



CENTRE FOR QUALITY ASSESSMENT IN HIGHER EDUCATION

EVALUATION REPORT

STUDY FIELD of LAW

at SMK Aukštoji mokykla

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Report language – English

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Study Field Data

Title of the study programme	<i>Law*</i>
State code	6531KX004
Type of studies	College studies
Cycle of studies	First cycle
Mode of study and duration (in years)	Full-time (3 years); Part-time (4 years)
Credit volume	180
Qualification degree and (or) professional qualification	Professional Bachelor in Law
Language of instruction	Lithuanian
Minimum education required	Secondary education
Registration date of the study programme	2002-06-28

** programme is implemented in Vilnius, Kaunas and Klaipėda*

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I. INTRODUCTION

1.1. BACKGROUND OF THE EVALUATION PROCESS

The evaluations of study fields in Lithuanian Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) are based on the Procedure for the External Evaluation and Accreditation of Studies, Evaluation Areas and Indicators, approved by the Minister of Education, Science and Sport on 17 July 2019, Order No. V-835, and are carried out according to the procedure outlined in the Methodology of External Evaluation of Study Fields approved by the Director of the Centre for Quality Assessment in Higher Education (hereafter – SKVC) on 31 December 2019, Order [No. V-149](#).

The evaluation is intended to help higher education institutions to constantly improve their study process and to inform the public about the quality of studies.

The evaluation process consists of the main following stages: 1) *self-evaluation and self-evaluation report (SER) prepared by HEI*; 2) *site visit of the expert panel to the HEI*; 3) *production of the external evaluation report (EER) by the expert panel and its publication*; 4) *follow-up activities*.

On the basis of this external evaluation report of the study field SKVC takes a decision to accredit the study field either for 7 years or for 3 years. If the field evaluation is negative then the study field is not accredited.

The study field and cycle are **accredited for 7 years** if all evaluation areas are evaluated as exceptional (5 points), very good (4 points) or good (3 points).

The study field and cycle are **accredited for 3 years** if one of the evaluation areas is evaluated as satisfactory (2 points).

The study field and cycle are **not accredited** if at least one of evaluation areas is evaluated as unsatisfactory (1 point).

1.2. EXPERT PANEL

The expert panel was assigned according to the Experts Selection Procedure as approved by the Director of SKVC on 31 December 2019, [Order No. V-149](#). The site visit to the HEI was conducted by the expert panel on *18th of October, 2023*.

Prof. dr. Bertel De Groote (panel chairperson) <i>Member Education Quality Board, Head of Department, Ghent University, Belgium;</i>
Prof. dr. Xavier Groussot , Professor of European Law and Dean for Research at the Faculty of Law, Lund University, Sweden;
Prof. dr. Mart Susi , Professor of Human Rights Law, Tallinn University, Estonia;
Ms Jurga Petniūnaitė , Lawyer, patent attorney, AAA Law firm, Lithuania;
Ms Vitalija Jakubaitytė , Vytautas Magnus university, 3rd year Law and Finance student.

1.3. GENERAL INFORMATION

The documentation submitted by the HEI follows the outline recommended by SKVC. Along with the SER and annexes, the following additional documents have been provided by the HEI before, during and/or after the site visit:

No.	Name of the document
1.	Link to final theses;
2.	Study Subject(s) Evaluation Systems and Exam descriptions;
3.	Link to videos of Kaunas and Klaipėda branches.

1.4. BACKGROUND OF LAW FIELD STUDIES AT SMK AUKŠTOJI MOKYKLA

The SMK HEI, established in 1994, is a non-state higher education institution in Lithuania with its headquarters in Klaipėda and branches in Vilnius (since 1999) and Kaunas (since 2018). As of October 1, 2021, it has 3818 Lithuanian and 186 international students, 241 lecturers, including 54 with a PhD, and 61 administrative staff members.

The institution implements 21 study programs in 13 fields, including Computer Sciences, Nursing and Midwifery, Design, Cosmetology, Law, Management, Business, Communication, Finance, Tourism and Recreation, Marketing, Programme Systems, and Media Art. Four programs are offered in English.

One of the study programs is the Law Study Programme (LAW SP), which has been implemented since September 1, 2002, and gained accreditation for a six-year period in 2014. As of October 1, 2022, LAW SP has 410 students across the Klaipėda Department, Vilnius Branch, and Kaunas Branch.

The last external accreditation of the Law study programme date was in 2014 for a six year accreditation.

II. GENERAL ASSESSMENT

The *first cycle* of the law study field at SMK Aukštoji mokykla is given a **positive** evaluation.
Study field and cycle assessment in points by evaluation areas

No.	Evaluation Area	Evaluation of an Area in points*
1.	Intended and achieved learning outcomes and curriculum	2
2.	Links between science (art) and studies	2
3.	Student admission and support	3
4.	Teaching and learning, student performance and graduate employment	3
5.	Teaching staff	3
6.	Learning facilities and resources	2
7.	Study quality management and public information	3
	Total:	18

*1 (unsatisfactory) - the area does not meet the minimum requirements, there are fundamental shortcomings that prevent the implementation of the field studies.

2 (satisfactory) - the area meets the minimum requirements, and there are fundamental shortcomings that need to be eliminated.

3 (good) - the area is being developed systematically, without any fundamental shortcomings.

4 (very good) - the area is evaluated very well in the national context and internationally, without any shortcomings;

5 (excellent) - the area is evaluated exceptionally well in the national context and internationally.

III. STUDY FIELD ANALYSIS

3.1. AIMS, LEARNING OUTCOMES, AND CURRICULUM

Aims, learning outcomes, and curriculum are evaluated according to the following indicators:

3.1.1. Evaluation of the conformity of the aims and outcomes of the field and cycle study programmes to the needs of the society and/or the labour market (not applicable to HEIs operating in exile conditions)

The HEI is convinced that the study programmes it offers are based on the needs of the economy of the country (society, and/or labour market). For this statement, the HEI refers to research regarding the professional needs. A document analysis on the regulatory framework of the professional field of law, labour market indicators, expert opinions, and opinions of social partners regarding labour market needs play a central role.

As for the HEI, the study programme refers directly to the perspective of state development, since strategic documents in Lithuania confirm the need for training specialists in law in view of national security - and a strong legal system as guarantor of rights of society and its citizens - as the basis for socio-economic development.

Several policy documents - eg. EJTN Handbook on Judicial Training Methodology in Europe and the Council of Bars and Law Societies of Europe (CCBE) - refer to competences that are crucial in the training of law specialists, as well as competences a HEI that trains law specialists must have itself. According to the SER (p. 3), SMK fulfils these requirements. In this regard, it can be noted that SMK cooperates with actors in the legal field, introduced experiential education and ensures active involvement of students in the study process.

Moreover, the documents stress the need and importance of regular professional development and continuous judicial education, as well as the needs of lawyers and other specialists of justice institutions. Lastly, the SER refers to the European Strategy of Training Specialists in the Area of Law (2020) that underlines the necessity of practical experience, attitude and competence, as well as the importance of knowledge and skills other than legal as well as the importance of skills in legal language. The latter is, according to the SER, addressed by SMK by course units that enhance creativity, knowledge of foreign languages, lifelong learning, speaking in public and IT skills.

Lastly, SMK also refers to the influence of AI in human life and the challenges this brings to inter alia legal paradigms. In line with the document *Ensuring justice in the EU - a European judicial training strategy for 2021-2024* the importance of training that addresses legal issues of the EU is highlighted by the HEI. Taking into account societal needs, the SER also refers to the need to take into account environmental, social and governance issues, as well as social responsibilities of companies and human rights (SER, p. 4). These are reflected in specific areas of judicial practice. SMK mentions in this regard a course - offered in English and Lithuanian - on International and European Union Law, Human rights. Furthermore, course units that address protection of the rights of individuals and specific groups are mentioned,

such as Family Law, Human Rights, Environmental Law, Personal Data Protection and Intellectual Property Law.

Referring to *Business Inside*, SMK points at the popularity and the promising character of law as a profession. Thereto comes that the report *Opportunities and Strategies of the Global Market of Legal Services until 2031* assess the legal services market as growing.

SMK claims that it does not only comply with the national and international documents in the area of law, but also with the expectations of current and potential employers. Moreover, these partners are said to be involved in the study programme.

According to the HEI there is a sufficiently high need for trained specialists in different sectors, offering graduates many possibilities to choose for starting a career in the private or public sector.

According to the SER (p. 5) there is a 'unique' focus on the development of soft skills. Special attention is also given to the protection of the rights of persons/certain groups and EU-legislation and digitization are embedded 'transversally' in course units.

When analysing SER one notices an assessment of the supply of law study programmes in Lithuania, based on an environment analysis. In the Lithuania Law Study Field there are 10 programmes registered of which 6 programmes have the title 'Law' (paying attention to the preparation of legal documents, provision of legal assistance to physical and legal entities, representation of legal interests and subjects). These programmes are offered in Lithuanian. In Lithuanian universities, 10 programs in the first-cycle are implemented in the law study field (3 of them are called 'Law'). Most are highly specialised. Some are offered in Lithuanian and others as well in English. Lastly study programmes at European higher education institutions were analysed. This analysis shows, according to the SER, close connections with the SMK study programme. It can be concluded that the Law Study Programme basically does not contradict the experience of foreign countries.

