methodology, which is approved by the SMK Academic Council meeting (on 22 May 2020, No. 2). This methodology is based on case-based training and real practices that are relevant to the needs of social partners. The faculty looks into the market to establish the content of the program. The students learn through practical experience, and the faculty acts as a tutor who helps them solve problems they encounter.

Teamwork is essential in any field of communication, especially in the area of creativity and digital communication. Specialization and a well-defined workflow are crucial for success. Therefore, it is important to train future professionals from a coordination perspective. The curricula of the Creative and Entertainment Industries and Digital Communication degrees cover all possible areas of work but do not go into depth on any specific area. To address this, the classes are structured around projects that allow students to deepen their knowledge of their areas of interest. They explained that they changed the name of the degree from Public Relations to Digital Communication to create a course that better trains students for their future profession. To achieve this goal, professors hold regular meetings and work breakfasts with experts, and share information about colleagues and professionals.

Students are also responsible for requesting tutorials with their professors regularly to solve any problematic issues related to their project. Additionally, there is a Procedure for Promoting the Academic Activities of Teachers, which includes an economic bonus to reward the organization of academic activities.

Regarding the integration of AI, teachers are introducing ChatGPT into the program to encourage collaboration with students. This allows students to assess the possibilities and limitations of AI. An interesting exercise involves solving a problem, planning how to use AI, using the ChatGTP process, and then discussing the solution and objectives.

The professors explain that there are regular meetings and training sessions to ensure that everyone is up-to-date on the latest developments and technologies in the field.

They also explain that they have had no problem integrating hybrid training into their teaching. Although they define it only as simultaneous integration with face-to-face teaching.

ANALYSIS AND CONCLUSION (regarding 5.1.)

It is generally observed that the faculty at SMK is more closely affiliated with the professional field than the academic field. All professors at SMK have a minimum of three years of professional experience. This fact is reflected in the data provided in Appendix 5, which shows that 36% of the professors hold a doctorate degree according to SER data.

It is important to note that having a minimum of three years of professional experience is a prerequisite for revising final theses. This requirement is in line with the overall philosophy of SMK, which emphasizes applied training for its students. The focus on direct application to the productive sector justifies the higher ratio of teaching staff dedicated to the professional sector as compared to the university teaching. However, coordination between professors and subjects must be rigorous. After reviewing the SER and meeting with the teaching staff, it was found that this coordination between subjects was not very clear. It would be beneficial to create a pre-programmed set of practices and exercises, as well as worksheets to track the progress of the project, which any teacher could use to monitor the progress of the students. It would be interesting to define a hybrid teaching strategy, as it has not been sufficiently justified.

Although the number of professors with a doctorate is adequate for the evaluated curricula, increasing this number can have a positive impact on the educational project. PhD professors' ability to research and seek innovative solutions helps focus teacher training on conceptual approaches rather than just the process. AI incorporation in professional environments focuses on process optimization, not prior conceptualization, which is necessary for any problem or project's solution. Over the next seven years, the relationship with AI will require greater theoretical and critical capacity among professionals in the sector. Therefore, it is advisable to foster research capacity among professors.

In conclusion, SMK has an adequate number of teachers to maintain an optimal student-to-teacher ratio.

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

FACTUAL SITUATION

During the meeting with the faculty, it was explained that there is no clearly defined strategy on this specific point in the SER at SMK University. Actions related to mobility and teacher training had been carried out in the past few years, but they were not part of a global plan. Instead, they were based on personal initiative in many cases.

5.2.1. Opportunities for academic mobility of teaching staff are ensured

There is a growing trend of SMK professors participating in research stays through the Erasmus+ program, indicating an increasing mobility for faculty. However, the number of visiting professors at the institution has decreased.

The number of Outgoing teachers has been:

- 2020-21: 4
- 2021-22: 2
- 2022-23: 9

The number of Incoming teachers has been:

- 2020-21: 4
- 2021-22: 1
- 2022-23: 2

It is indicated that there are projects such as the 2021-2025 SMK Strategic Activity Plan to encourage faculty mobility but, at the same time, it is recognized that it does not have sufficient funding.

The mobility presented is mainly directed toward the student and not towards the faculty. A teaching system closed to the local leads to a regression in the main topics of interest in the field of communication.