Regarding the first assessment criterium - evaluation of the compliance of the aims and outcomes of the field and cycle study programmes with the needs of the society and (or) labour market - the expert team deliberately gave great effort to summarise the content of the SER as it is, according to the expert team, revealing for the programme under review. Though it can be partly due to the quality of the redaction and translation of the document, the expert team cannot deny the impression that the HEI disposes of a lot of information regarding the programme's societal context, but is less convincing in demonstrating how this information led to an integrated view on the study programme. One could say that it is hard to define the character of the study programme. Moreover, the link between the study programme's outcomes and the data on which the choices are based, as well as the choices themselves could be better substantiated.

The interviews, not at least those with alumni and the professional field, confirmed the impressions the expert team described above. A fair number of the alumni - as the interview with alumni illustrated - continue their studies, mainly in the field of law and take a master's

degree. Also, the expert team, learnt during the meeting it had with the external stakeholders of the higher education institution that there is overall satisfaction with the practical preparation of the graduates for the labour market. The expert team learnt that SMK is a good starting point, allowing the graduates to continue their studies at other higher educational institutions. The expert team concludes that it can be challenging for the institution to find the right balance between a focus that is mainly 'vocational' and searches for a direct link with professional opportunities at an undergraduate level, whereby SMK clearly wants to invest in the mix of business-oriented and legal competences, on the one hand and that on the other hand gives a good basis for further, academic, studies in law.

For the expert team it was hard to assess whether the programme, though being in the study field of law, gave the graduates access to professional opportunities for which the legal component of their competences was highly relevant and sufficiently addressed their expectancies in this regard. Neither was it clear for the expert team to what extent the assessed programme in 'law' took advantage, in defining its profile, of being part of a HEI that mainly focuses on other study fields - that are quite well in line with business - and points at the importance of generic skills and attitudes.

Therefore, the expert team recommends the programme to thoroughly invest in defining its profile and implementing it in the assessed study programme. The HEI, disposing of good contacts with stakeholders, shall at best involve all of them in the definition of its orientation. The stakeholders guarantee the awareness of societal demands and labour market requirements. When dealing with challenges and opportunities of the study programme being embedded in SMK, the (future) regulatory framework imposing requirements regarding academic output has to be taken into account as well. It will bring requirements regarding scientific activities - as well as (new) ambitions of the HEI - that can affect the staff's characteristics and lead to new focal points in their activities. This can bring the programme a strong academic basis, but could change the programme's profile and the competences it aims for. In this regard, the management will have to assess how the programme relates to the institution's profiles and what (dis)advantages this relation brings. The suggested exercise will make it for the HEI clear how the programme's outcomes in line with the orientation the context of the HEI forces the institution to.

Part of the analysis, according to the expert team, has to address the academic ambitions as well as requirements the programme has and will have to fulfil and how this academic orientation will be translated in the programme's outcomes and characteristics. This will also lead to questions on how academic skills and other competences and skills that the programme values as characteristic are integrated and outweighed in the study programme. Inevitably this must lead to a reflection on the place of the programme in the HEI itself.

As the HEI, according to the SER, clearly points at the importance of internationalisation, the expert team recommends the HEI to develop a well-thought point of view on the role of courses taught in a foreign language. The programme's profile, challenges, opportunities have to be taken into account, when defining how this could be a lever for internationalisation and strengthen the study programme. The HEI is advised to use a clear time path and to take and

implement the necessary decisions its analysis leads to. The exercise regarding the role of (obligatory) courses in English shall be part of a broader reflection on how internationalisation can be a more prominent aspect of the educational experience and influence the design and outcomes of the programme.

Despite the remarks that are due to the quality of the text of the SER and the improvements that are necessary and recommended regarding the integration of the different contextual elements and the way in which they're coherently reflected in the programme's characteristics and the aims and outcomes that drive the programme, the expert team sees sufficient conformity of the aims and outcomes of the programme and the needs of society and the labour market.

3.1.2. Evaluation of the conformity of the field and cycle study programme aims and outcomes with the mission, objectives of activities and strategy of the HEI

The SER describes (p. 6), for the professional bachelor's qualification degree in law, the aim and learning outcomes of the LAW SP (in the field of law studies).

The HEI states that this is based on an assessment of the requirements for the professional bachelor's qualification degree in law, the general and subject competencies necessary for graduates from the law field, taking into account the country's need for specialists in the law field, expectations of social stakeholders and wider aims and needs of the society's development.

According to the self-evaluation (SER, p. 6) the aim of the study programme is to train critically thinking and socially responsible law specialists, able to prepare and analyse local legal acts, contracts and other legal documents, to provide legal assistance for physical and legal entities, to represent legal interests of subjects, following the requirements of professional ethics and appropriately treating confidential information.

The outcomes of the study programme are in line with the documents of the 2021-2023 strategic period, according to the HEI. The mission is 'three-cycled'. It addresses the empowerment of the overall potential for a constant personality development and a meaningful - value creating - professional activity. Hereby lifelong learning needs are of paramount importance. The mission also refers to a second cycle, referring to scientific innovations and knowledge in order to contribute to the welfare and sustainable economic growth. In this regard, SMK pretends to invest in knowledge networking and academic entrepreneurship, creating new products based on scientific knowledge and constructing a sustainable business and science ecosystem. The last cycle of the mission refers to the creation of an open and inclusive environment (promoting positive changes, collective creation of meaning and holistic co-evolution). The holistic attitude allows SMK to be the initiator and spreader of significant changes, whereby co-creation (of meaning) is central.

According to the SER, the aim of the SP Law is related to the mission of the college (SMK).

The expert team, taking into account the provided documents as well as the interviews that were held during the site visit, has difficulties in seeing how this mission is embedded in the

set-up of the study programme (i.e. the programme's aimed outcomes). The expert team is convinced that the strategic framework can be very useful but recommends the HEI to reflect on how it relates to the study programme under review and to articulate in a substantiated way how the programme fits in and contributes to it.

The expert team reads in the SER (p. 7) that the learning outcomes are based on the basic subject, general competences and qualification requirements, necessary for specialists in the study field of law. The expert team finds that the SER could have been more substantiated in this regard.

According to the SER (p. 7), the level of competences, the areas of activity and the main functions of activity are taken into account. Moreover, the title of the study programme implies a precise and clear view on the area of activity students are trained for. The title is nationally and internationally recognised and consequently offers students opportunities to further development (mobility, career plan realisation, etc.). The SER states that the implementation of the study programme also focuses on common integral development of student creative and critical thinking and is a basis for Lifelong Learning. In order to stay competitive on the labour market, reference is made as well to technological skills in the learning outcomes.

Though the expert team is convinced that the HEI is aware of the importance of integrating the study programme in its strategic objectives. Nevertheless, and the expert team is aware of the fact that it can be partly due to the way in which the SER is drafted/translated, the link between the strategic framework and the programme's outcomes and how they are implemented could be addressed in a better integrated and substantiated way.

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

The SER states (p. 8-9) that the structure of the Law field study programme is subject-specific.

The programme management opted for a different number of credits for each course unit. The number of semester credits is fixed and constant (i.e. 30). According to the SER, this structure enables the study process. The HEI claims that it is orientated towards student needs and that it satisfies specific aspects of organising the study process in the SMK.

The programme counts 180 ECTS credits, whereby the programme aim and the outcomes to be acquired are taken into account. With its 4800 hours students in a full-time study mode have a 3 year study programme, whereas students in a part-time mode have a programme of 4 years.

At the end of the studies a bachelor thesis is handed in and defended. The thesis has a credit number (10 ECTS) in line with the regulatory requirements. The same goes for the internship and the number of credits for course units that are covering the subject field.

Study Plans structure the programme regarding volume, type, arrangement and order of the different course units, such in view of the gradual student development and study progress.

The SER states, though without substantiating this, that the volume of course units in credits and the consistency of the course unit layout, the compliance with the regulatory framework guarantee that the programme enables to achieve the foreseen learning outcomes within the planned time and on the necessary level.

Based on the documents available and the interviews during the site visit, the expert team sees no reason to doubt the programme's compliance with the legal requirements.

Table No. 1 Study programmes' **Law** compliance to general requirements for *first cycle study programmes of College level (professional bachelor)*

Criteria	General* legal requirements	In the Programmes
Scope of the programme in ECTS	180, 210 or 240 ECTS	180 ECTS
ECTS for the study field	No less than 120 ECTS	152 ECTS
ECTS for studies specified by College or optional studies	No more than 120 ECTS	12 ECTS
ECTS for internship	No less than 30 ECTS	32 ECTS
ECTS for final thesis (project)	No less than 9 ECTS	10 ECTS
Practical training and other practice placements	No less than one third of the programme	1/3
Contact hours	No less than 20 % of learning	59.8 percent

3.1.4. Evaluation of compatibility of aims, learning outcomes, teaching/learning and assessment methods of the field and cycle study programmes

According to the HEI, there is a compatibility of aims, learning outcomes, assessment and teaching methods.