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

The SMK institution provides teacher training based on various items including training, seminars, and conferences organized by the SMK, national and international projects, training organized by other institutions, mobility programs, doctoral studies, and participation in decision-making processes in the SMK.

The training that the teaching staff receives is based on two global concepts: general competencies and research, teaching, and learning competencies. During the academic year 2022-23, professors have received courses on Artificial Intelligence, and the institution plans to continue this trend in the coming years.

Regarding doctoral studies, only three professors are currently preparing their doctoral thesis. This data indicates the need to reinforce this factor in the coming years, as teaching will be focused on creating concepts rather than process-oriented work routines, which is the central axis of the SMK curricula.

The follow-up of the teaching training is centered on a Monitoring Committee, interviews with the Head of Study Program, and self-evaluation. Early detection of teaching needs is a clear symptom of a well-functioning institution.

ANALYSIS AND CONCLUSION (regarding 5.2.)

Having a Procedure for Promoting the Academic Activities of Teachers stimulates activity within the college, but apart from the economic bonus, it does not motivate research and teaching development expected from any university professor. Learning new teaching techniques, especially those related to AI, should be encouraged to adapt to the new times. The specific training indicated in the SER focuses on acquiring general and specific teaching skills needed at present. There does not seem to be a specific training plan for faculty, related to future needs such as AI.

Regarding faculty mobility, we believe that it would be interesting to incentivize with more funding the 2021-2025 SMK Strategic Activity Plan to increase the motivation of the faculty to carry out stays in other international centers.

In the absence of a defined research strategy, mobility allows the introduction of new concepts and processes from other external universities. The list of projects provided in the SER seems to indicate a typology of national or even local projects. There are no European projects involving professors from other countries.

The monitoring of the continuous evaluation of teaching needs should be more regulated if we follow the indications of the SER.

AREA 5: 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			X		

COMMENDATIONS

1. Integration of curricula and faculty profile to SMK teaching needs.
2. The student/teacher ratio is very adequate.

RECOMMENDATIONS

To address shortcomings

1. Improve the teacher training plan, especially about doctoral studies and new tools such as AI.
2. Promote faculty mobility programs for both those who go to foreign centers and those who come to SMK.
3. To strengthen the coordination of professors and subjects for the project-based teaching that has been applied.

For further improvement

1. Encourage faculty to seek research funding for international projects.

AREA 6: LEARNING FACILITIES AND RESOURCES

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

FACTUAL SITUATION

The building has a welcoming design that encourages ongoing interaction between students. The central atrium is particularly bright and serves as the hub around which all internal activities within the building are arranged.

The classrooms are well-equipped with IT infrastructure. The furniture is perfectly suited to the needs of the students, and some classrooms even feature furniture that enables different teaching approaches beyond the usual ones. This contribution helps teachers establish teaching routines that are tailored to the training objectives based on project resolution.

There is a magnificent auditorium that features all the necessary technical equipment, and the seats are state-of-the-art. It is a space that encourages listening, which is the main objective of any auditorium.

The building and each room are designed to be accessible to any student with a disability. Students have access to all the necessary technical equipment required to carry out their internships. They can also avail the technical support service to help them with their class projects.

The common areas, such as the cafeteria and meeting areas, are equipped with ample resources to ensure the comfort of all users. Furthermore, there are dedicated spaces available for students to meet and carry out various activities related to their coursework.

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

The building is fully accessible to individuals with disabilities. The location information for different areas within the building is clear and precise, enabling easy and efficient movement. There are well-defined protocols for collaboration between students and social partners, with the technical resources and spaces within the building fostering such partnerships. The building features commonly used software, which students have full access to. Auditoriums and other spaces of HEI are arranged and equipped with the necessary resources to meet the needs of certain specific taught subjects (for example, a hall with a stage and the necessary lighting, auditoriums with adapted computer equipment, etc.).

The library has sufficient physical resources (both in Lithuanian and other languages) available for consultation, and the space dedicated to the library is comfortable and meets student expectations. Although the library is a bit small, it is still quite useful. The institution has made a clear commitment to providing electronic access to bibliographic resources due to sustainability reasons, which seems to be a good strategy. This way, the bibliography can be adapted to the specific needs of each moment. Access to the bibliographic database is free for both students and professors.

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

There is a clear commitment to keeping up with the latest teaching technologies and maintaining an up-to-date collection of books and subscriptions (during the visit, plans were already presented about the innovations at the Vilnius branch). According to the SER data, the purchase of books and subscriptions is aligned with the student's needs. Workspaces are designed to encourage reflection and teamwork, and this is evident throughout the different rooms and classrooms. The investment in innovative furniture allows for continuous improvement in this aspect, which was confirmed during the interview. The main goal is to create shared spaces that foster innovation.

ANALYSIS AND CONCLUSION (regarding 6.1.)

Both the building and the technical and bibliographic resources are excellent and meet the expectations that students may need to complete their university education. The classrooms have sufficient technical material for any audiovisual presentation; there are also spaces with furniture that allow the use of innovative teaching techniques in the development of teaching.

The atrium deserves special attention because it is a vehicular space of the vital dynamics of the building. This particularity gives it a central axis for the interconnection among students and, thus, to better manage teamwork.

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					X

COMMENDATIONS

1. Adapted workspaces that invite shared work and the generation of ideas.
2. The technical and bibliographic resources.

RECOMMENDATIONS

To address shortcomings

1. Not identified.

For further improvement

1. Introduce software related to AI implementation
2. Improve available infrastructure considering students accommodation.

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 SMK internal quality assurance is based on a Quality Guide that is approved by the Academic Board and the Order of the Director. The document describes the quality policy, aims and values, the quality management system, the management procedures, processes and stages, and the internal quality assurance system of SMK. The Quality Guide complies with the SMK strategic goals and organizational culture and is applied to all structural divisions of the institution. It is also in line with the Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education (ESG) and the Law on Science and Studies of Lithuania.

The internal quality assurance is based on the principles of equality, openness, transparency, academic ethics and honesty. Participation of all parties of interest, involving the entire academic community and social partners, is ensured in the internal quality assurance through clear processes of quality planning, implementation and improvement. Responsibility for quality is also shared at all levels. Lecturers are

responsible for the conformity of the content in their units and the study process is administered by the Department of Studies, with the Head of Studies in charge. Head of SP is responsible for the assurance of implementation quality in every division of SMK. Furthermore, Study Programme Committees are responsible for the assurance of the quality of the implemented study programmes as well as for the constant improvement of the study programmes. The Head of Academic Activity is responsible for the coordination of academic activities, and the Director for the creation of suitable conditions for studies and development possibilities in the institution.

Effective feedback loops are the core part of the SMK quality system. The feedback practices involve students, lecturers, graduates and employers, as well as social partners and other social stakeholders. There are multiple forms and methods in organizing and scheduling consistent feedback. The order of organizing feedback surveys, data analysis and publicity is regulated by the 'Order of Organizing Feedback' in SMK.

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

In addition to feedback processes, students, staff members, and social partners are all involved in the internal evaluation of the efficiency of study quality assurance. This evaluation aims at ensuring efficient quality measurements of the quality of study process, and their constant development. The evaluation work involves a number of systematic means with different stakeholders. Collection of the student opinions of the quality of study organization and teaching is organized several times during the academic year. The surveys for lecturers, concerning the quality of organizing study process, are in turn implemented two times during the academic year. Graduate survey is organized twice after the graduation (6 months and 3 years), which provides SMK information in terms of the position of graduates in the labour market and help to improve the study quality accordingly. Moreover, surveys and meetings with social partners take place in several stages

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

Information of the evaluation of the study programme quality, the results and required changes are discussed in different meetings with the study programme lecturers, the academic community, as well as in public discussions with the students and social partners. Meetings with students are implemented several times during the semester. The feedback gathered in these meetings is then used to plan and implement required changes in the study process, programmes of course units, material resources, and other aspects. The results of these meetings are also discussed with students and announced in the E-learning environment. On the basis of information particularly obtained from employers, the needed changes are also made concerning the improvement of internships as well as the topics, the process, and defences of the final theses.