In this regard reference is made to Appendix 3 of the SER, linking learning outcomes of the study programme and the course units. Relevant as well are the teaching and assessment methods to turn the learning outcomes into student achievements. Moreover, course unit descriptions mention study topics that ought to be compatible with the learning outcomes and teaching methods.

The SER describes a broad range of teaching and learning methods used during lectures and practical activities, and pinpoints methods that allow students to enhance their ability to think critically and analytically or to gain practical knowledge. Students seem to be prepared to solve problems and to search for ways to solve debatable questions. Hereby, students have to learn to go beyond a plain and simple knowledge of the law. According to the SER, attention is given to experiential teaching as well. The SER states that expert lecturers help students to solve real business challenges, allow them to experiment, make mistakes and learn from it, as well as learn to think critically and cooperate.

Unfortunately, the substantiation that was given to the expert panel - as well during the interviews at the occasion of the site visit - made it not undoubtedly clear if and how the aforementioned learning approaches were widely integrated in the study programme. The expert team, praising the HEI for its ambition to use a broad and goal-oriented mix of learning approaches, recommends to systematically document the used didactical approaches and monitor their mix, as well as the results they bring.

The SER mentions that teaching methods are inseparable from assessment methods and that a lecturer follows the principle of coherence between assessment methods and study methods. Though the SER mentions some examples in this regard, this alignment - linking outcomes of course subjects with their content, as well as the teaching approach and evaluation practice - must be structurally safeguarded. It is recommended for SMK to assess in a 'global' way for the programme under review the mix of teaching and evaluation methods and in view of the learning outcomes of the courses. Brought on a programme-level, in a balanced mix all outcomes must be guaranteed by the content of the courses and the methods used to teach and evaluate them. Assessment is governed by the principle of 'cumulative assessment'. Course units are assessed by means of interim tests to assess specific learning outcomes of a course, whereby the weight of every interim test for the final grade is established. All aspects of the assessment are, according to the SER, in line with the checked outcome. Every course unit foresees an examination and also during the thesis defence students demonstrate the achieved learning outcomes.

Though the expert panel shares the opinion that the set-up of the study programme is sufficiently coherent, the SER could have substantiated better the alignment of the objectives of the programme and the pedagogical approach supporting them. The expert team finds references to experiential learning and the scientific evidence for what is taught, but invites the HEI to map outcomes, content and approach in a detailed way. This mapping gives a clear idea of the existence of a pedagogical mix that is fit for purpose and of the balance in competences, courses that deal with them and styles of teaching and evaluation.

3.1.5. Evaluation of the totality of the field and cycle study programme subjects/modules, which ensures consistent development of competences of students

The programme consists of general college course units, course units in the law study field and optional units. Subject competences and general competences are, according to the SER, integrally/consistently addressed during the studies.

The expert team sees a coherent study programme with a logical structure in view of acquisition of competences.

The studies start with general college units and courses on the basics of the field of study. The idea prevails that they enhance abilities that are relevant in various situations and for a whole range of activities (sense for initiative, creativity, communication skills, ability to generate and substantiate ideas). The course units concerning the basics in the field of law “form student abilities to analyse problem situations in the aspect of law history, a map of the main legal concepts, relate different legal ideas and reason decisions made in the area of administrative law”, as states the SER.

The course units related to the ‘study field’ are meant to prepare students for legal tasks.

In order for the programme to be coherent and well-thought, the expert team advises to clearly focus on the balance between and the need to combine general and law-oriented competences, and its combination with knowledge in specific fields of law. This advice does not lead to the conclusion that the expert team shares the opinion that the programme under review does not meet the regulatory requirements it is subject to. In recommending to clarify and substantiate the aims and the ratio of its educational choices, against the background of the context of the programme, the expert team does not blame the programme to be unidimensional in defining the programme and its outcomes.

The list of optional units refers to the students’ needs and latest changes in the labour market. The programme is inspired in this regard by qualitative meetings with students. The course units are meant to deepen general and special competencies, necessary in the professional activity.

The HEI could at best consider a thorough evaluation of the programme in view of regulatory requirements, pedagogical concerns, societal needs and challenges etc. Thereby it could gather in a structural and systematically documented way (eg. regarding the qualitative meetings with students or the labour market input) the input of its different stakeholders and, if possible, as well as desk research and the view of staff members in HEIs abroad that offer similar programmes.

Regarding the full-time study plan, it can be mentioned that a well-balanced spread of credits during a semester helps to maintain a consistent study load (max. 7 units/semester).

Internships are a constituent and inseparable part of the programme. The study load of the internship is 32 credits and the internships are carried out under ‘real conditions’ and the receiving institution’s work (organisation) determines the content of it. Students hereby get acquainted with the future professional activity in the concerned company/institution, apart from achieving the learning outcomes set out.

During the internship there is a follow-up of the students (consultations to provide students with support, supervision of the internship).

Internships give the students the opportunity to learn from experience as well as to combine professional activity, education and personal growth. Moreover, they get acquainted with how a company/institution is organised. Lastly, practical skills are developed. Often, the internship is linked to the topic of the final thesis.

A report they have to draft in an established form gives students the opportunity to reflect on the internship, as well as to present how they worked towards the outcomes of the internship. The internship is graded by the person responsible for the internship in the company/institution and the head of study programme.

According to the SER the internships (organisation, supervision, assessment, functions of participating persons) are regulated (Provisions of Internship of Professional Activity).

The last phase is the completion of the Final Thesis, that is focusing on general and subject-related abilities. The student, who writes the thesis after having successfully passed the exams of all course units, hereby proves that the learning outcomes of the study programme are achieved.

Based on the information that is set out above, the expert team is convinced that the study programme under review meets the requirements of the applicable legal acts.

The SER moreover concludes that the foreseen course units enable to achieve the learning outcomes of the Study Programme and to train critically thinking and socially responsible specialists in 'Law Study Field', able to prepare and analyse local legal acts, contracts and other legal documents, provide physical persons and legal entities with legal assistance, represent legal interests of subjects, following the requirements of professional ethics and treat confidential information properly. A focal point of the SER is 'interdisciplinarity'. For the expert panel however, it is not evident how the programme management conceives multi- and/or interdisciplinarity, electives only brings the opportunity to individualise the studies of students but does not make the law studies interdisciplinary.

The part-time mode of the study programme is equal to the full-time programme (eg. same number of hours), but the 'planning' is somehow different as the number of course units per semester and the number of credits a student can accumulate in a study year differ. Here as well the students have to fulfil an internship of 32 credits. Students in the part-time mode study in 'sessions' in order to provide them with favourable study conditions as they cannot study in full-time mode.

According to the SER the study programme takes into account the possibilities, time and learning load of/for the students. The programme answers the desire of students to improve and grow, starting with compulsory and structured studies, developing competences and increasing possibilities to integrate choices in their study journey, whereby learning and assessment methods are chosen to promote learning and to show the learned.

The SER is convinced that students have possibilities to individualise their studies. For this, 'optional' courses are integrated in the study programme. They aim, according to the SER, at interdisciplinarity and general competences. Every year a list - of which students have to

choose 12 credits - is approved. Worthwhile mentioning are courses on entrepreneurship and 'internationally' oriented courses. Thereto comes that students have the opportunity as well to 'deepen' their knowledge in field studies (see list on page 13 of the SER).

In this regard, taking into account the list of alternative 'field studies' students can 'deepen', the expert team finds on p. 14 of the SER course units on 'International and EU Law'. It brings the panel to the question whether international and EU law is a sufficiently structural part of the study programme, taking into account the 'global' society we live in.

While the expert team is fine with the integration of 'choice' in the study programme, it recommends to reflect on whether there is a need to align the optional courses with the study field. In this regard, the programme management could as well assess whether the 'field studies' - another way for students to steer their own study path - could be strengthened by rebalancing the balance between course units in a given field and the credits for optional course units. Apart from that, it is not always clear to the expert team how the content of the 'field studies' is motivated. Lastly, as already mentioned, assessing the field-related (law) courses taught in a foreign language in view of the importance the programme management gives to 'internationalisation'. The recommended exercises would allow the study programme to clearly embed the characteristics it aims in the study programme, hereby taking into account the specific profile of professional bachelors, the societal needs they can address and the framework created by the HEI - and the expertise that is available there - it is embedded.

An important aspect of the study programme is the thesis as well.

According to the SER, the organisation, submission, defence and assessment of the 'thesis', is in line with the applicable regulatory texts that guide the behaviour of everyone involved in the thesis-procedure. In this regard it should be noted that the final thesis takes 10 credits.

Students are given the necessary information (laid down in the appropriate documents) via the E-learning system.

The SER mentions that students have full and timely academic support from the supervisor and the head of the study programme (in this, the SER refers to table 3 on p. 17 of the SER).

Important to note - as a valuable aspect of the support for students - are the trainings that are organised every month in which the most important aspects of the preparation of the thesis are discussed. Their development has the support of the expert panel;

Moreover, there seem to be regular individually agreed meetings between the student and the supervisor.