7.1.4. Student feedback is collected and analysed

SMK has an active student representation in different bodies and delegated representatives are actively involved also in the management and quality assurance. Student feedback is actively and regularly gathered in all study programmes, including the communication study field. The collection of feedback takes place in several stages through qualitative meetings and quantitative surveys.

ANALYSIS AND CONCLUSION (regarding 7.1.)

The development of the field of study in SMK is based on a clearly articulated and wide internal quality assurance system that involves all stakeholders. Continuous monitoring, transparency and public information

sharing of the evaluation results are also properly arranged. The Quality Guide is in place and properly constructed and implemented to ensure effective and meaningful quality assurance contents and processes.

Lots of effective examples were identified both in the SER and during the site visit, regarding how feedback is practically gathered and how changes are implemented accordingly. There are generally good feedback structures in use. However, somewhat more active involvement of the graduates in feedback surveys could be achieved, especially concerning their employability. The overall student satisfaction in the field of communication studies is good, ranging from 4.1 to 4.3 (out of 5), satisfaction was highlighted also during the site visit. It was however not fully clear how the voices of perhaps more silent and/or introvert students are ensured in feedback processes.

The recommendations of the experts in the previous external evaluation are also well taken into practice.

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				X	

COMMENDATIONS

1. Students, lecturers, and social partners are effectively involved in the processes of internal study quality evaluation and improvement.
2. Student feedback on study quality is extensively collected and the results are clearly used for the improvement of the study process and quality.

RECOMMENDATIONS

To address shortcomings

1. Not identified.

For further improvement

1. Making sure that also the voices of perhaps more silent and/or introvert students are ensured in feedback processes.
2. Finding ways to involve the graduates more actively in feedback surveys, especially concerning their employability.

IV. SUMMARY

This External Evaluation Report (EER) was compiled by the expert panel and is based on the detailed Self-Evaluation Report and supporting documentation submitted by SMK as well as the information gathered from the various stakeholder meetings and campus tour during the site-visit. The panel wishes to thank SMK and the stakeholders involved for their efforts in the preparation of the SER and for their engagement with this panel.

These activities enabled the panel to appraise the different aspects of curriculum design, delivery and quality assurance and to identify some of the key strengths of SMK's provision, in particular, the annual review and approval of optional subjects (and open to student requests) to help ensure the currency and relevance of the programme; how the focus on professional training is reflected in the applied nature of the theses; the working relationship between SMK and social partners including alumni; the support and incentives for staff to engage in research activities; how information on Erasmus exchange opportunities is detailed and easy to find; the level of communication with students; the framework to systematically promote good academic practice and integrity; as well as the equality, diversity and inclusion policies to ensure fair work practices; the relevance of the staff profile to curricular content and teaching methods; the student/staff ratio; collaborative and innovative learning spaces; the effective involvement of all stakeholders in quality processes; as well as the collection and use of student feedback in programme development and quality assurance.

The panel, however, also noted areas needing attention and improvement, namely, having more guest lectures to provide real-world exposure and facilitate networking; encouraging academic staff to publish their research in high profile academic journals including international collaborative research outputs; having clear systems in place to ensure that any emerging issues between students and social partners in projects/internships are effectively dealt with; encourage academic staff to follow postgraduate research studies and qualification; and finding ways to involve alumni more actively in feedback surveys namely concerning their employability.

This expert panel's final recommendation acknowledges the impact of Artificial Intelligence (AI) and the cruciality of AI skills for every sector and occupation, specifically, Higher Education and the communication industry. It therefore urges SMK to embrace the topic of AI across its programmes more explicitly: both as a tool for teaching and learning and as a Communication subject-specific area of competency and skill whilst promoting its responsible use by students.

Overall, the panel is satisfied that SMK delivers two strong professional first cycle study programmes which prepare graduates to engage with the job market and industry effectively.

V. EXAMPLES OF EXCELLENCE

Examples of excellence should include examples exhibiting exceptional characteristics that are, implicitly, not achievable by all.

1. Collaborative and innovative learning spaces that invite shared work and the generation of ideas
2. The technical and bibliographic resources
3. A developed and applied systematic approach to the monitoring of the student study process.
4. A very close and useful relationship with graduates for improving study programmes.
5. Academic ethics, integrity, tolerance, non-discrimination - one of the major priorities at the institution.