A flowchart of the 'course' of the final thesis, referring as well to everyone involved in the process, structures and optimises the process of learning and assessment. Interesting in this regard is the existence of a preparatory and a public defence. For reviewing the thesis the requirements for being a reviewer, guaranteeing scientific/practical expertise, are established, as well as grading criteria (quality of the thesis research, applicability in practice, link between

scientific literature and the research that has been done and the analysed topic). Lastly there is a public defence, that takes place in the final assessment commission.

The final grade is based on the assessments of the reviewer and the members of the commission. Social partners and at least one member with a doctor's degree are part of the commission, guaranteeing a scientific framework when grading as well as a more practical one.

Social partners, according to the SER, also bring timely feedback of the study programme as well as, in particular, the final thesis. In this regard the 'Notes of a Member of the Commission on the Defence of Final Theses of the Study Programme' ought to be signalled.

The expert panel is aware of the efforts the higher education institution gives to consult structural partners and consequently to widen the programme management's horizon. The institution thereby refers – *inter alia* – to feedback gathered in correspondence with the Order of Organizing Feedback as it also addresses 'social partners'. The contact consists of meetings and surveys. The expert team encourages these contacts, whereby it stresses the importance of the structural character (regarding recurrence, agenda setting etc.) of them, and invites the higher education institutions to document the input they give and how it is dealt with it (eg. in meeting protocols) well. The above may raise no doubt on the expert team's appreciation for the value of 'informal' feedback when cooperating in the guidance of internships, research projects etc. Moreover, the expert team is well aware of cooperation with academic partners. However, the expert team would like to invite the higher education institution to a structural, specifically dedicated, check of the programme by some (foreign) academic peers.

In its SWOT-analysis, the programme refers to the need to encourage students to be more active when preparing final theses on the orders of social partners. The expert team is confident that the programme management will tackle this self-raised issue.

Taking into account the observations the expert panel made it can be concluded that the programme that is 'rolled out' leads to a consistent development of competences.

Nevertheless, the expert panel is not convinced that the main characteristics that are assigned to the programme are embedded in the day-to-day education practice.

The expert team sustains the programme management's willingness to invest in initiatives that add an 'international' flavour to the programme and informs the management that in this regard a stepping stone approach could be useful in order to give as many students as possible the opportunity to bring internationalisation in their study programme. During the interviews, the expert team as well learnt that the management considers digitalisation as a clear challenge and opportunity for the study programme. The expert team can't but confirm this opinion and invites the programme to clearly integrate this topic in a future assessment of the study programme.

Overall, the expert team after long consideration concludes that the programme experiences a challenging balance defining its profile, thereby balancing academic and practice oriented interests and it's the experts' advice to thoroughly deal with this existential question. Analogously, the expert team noticed that a relevant number of the alumni continued their

studies in law, so this shows potential of the studies. It's a starting point for the SMK in further defining its objectives. Is it the programme's ambition to lead students to legal (starting) positions, from which they can eventually continue studies in law, or is the labour market orientation rather business-oriented, with a focus on a legal background.

Strengths and weaknesses of this evaluation area:

(1) Strengths:

1. No particular strengths in this area.

(2) Weaknesses:

1. For the moment, the programme's identity needs a sharper definition, in view of the opportunities and challenges being part of the SMK-portfolio brings along. There is a need for clarity regarding the relation between the academic approach of the programme and the other (business-oriented) outcomes it aims at. From this point of view, for now, the societal role of the alumni - though well appreciated - that serves as a frame of reference for the programme needs clarification, also in view of the regulated character of 'legal' labour market. In summary, according to the expert team, the programme has to properly define its identity.

3.2. LINKS BETWEEN SCIENCE (ART) AND STUDIES

Links between science (art) and study activities are evaluated according to the following indicators:

3.2.1. Evaluation of the sufficiency of the science (applied science, art) activities implemented by the HEI for the field of research (art) related to the field of study

It follows from the SER that the HEI is an active organiser of applied nature conferences which is important to stimulate the science activities to the field of study. During the reporting period the HEI has organised 48 conferences. The HEI has also organised a few international scientific conferences in 2021 and 2022 (see in particular SER at pp. 20- 21). The SER also underlines that there is a positive and sufficient progression of scientific publications and reports in conferences: 11, 13, 32 and 23 publications in respectively 2019, 2020, 2021 and 2022. According to the SER (at p.20), during the period under evaluation, the HEI lecturers published 9 scientific articles in the area of law in scientific journals referred to in Ebsco Publishing databases. Some of the publications are also published in Scopus databases (only 2 examples are provided by the SER. at p. 20). According to table 7 (at p. 20 of the SER), the scientific activity of lecturers teaching in the Law Study Field which is reported is based on scientific publications and reports in conferences. Some lecturers at HEI are particularly active. Indeed, according to SER (at p. 20), 5 lecturers are responsible for more than 50% of the scientific activity (54 publications out of 96 publications between 2018 and 2022). This means that most of the lecturers at HEI (the remaining 41 lecturers, see SER, at p. 46 and section 3.5.1. of this report) are much less active in publishing scientific papers. Therefore, there is a need to make all the

lecturers more active in publishing research and in participating in academics conferences at national and international level to improve the culture of scientific activity, which now can be evaluated as sufficient and thus justifies the granting of the grade 2 as to the evaluation of this specific criterium. In addition, the SER (at pp. 20-21) does not specify the number of scientific publications and the number of reports in conferences. An assessment of the scientific activity of lecturers at HEI should take into consideration in priority the scientific publications. It is unclear from the SER what is the exact number of scientific publications which are peer-reviewed during the reported time. It is unclear how many 'reports in conferences' have been reported together with the scientific publications. In any case, there is a general need to increase the number of academic and peer-reviewed publications. Indeed, the present academic production in the law field is just sufficient (see SER and Table 7, pp. 20-21).

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

Lecturers share knowledge during lectures, based on a close cooperation between lecturers and social partners. This cooperation enables us to react to the changes in the area of law, to ensure the quality of implementing study programme in the study process, by applying the latest knowledge and innovations. There is a willingness to ensure that the content of studies is related to the latest developments in science, art and technology by promoting constant performance of applied research, cooperation of lecturers and social partners, opportunities of the subscribed databases, supply of the most relevant scientific and methodical literature, proofs of cooperation with companies, activity of participating in local and international associations. There is a need to expand the HEI cooperation with the national and international law and business associations to respond to the latest trends and innovations in law.

3.2.3. Evaluation of conditions for students to get involved in scientific (applied science, art) activities consistent with their study cycle

The HEI Students are involved in scientific activities. They participate in various national and international projects, events, where they develop not only professional, but also general competences. Some students, who choose the topic of their final thesis or after preparing independent works research participate in science applied activity. Students present their final theses, independent works, research in the competitions organised by the Lithuanian higher education institutions. The HEI organises scientific practical conferences for students. There was an increase in the last year before evaluation of the study field with 6 students having presented their final thesis in a conference, before that usually 1-2 students per year do it, there is still a need to make this number higher and consistent. The HEI provides conditions that are sufficient for students to get involved in scientific activities that are consistent with their study cycle.

Strengths and weaknesses of this evaluation area:

(1) Strengths:

1. There is a positive development in terms of an increased number of scientific publications and reports in conferences.
2. Students have sufficient opportunities to participate in research/ applied research activities and various academic activities are available for the students.

(2) Weaknesses:

1. There is a need to increase the number of scientific publications in peer-reviewed journals since the number of scientific publications in peer-reviewed journals remain just sufficient.
2. There is a need to involve all the teachers in the law field of study in publishing their scientific activities.
3. There is a need to expand further the HEI cooperation with the national and international law and business associations to respond to the latest trends and innovations in law.

3.3. STUDENT ADMISSION AND SUPPORT

Student admission and support are evaluated according to the following indicators:

3.3.1. Evaluation of the suitability and publicity of student selection and admission criteria and process

Admission to the Study Program in the field of Law is conducted in accordance with several regulations, including the Law on Science and Studies of the Republic of Lithuania. Additionally, it follows the Order of the Minister of Education, Science, and Sports of the Republic of Lithuania, which outlines the minimum indicators of learning outcomes for applicants in first-cycle and integrated studies since 2020. The admission process also adheres to descriptions detailing the procedure for determining the competitive order of applicants for state-funded study positions and study scholarships, as approved by the Order of the Minister of Education, Science, and Sports of the Republic of Lithuania. Further guidance comes from principles and criteria set for establishing competitive scores for admission to college study programs, endorsed by the Order of the President of the Lithuanian College Directors' Conference. Moreover, the provisions of the Lithuanian Association of Higher Education Institutions (LAMA BPO) for organising general admission and the rules of student admission established by the Director of SMK play a role in shaping the admission process. These rules are published annually on the SMK website (www.smk.lt) and the LAMA BPO website, so the admission process is public and accessible to everyone.

The competitive score for the Law Study Field is structured based on the inclusion of the study program in this group. It encompasses various components, including maturity examinations and specific course units that assess a person's capacity to apply knowledge, analyse and interpret information, engage in logical and critical thinking, communicate effectively, and express ideas accurately both orally and in writing. These abilities serve as the foundation for a student's preparation for higher education studies within the chosen study field. The competitive score consists of History's (0.4), Mathematics or IT or Foreign language's (0.2) and a course unit different from other course units (0.2) examination results.

Starting in 2019, SMK has introduced a motivation assessment, often referred to as a "motivational interview," for prospective students. This assessment serves the purpose of uncovering and evaluating the individual's attitudes, intentions, knowledge, and capabilities concerning their desire to study in their chosen field of study. However, motivation assessment is not mandatory for everyone - if you have good admission grades, then you do not have to attend. Moving further, additional points are awarded to applicants who have excelled in Olympiads, competitions, or other specific achievements. The specific impact of these additional achievements on the formation of a competitive score and the criteria for assessing these accomplishments are outlined in the admission rules each year.

Admission to the study programs within the Law Study Field is exclusively available for state non-funded study places. As a result, applicants to non-state higher education institutions, including the SMK, are ineligible to apply for state-funded study positions.

Number of admitted students in Kaunas branch: from 2019 to 2022 there were 39 admitted students on average. In 2019-2020 the number rose by 14 (from 35 to 49) and from 2020 to 2022 the number fell down (in 2021 there were 41 admitted students, in 2022 - 34).

Speaking about the number of admitted students in Klaipeda branch, there is a decrease in part-time Law studies: the number fell from 71 to 35 (in 2019-2022).

Moving forward with admitted students in Vilnius branch - the number is decreasing. In 2019 there were 78 admitted students, in 2020 - 64, in 2021 - 62 and in 2022 - 54.

Details about the admission process are made available through various channels. This information can be found on the Study Monitoring and Quality Assessment Center's website, the Lithuanian Association of Higher Education Institutions (LAMA BPO) website, and in informational publications like "Kur stoti?" (Where to enter?). Information regarding the admission requirements for the offered study programs is disseminated during events such as participation in higher education institution study exhibitions, attendance at Career Day events held in Lithuanian secondary schools, vocational schools, and gymnasiums, and participation in other events where professions are presented by various organisations and associations.

3.3.2. Evaluation of the procedure of recognition of foreign qualifications, partial studies and prior non-formal and informal learning and its application

Recognition of Qualifications Gained Abroad and Periods of Studies - the International Relations Office staff, who handle the admission of foreign students, offer guidance to applicants regarding the processes involved in the academic recognition of secondary education obtained abroad. Presently, SMK is actively pursuing the authorization to conduct academic recognition of foreign qualifications. The center has undertaken the necessary preparatory work, coordinated the required documentation with the SKVC and is in the process of preparing an application to be submitted to the Ministry of Education, Science, and Sport of the Republic of Lithuania. During the period before obtaining the authority to perform academic recognition of foreign qualifications, the staff of the International Relations Office, who are responsible for the admission of foreign students, will continue to assist and provide support in other areas.

The SMK Assessment of learning achievements acquired in an informal and self-contained manner is implemented. In the academic years from 2018 to 2023, seven individuals utilised the officially sanctioned procedure for evaluating and recognizing competences acquired through informal and self-guided means.

Also, SMK has an approved "Descriptor of the Order for Recognizing Competences Acquired through Formal Education, as part of a study program, for individuals who wish to continue their studies at the SMK" as well as "the SMK Descriptor of the order of crediting learning outcomes of periods of study", which establishes the procedures for registering, formalising the achieved learning outcomes, and transferring credits for graduates who have pursued studies in other Lithuanian or foreign higher education institutions in alignment with higher education study programs. Additionally, it outlines the process for individuals who have studied at the SMK but haven't completed their studies within the designated timeframe and wish to continue their education at the SMK, either in the same or a different study program.

During the academic years 2018-2022, students who took part in the Erasmus+ program for study or internship periods received credits based on the agreed credits in the tripartite Learning Agreement and their academic certificates.

SMK places a strong emphasis on transparency and objectivity when recognizing periods of study and prior informal or self-guided learning. To maintain the quality of this process, the SMK provides all applying students with clear and comprehensive information, ensuring that the recognition of their prior educational experiences is conducted fairly and objectively.

No areas of improvement were identified in this criteria by the expert panel.

3.3.3. Evaluation of conditions for ensuring academic mobility of students

Students take part in mobility programs under the EU Erasmus+ exchange program in two different modes: for academic studies and/or for internships. Detailed information about the Erasmus+ program, the procedures for participating in Erasmus+ programs, partner institutions categorised by study fields, partner institutions by countries, and the Erasmus+ coordinators at the SMK is available in both Lithuanian and English languages on the SMK website. The Erasmus+ institutional coordinator is tasked with the responsibility of coordinating student mobility within the Erasmus+ programme.

The nature of the Law Study Program, which involves the study of different legal acts and their application in various countries, presents unique challenges for SMK Law Study Program students. This has resulted in limited participation in the Erasmus+ exchange program. In the years 2019-2022, only one student from the Law Study Field took part in the Erasmus+ program. This challenge is not exclusive to SMK but is a broader concern for students studying law in both Lithuania and other countries due to the specialised nature of their curriculum. But besides that, Students in the Law Study Programme collaborate and engage in joint activities with incoming Erasmus+ students who are studying at the SMK Vilnius Branch. These interactions serve to boost student motivation, enhance the international aspect of the Study Program, foster a global perspective, and promote intercultural competencies. These skills are

valuable not only for students' integration into the international job market but also for their participation in lifelong learning programs. Students in the Law Study Program also take part in short-term mobility experiences, involving 1-2 week trips to participate in Erasmus+ youth exchanges. During the analysed period, two students from the Law Study Program participated in these short-term mobility opportunities.

SMK fosters internationalisation through a variety of methods and approaches. For students who are unable to participate in Erasmus+ programs due to personal reasons, the SMK provides opportunities to develop international competencies by promoting international dimensions within their local environment. This includes integrating international aspects into the content of their academic and scientific activities, offering courses taught in English, updating study program course units to align with global trends, incorporating international databases and foreign-language literature sources, and inviting foreign experts or individuals with international experience to deliver lectures. For example, Students in the Law Study Field had the opportunity to attend online lectures conducted by 20 lecturers from foreign higher education institutions.

From 2019 to 2022, under the Erasmus+ exchange program, there were no foreign students who came for study periods in the Law Study Field. This was because the SMK does not offer the Law Study Program in English. Overall, the student outgoing mobility is still too low, this might be related to the fact that some students lack proficiency in English. SMK should take actions to improve the foreign language level of students, especially the English language.

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

Academic support is offered to students in various areas. Throughout the entire academic year, once or twice per semester, the staff of the Department of Studies convene with senior students in groups. During these meetings, they provide updates on the latest study-related information, address attendance and academic progress issues, and work together to resolve any challenges that may arise. Also, each month the Head of the Study Program in each city meets with the students under their supervision to address and discuss the most critical study-related matters. The Head of the Study Program places particular emphasis on first-year students. They provide comprehensive information to these students about the study system, the course of studies, and methods for informing and instructing students. This information is typically delivered during the lectures held as part of the Introductory Week of studies. Lecturers also provide guidance and consultation to students while they are working on practical, independent tasks, preparing for interim tests and examinations. These consultations are arranged based on a monthly schedule. They can take various forms, including one-on-one meetings and online sessions, to accommodate the students' needs and preferences.

Financial support for students is available through scholarships provided by social partners and the SMK. High-achieving students may also receive incentives and scholarships from social partners or municipalities as recognition of their exceptional and significant academic accomplishments in studies, scientific research, and public engagement. Additionally, during each semester, the most progressive and active students at the SMK have the opportunity to

receive study scholarships. These scholarships take into account not only academic performance but also consider social, creative involvement, participation in extracurricular activities and projects, as well as achievements in sports. The value of these scholarships can range from 20 to 80 percent of the study fees. During the evaluation period, the SMK awarded 4 study scholarships to students in the Law Study Field. The SMK also extends other forms of financial support, including discounts for family members of SMK students and graduates (a 10 percent discount), and a 30 percent discount for individuals pursuing a second round of studies at the SMK. Within the evaluation period, two students in the Law Study Field benefited from these study fee discounts. Lastly, students have the opportunity to obtain state loans for various purposes, such as covering tuition fees, living expenses, and financing study periods in line with international contracts and agreements. These loans offer financial support to students to meet their educational and living costs.

Students receive social support through various means, facilitated by the State Studies Foundation. This support includes reimbursements for studies, state-funded loans for SMK students, financial assistance for foreigners of Lithuanian origin pursuing studies in Lithuania, financial support for students with disabilities, and social scholarships. These programs aim to provide financial assistance to students to ensure access to education and support their academic pursuits.

Students at the SMK have access to psychological support services. Information regarding psychological counselling is available on the SMK website, and open lectures and seminars on psychological topics are organised for SMK students. This resource is beneficial for students in the Law Study Field as well, as they also participated in these open lectures and seminars. On the other hand, the expert panel found out that there is psychological counselling for students but it is still not alright. It is true that psychologist consults students, but the information about that is only provided in the Lithuanian SMK website's version. So, as we understand, she only provides consultations to native Lithuanian speakers. We worry that foreigners, especially when they are a big part of SMK's community, lack support for psychological matters. Also, these private consultations aren't free. So the panel suggests changing this weakness so students would receive the help they require.

The SMK also offers a mentorship program, which pairs experienced students with first-year students. The main objective of this program is to assist first-year students in adapting to and socialising in the new academic environment. It aims to help them understand and adjust to the changes, develop general competencies, and enhance their academic and personal achievements. Worth mentioning, that not every mentor is responsible and competent enough, because, according to students, in the past there were some situations that mentor's did not help.

3.3.5 Evaluation of the sufficiency of study information and student counselling

SMK ensures that information regarding studies is comprehensive, consistent, timely, and openly accessible to students. This information encompasses details about the study program, any changes to it, the teaching staff and their consultation availability, publications from the SMK, information about sociocultural events, as well as documents that regulate the study

process. This information is made available on the SMK website and through the virtual learning system E-learning (Moodle). In addition, study schedules and lecture timetables are provided in advance of the semester via the E-learning system and the student information system Classter. Classter is a comprehensive tool that facilitates various aspects of the study process, including the management of student data, lecturer information, course units, assessments, and the generation of different study-related documents such as agreements, accounts, and diplomas.

SMK places a strong emphasis on evaluating the efficiency of consultations and the provision of information to students through various means, including surveys and qualitative meetings with students. Quantitative surveys are conducted to gather feedback from students. These questionnaires include inquiries designed to assess whether SMK students receive sufficient information about studies, the study process, and the adequacy of counselling, among other aspects. The results of these surveys indicate that lecturers are willing to consult during lectures and in the E-learning environment (Moodle), and that the SMK administration is always available to provide guidance on study-related issues. These feedback surveys are carried out every semester, including both the Autumn and Spring semesters.

Strengths and weaknesses of this evaluation area:

(1) Strengths:

1. Family discount of SMK students and graduates is a commendable idea.
2. Students have wide opportunities to give feedback about studies and the study process itself.

(2) Weaknesses:

1. Academic mobility is not as good as we wish, Erasmus+ exchange programme's student applications are very low (almost zero) due to the difficult and specialised nature of the curriculum. Also, there were no foreign students from 2019 to 2022 who came to study at SMK in the Law field, because the programme is being offered only in Lithuanian language.
2. Financial support is not developed enough. Only a few students get scholarships and they are small.
3. Besides open lectures and seminars, students aren't able to get free psychological help from professionals. Also the website does not provide information in English.

3.4. TEACHING AND LEARNING, STUDENT PERFORMANCE AND GRADUATE EMPLOYMENT

Studying, student performance and graduate employment are evaluated according to the following indicators:

3.4.1. Evaluation of the teaching and learning process that enables to take into account the needs of the students and enable them to achieve the intended learning outcomes

SMK implements the teaching and learning process, which enables students to achieve the foreseen learning outcomes.

The SMK applies methods of experiential teaching, as approved in the SMK Academic Board. Based on these methods' attention is paid to the education of students, as young professionals. Lecturers, experts in their areas, help them solve real business challenges, enable them to experiment, make mistakes and learn from their own mistakes, as well as learn to think critically and collaborate with other members of the team.

The SMK Study Regulation states that to assess the learning outcomes of course units the SMK applies cumulative assessment. Composite parts of the cumulative assessment are used to assess different learning outcomes, or their parts, as foreseen in the programme of a course unit/module, depending on the complexity of the learning outcomes.

At the start of every semester, in the order established by the SMK, the lecturers implementing the study programme coordinate the distribution of classroom and independent workload during a semester, terms of interim and final tests as well as interdisciplinary relations. Lecturers together analyse the compliance of the content of the course unit with the learning outcomes foreseen to be achieved, logical links between course units to avoid content duplication and overlapping topics.

Every semester, before starting teaching a course unit, a lecturer prepares a *Course Unit Assessment System*, where he/she plans the content and tasks of independent work of studies in a course unit, test forms and terms, assessment methods and criteria, requirements for certain independent work tasks of a semester, included in the system of assessing learning outcomes of a course unit.

The SMK Study Regulation also requires that an assessment of learning outcomes would be carried out during the entire semester and during the examination session: learning outcomes are assessed by interim tests and the final grade comprises the grades of interim tests and examination.

Every semester Heads of SP carry out monitoring of the "E-learning" system for the presentation of information.

According to the HEI, the teaching and learning process is clear and enables HEI to consider the needs of students.

3.4.2. Evaluation of conditions ensuring access to study for socially vulnerable groups and students with special needs

SER describes that the SMK makes necessary decisions, which enable the students of socially vulnerable groups and those with special needs to participate fully in the study process and activities of the community.

Students with a disability or a temporary health disorder can individualise their studies. The SMK administration and lecturers try to adapt the study environment and study material to the individual needs of students.

Since 2014 the SMK employees of administration and lecturers, who work with the disabled students, have participated in training organised in the context of the State Studies Foundation Project *“Increasing Study Accessibility”*. After the training the employees shared their knowledge and experience with other SMK staff, aiming at an active involvement of the entire SMK community in the increasing of study availability and preparation for adapting studies to students with special needs.

Using this measure of the Project *“Increasing Study Accessibility”* in 2012-2022 the SMK purchased equipment that improves study conditions for the disabled and increases study accessibility.

Klaipėda Branch, Vilnius and Kaunas branches of the SMK have all the conditions for the studies of students with mobility, hearing or visual disabilities.

In 2019-2022 the SMK had 147 students with physical disabilities.

3.4.3. Evaluation of the systematic nature of the monitoring of student study progress and feedback to students to promote self-assessment and subsequent planning of study progress

Throughout the entire academic year, the SMK carries out monitoring of study progress of students. The monitoring of study progress of students is regulated by the SMK Study Regulation and the Order of Organizing Feedback.

Monitoring of study progress of students in the SMK consists of several systematically planned stages, which are carried out by a lecturer, Department of Studies, Head of Study Programme.

Results of student progress monitoring are used to decrease the dropout of students, to improve the indicators of student progress, to promote study motivation and continuous development by improving study process etc.

Students constantly get feedback, throughout the entire academic year from the lecturers and Head of Study Programme.

The feedback provided by the lecturer during the entire semester is both oral and written in the “E-learning” environment, next to the placed independent works of a student.

Heads of the Study Programme gives students feedback, which is related to student achievements in an examination session and the obtained assessments. SP Head contacts students who have academic debts (after each examination session), in order to find out the reasons for academic failures and offers certain solutions: *e.g. consultations of lecturers*.

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

Monitoring of the employability of the graduates is implemented in accordance with the *Programme of Graduate Career Monitoring*, which foresees that the SMK contacts the graduates 6 and 36 months after graduation from studies.

Other important sources of data on graduate employability are Career Management Information System (hereinafter – CMIS) of the Lithuanian Consortium of Higher Education Institutions, accessible through the website www.karjera.lt and Education Management Information System (EMIS).

According to the CMIS data of 2022 - 2890 SMK students and graduates are registered in the system. This data allows monitoring of the career path of the registered persons and to use the obtained data for the improvement of the study process.

EMIS platform cumulates data on the demographic, social and employment conditions of the country's residents, relating the conditions with the acquired education. During the analysed period (AY 2019-2022) 441 graduates finished studies in Law Study Field (252 in Klaipėda Department, 159 in Vilnius Branch, 30 in Kaunas Branch). Based on EMIS data, 89 percent of graduates, who finished studies, have been successfully employed.

Graduates from LAW SP are employed in police commissariats, other institutions of pre-trial investigation, courts, law firms, bailiffs' offices, notary offices, other law enforcement institutions, public and private sector companies. It shows that graduates from the Law Study Field are in demand in the labour market and are active participants in the labour market.

Analysis of the opinion of employers, company internship supervisors on the professional training of graduates from Law Study Field, their acquired competences after studies and ability to integrate into the labour market, reveals the data that employers positively evaluate the preparation of students for the labour market.

During the on site meeting with employers and other social partners, it was confirmed that employers are actually satisfied with the graduate's practical preparation for the labour market. SMK is a good starting point, as the graduates continue their studies at other higher educational institutions.

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

Standards of academic integrity, tolerance and non-discrimination are perceived as an integral part of the organisational culture of the SMK.

The SMK provisions and procedures of academic integrity, tolerance and non-discrimination are regulated in the following documents: *the SMK Code of Academic Ethics; the SMK Regulation of Academic Ethics Commission; the SMK Descriptor of the Order of Assessing Learning Outcomes; the SMK Order of Implementing Examination Session in a Remote Mode; the SMK Descriptor of the Order of Preparing, Defending and Storing Final Theses; Descriptor of the Order of Equal Opportunities Policy and its Implementation; the SMK Descriptor of the Order of the Prevention of*

Psychological Violence and Mobbing; Regulation of the Appeals Commission; Dispute Solving Provisions.

The Code of Academic Ethics, updated in 2022, defines that the Academic Ethics Commission is responsible for its monitoring and that it accepts and considers applications of the members of academic community concerning the violations of the provisions of the Code of Academic Ethics. The commission acts in accordance with the Regulation of Academic Ethics Commission, approved by the Academic Board.

The SMK students are introduced to the applied provisions and procedures of academic integrity and ethics during introductory weeks.

Students of the SMK also participate in the training organised by the Office of the Ombudsperson for Academic Ethics and Procedure.

All the final theses of students are checked on the Text Matching Verification system OXSICO.

The Academic Ethics Commission determined 7 violations of academic integrity and ethics. During the analysed period the Academic Ethics Commission considered 5 violations of academic ethics by administrative staff. The SMK Academic Ethics Commission confirmed 3 violations of academic integrity and ethics by administrative staff.

3.4.6. Evaluation of the effectiveness of the application of procedures for the submission and examination of appeals and complaints regarding the study process within the field studies

The SMK Regulations on appeals and complaints regarding the study process are in force.

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 documents are available on the SMK website and E-learning system.

Procedures of appealing and complaining about the study process in the SMK is regulated in the following documents: *Regulations of the Appeals Commission; Provisions of Dispute Solving Commission.*

The SMK Appeals Commission follows the SMK Statute, Study Regulation, the Order of Assessing Learning Outcomes, the Order of Preparing, Defending and Storing Final Theses and other documents that regulate studies.

Before deciding on the validity of an appeal a student must consult the corresponding staff of administration of the academic division of the SMK and find out the possibilities of solving the arisen problem. In case the problem solution does not satisfy the student, he/she has the right to initiate a formal process of problem solving. The staff of the Department of Studies, where an appeal is initiated, must provide a student with an impartial information of the procedure of filing and analysing appeals.

Within the analysed period the Appeals Commission received appeals from 5 students concerning the assessment of final achievements of course units. Final assessments of course units were changed to 2 students.

Provisions of Dispute Solving Commission in the SMK regulate the formation of Dispute Solving Commission, its competence and activity organisation. The formed *Dispute Solving Commission* solves disputes concerning learning conditions, learning and rest time, payment for studies, imposing disciplinary penalty, study process implementation, following internal order rules, implementation of requirements for safety and health and other issues.

Within the period under evaluation, the Dispute Solving Commission solved disputes submitted by 4 students. Disputes raised by 2 students were resolved in their favour.

Strengths and weaknesses of this evaluation area:

(1) Strengths:

1. The teaching and learning process is based on clear principles, taking into account the needs of students.
2. Implemented systematic monitoring system of student progress and systematic feedback system, encouraging and helping to achieve learning outcomes, as well as further planning of study progress.
3. Stakeholders are involved in the SMK study quality assurance and its improvement, by participating in the decision making process.

(2) Weaknesses:

1. For now, the role of the alumni - though well appreciated - that serves as a frame of reference for the programme needs clarification, also in view of the regulated character of 'legal' labour market.

3.5. TEACHING STAFF

Study field teaching staff are evaluated according to the following indicators:

3.5.1. Evaluation of the adequacy of the number, qualification and competence (scientific, didactic, professional) of teaching staff within a field study programme(s) at the HEI in order to achieve the learning outcomes

Studies in the Law Study Field are implemented by 46 lecturers (15 in Klaipėda + 17 in Vilnius + 14 in Kaunas) and around 20% have a scientific degree. Lecturers are employed based on their qualification, scientific degrees, pedagogical and/or practical work experience. At least 10 percent of the volume of the course units of Law Study Field in college first cycle study programs must be taught by scientists, who have a doctor degree and carry out research on a corresponding field of science. The staff in the Law Study Field correspond to the general requirements for study programs of the first cycle college studies. The expert panel would suggest not only to meet the requirement of having at least 10% but the SMK should focus on

having even more lecturers with a scientific degree which would also help to increase scientific output and they could be of higher quality. The Program lecturers are experts in their area, related to the taught course unit and have significant practical experience and work in different organisations, companies and public sector organisations. The teaching staff at the HEI has good qualification and competence to teach in the Law Study field.

3.5.2. Evaluation of conditions for ensuring teaching staffs' academic mobility (not applicable to studies carried out by HEIs operating under the conditions of exile)

The staff of the Law Study Field is involved in teaching and learning mobilities in order to adopt good practices, to discuss cooperation opportunities, common initiatives in projects, scientific applied activity, to get acquainted with the material study basis in partner institutions. In 2019-2022, 58 international teaching and learning mobilities were implemented with the participation of the HEI lecturers, who share their mobility experience with other lecturers. In 2019-2022, 76 incoming mobilities were implemented, including 27 teaching, 39 learning, 9 virtual teaching and 1 virtual learning mobility. The HEI maintains a balance between outgoing and incoming lecturers, and this helps to qualitatively implement mobilities, integrate the incoming lecturers in the study process. Promotion of internationality is one of the strategic goals of the HEI. International weeks are organised every year. The 2021-2025 HEI Strategic Activity Plan maintains a goal to increase the flows of incoming and outgoing staff.

The conditions at the HEI for ensuring teaching staff's academic mobility are good and usage is at a sufficient level.

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

The competences of the teaching staffs are improved by a variety of activities: 1) trainings, seminars, conferences organised by the HEI, 2) national and international projects, 3) trainings organised by other institutions, 4) mobility programs, 5) doctoral studies 6) participation in decision making processes in the HEI. The teaching staff participate in the development and evaluation of their competence. The conditions to improve the competence of the teaching staff at the HEI are good.

Strengths and weaknesses of this evaluation area:

(1) Strengths:

1. Well-qualified teachers adapting their teaching to the needs of the Lithuanian society and professional practice.
2. The conditions for ensuring teaching staff's academic mobility are good.
3. The teaching staff participate in the development and evaluation of their competence. The conditions to improve the competence of the teaching staff are good.

(2) Weaknesses:

1. Only around 20% of the teaching staff have a scientific degree.

3.6. LEARNING FACILITIES AND RESOURCES

Study field learning facilities and resources are evaluated according to the following indicators:

3.6.1. Evaluation of the suitability and adequacy of the physical, informational and financial resources of the field studies to ensure an effective learning process

The SMK conducts studies in three branches – in Klaipėda, Kaunas and Vilnius.

Previous evaluation report recommended to significantly improve the physical conditions for studies. It was mentioned that the premises seem very compact and library resources for the third-year students are limited. The current report from SMK puts forward a totally altered image. Klaipėda and Kaunas branches have moved to new and modern premises. All premises now are modernised and expanded.

The previous evaluation report also recommended improving the library resources by providing more possibilities to use traditional and electronic resources. It was also recommended to concentrate learning tools and resources in Vilnius. The self-evaluation report now says that all three branches have a library and 5 000 euro is allocated for the purchase of books and periodicals. All libraries have software allowing access to international databases. Prior to the visit the figure of 5 000 euro per year still raised doubts as being insufficient to secure access to relevant literature. There are some databases which are not mentioned in the report, such as Heinonline. The report claims that the students and faculty are satisfied with the material resources available.

The experts were able to get introduced to the campus in Vilnius and were given a short description and videos of the facilities in the other cities. The committee members were impressed by the design and equipment of the Vilnius campus, where ample usage of glass gives the image of space and light. The campus is not only used by the law students, but by students in all programs. Unfortunately, there were not too many law students around at the day of the visit.

The library sources continue to be an area of grave concern. Although for the day of the visit some recent purchases of law books were placed on the open shelves, a more detailed look into the collection revealed an absence of recent and basic academic resources needed for legal studies and independent research. The library budget of 5000 euro per year for law clearly remains inadequate and raises a question of strategic choice by the management of the allocation of the budget (the committee was told that hundreds of thousands of euros were spent for physical improvements). This leads to question whether the institution is capable through its library to support to an adequate degree rigorous law studies. During the inspection visit the committee members noted that the overall number of printed books related to theory of law, international and European law is scarce and even these books are from the beginning of the 2000s. This shows a fundamental shortcoming in academic resources available to the students. If the institution has a sincere intent to continue with law studies, a concrete task force with adequate budget and discretion needs to be set up immediately so that the situation can be changed. The committee observed that during the day of visit there would have been no

possibility to use the library for any academic purpose, since there was a crew filming an advertisement and editing equipment was all around the space.

The committee is attentive to the following legal requirement: “33. Libraries and reading rooms must have sufficient copies of books, methodological publications, glossaries and other publications in Lithuanian and printed and digital scientific literature, text foreign languages. Libraries must be equipped with computers, internet connection and access to international databases, printing and copying equipment.” The committee did not see computer equipment in the library, the selection of methodological publications was extremely limited. No evidence was provided that the situation would be in any way different in other locations.

The committee is also attentive to the following standard regarding law studies: 47.4. the number of literature held in libraries has to be sufficient to ensure qualitative studies of all the subjects (modules) provided in the study programmes: textbooks, monographs, journals, dictionaries, encyclopaedias, electronic databases, teaching aids, other educational literature or lecture notes; the computers and suitable software (literature catalogues, search engines, connection with databases of bigger libraries, Internet connection) must be available.” The committee also inspected the library in Vilnius to verify the compatibility of the existing library for these standards and came to the conclusion that there were no monographs, dictionaries, lecture notes and journals. These were the main reasons for the shortcoming in the evaluated area.

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

The self-evaluation report claims that the process of updating material resources is implemented on the basis of suggestions from lecturers given in annual self-evaluation, and the latest changes in art and technologies. Students are involved in study resources updating. In the period of 2019 – 2023 the institution has spent around 800 000 euro for various material investments, including furniture, computers, hybrid teaching equipment, software and hardware, databases and subscriptions. There seems to be a clear process of how the needs are collected, analysed, and then forwarded to the decision making.

The committee was not able to verify that the claims from the report are implemented in reality. Although there were some mentionings of the need to subscribe to some databases, the committee developed an impression from the conversations held during the visit, that the usage of material resources is made within a closed circle of senior administration without input from the academic community. When asked during the meeting what was the latest request made by the members of the academic community, the persons attending the meeting could not remember any.

Strengths and weaknesses of this evaluation area:

(1) Strengths:

1. All branches are located in modern facilities equipped with teaching tools necessary for academic studies.

2. The institution has made considerable investments into material conditions (rooms and furniture, equipment).

(2) Weaknesses:

1. The library budget is clearly not sufficient, since 5 000 euro per year does not allow you to purchase even the most significant books published, or give access online. The library sources are not adequate to support independent academic research in law. This is a fundamental shortcoming.
2. The system of co-decision of the usage of material resources remains rhetorical. There was no verification that members of the teaching staff are consulted on the usage of informational resources.
3. There is fundamental shortcoming of physical printed law literature.

3.7. STUDY QUALITY MANAGEMENT AND PUBLIC INFORMATION

Study quality management and publicity are evaluated according to the following indicators:

3.7.1. Evaluation of the effectiveness of the internal quality assurance system of the studies

According to the report, there is in place a clear procedure for internal quality assurance evaluation. Principles of quality, openness, transparency, academic ethics and honesty are the main properties followed. Participation of different parties is the basic element in every stage. The process is multi-layered. The main role seems to rest upon the Study Programme Committees. However, the report does not mention how often the collective meetings take place and there are no examples of various issues identified.

The committee was not convinced, based on the information obtained during meetings, that such a system works effectively in reality. For instance, several members of the academic community had never heard of the Study Programme Committees. The system should be effective not only in paper but also in practice, this needs attention from SMK.

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

There seems a clear system of engagement with various stakeholders, as well as their involvement in the quality assurance mechanisms. Results of the surveys are discussed internally. However, the report puts forward a formal image, but there is no data about how these procedures work in reality – for instance, how many social partners are involved, who they exactly are, what types of suggestions are made and how these are taken into account.

The committee was not able to obtain this information during the meetings as well. Stakeholder representatives were of high opinion about the institution, but were not sure what exactly are the collective formats where they can be engaged in.

3.7.3. Evaluation of the collection, use and publication of information on studies, their evaluation and improvement processes and outcomes

The self-evaluation report puts forward concrete examples of how the suggestions of students and lecturers have led to changes. For instance, the start of lectures in Vilnius, broadening the choice of foreign languages, increasing the number of interdisciplinary projects. Likewise, the recommendations from employers have led to concrete improvements, for instance increase in the number of ordered theses, including specific thesis topics, increasing the international aspect of the thesis.

The committee had the impression during the meeting that information from the students and lecturers is gathered and occasionally taken into account in the planning of the study process. Since the committee was able to meet with a very small number of law students and faculty whose main area of expertise is law, it is not possible to make any conclusions regarding the improvement process of strictly law studies, other members of faculty gave some examples of changes but it was not related to law study field subjects.

3.7.4. Evaluation of the opinion of the field students (collected in the ways and by the means chosen by the SKVC or the HEI) about the quality of the studies at the HEI

Regular qualitative and quantitative surveys are conducted to gather feedback from the students. Quantitative surveys show a consistent overall satisfaction rate with the studies over 4.0 (5.0 being the maximum). Klaipeda students evaluated best the study materials and methods, Vilnius students evaluated best the student activities, and Kaunas students evaluated best the independent work and interim tests. Yet there is no information on the results of the qualitative surveys.

The committee asked the law students about their satisfaction with the programme and received positive feedback. Yet the students complained that they need to combine studies with work. The committee has the impression that none of the students who attended the meeting and also work - who were supposedly outstanding students - appear to work in the legal field. The committee asked explicitly what is the nature of work the students are doing and received responses showing shifts, direct supervisors, etc - these indicators are all applicable to non-legal work. The committee only wonders why is it so?

Strengths and weaknesses of this evaluation area:

(1) Strengths:

1. Internal quality assurance system is formally based on clear principles and follows the idea of collectivity.
2. There is a formal clear system for the engagement of external stakeholders.
3. Input from stakeholders, such as students, lecturers and employers is taken into account and leads to concrete improvements.

(2) Weaknesses:

1. The internal quality assurance system involving various parties is not transparent and creates the image of discrepancy between what is claimed and what happens in reality.

IV. RECOMMENDATIONS

Evaluation Area	Recommendations for the Evaluation Area (study cycle)
Intended and achieved learning outcomes and curriculum	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. The expert team recommends a fundamental assessment and reflection, involving all the stakeholders, of the orientation of the study programme, dealing with the societal demands, the challenges and opportunities it being embedded in SMK brings, and the (future) regulatory framework. The reflection has to address the academic approach of the programme as well as the balance with other outcomes it aims at. In general, the HEI has to define the role for their alumni in the labour market, taking into account the existence of professional and academic degrees in the study field and the existence of regulated professions. The HEI has opportunities - inter alia regarding access to staff - to fully develop an authentic, multi-disciplinary, 'business-like' learning environment. It is recommended to carefully balance (eg. in its hr-policy) this opportunity with the academic requirements of the study programme and its staff members have to fulfil. 2. The expert team strongly recommends a profound assessment of the role of courses taught in a foreign language as part of a more general reflection on how strongly 'international' initiatives are embedded in the study programme and experienced by students. 3. The expert team recommends to elaborate and substantiate the link between the HEI's strategic framework and the study programme, especially since it allows to strengthen the programme's identity. 4. The expert team recommends to invest in documenting the line between programme and course outcomes, pedagogical approaches and evaluation standards and methods as well as to globally review and optimise the programme as a whole from this perspective. 5. The expert team recommends to consider the need to align optional courses with the study field as well as to revisit the 'field studies' that address the students' need to design their study programme.
Links between science (art) and studies	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. To increase the number of scientific publications in peer-reviewed journals since the number of scientific publications in peer-reviewed journals remain just sufficient.

	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 2. To involve all the teachers in the law field of study in publishing their scientific activities. 3. To expand further the HEI cooperation with the national and international law and business associations to respond to the latest trends and innovations in law. 4. Involve more students in joint applied research.
Student admission and support	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Increase outgoing and incoming student mobility. 2. Offer more English courses to students, so they could improve their English proficiency. 3. Find ways to offer more financial support. 4. SMK needs to provide free psychological support to students.
Teaching and learning, student performance and graduate employment	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. The expert team recommends strengthening cooperation with social partners and employers. 2. The expert team recommends involving alumni more in SMK activities, showing the attractiveness of the programme and disclosing the labour market opportunities for those students as well, who do not intend to continue further studies.
Teaching staff	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Employ more teaching staff with scientific degrees.
Learning facilities and resources	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. There needs to be a systemic and decisive improvement of the library resources. 2. A transparent system of involving members of the academic community needs to be put in place for deciding how to use material resources for investment.
Study quality management and public information	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Further improve the academic quality assurance process taking into account the views of external stakeholders.

V. SUMMARY

The evaluation of the programme's aimed outcomes and the alignment of programme and outcomes led to the main conclusion that the identity of the programme is in need of attention. Being part of the SMK-portfolio brings opportunities and challenges for the programme. Both need the management's attention. There is a need for clarity regarding the academic approach of the programme and the other (business-oriented) outcomes it aims at.

The HEI has the know-how and the vision to establish a genuinely multi-disciplinary programme and to create an authentic, stimulating, 'business like' learning environment. It also has access to a staff that has the necessary skills. The HEI will have to carefully balance (eg. in its hr-policy) this opportunity with the academic requirements of the study programme. Determining will be the requirements for academic staff members linked to the study programme as well, as a change in staff profile can inevitably affect the pedagogical identity as well.

When the review team had to evaluate the link between science (art) and study activities in SMK higher education institution. Key indicators, such as the sufficiency of science-related activities and the alignment of study content with the latest developments, were considered. Positive aspects included an upward trend in scientific publications and sufficient opportunities for student research. However, identified weaknesses highlight the need for more peer-reviewed journal publications, increased involvement of all teachers in scientific activities, and expanded collaboration with law and business associations to stay abreast of evolving trends in the law study field.

The expert team acknowledges that the SMK established a partnership with the social partners and employers. Students graduated from the programme are welcomed in the labour market due to their practical skills.

The expert team is concerned about the library resources. The library is a small room with no individual workstations for students. It appears that it is sometimes also used non-purposefully not for academic studies. There is not a sufficient amount of printed collections to support law studies - encyclopaedias, dictionaries, monographs.

Overall, we would like to thank SMK for the hard work preparing the SER report and we only wish the best to improve the studies provided and hopefully SMK will become fully equipped for high quality study implementation.

Expert panel chairperson signature:

Prof. dr. Bertel De Groote

(signature)