SKVC

CENTRE FOR QUALITY ASSESSMENT IN HIGHER EDUCATION

EVALUATION REPORT

OF ADVANCED PRACTICE NURSING

NEW STUDY PROGRAMME

at KLAIPĖDA UNIVERSITY

Expert panel:
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STUDY PROGRAMME DATA

Title of the study programme	Advanced practice nursing
Group(s) of study fields	Health Sciences
Study field	Nursing and midwifery
Type of the study programme	*University studies*
Study cycle	Postgraduate (Second cycle, Master's)
Mode of study and duration (in years)	Permanent form, duration - 2 years
Volume of the study programme in credits	120 ECTS
Degree and (or) professional qualifications awarded	Master of Health Sciences and Advanced Practice Nurse qualification

TABLE OF CONTENT

I. INTRODUCTION

Klaipeda University was Established by the resolution of the Supreme Council of the Republic of Lithuania - the Restorative Seimas in year 1990, Klaipėda University (hereinafter - the KU/University) has successfully grown into a multi-disciplinary center of marine sciences and studies of the Baltic region integrated into international academic networks over more than three decades of academic activity. Operating in the region of Western Lithuania and the coastal zone, the KU pays great attention to marine sciences and studies and research in the Baltic region, which form the University's identity and are the basis of its operational strength. The university's focus on leadership in creating the region's prosperity is based on the highest level of science and studies. Currently, the KU has three faculties (Social Sciences and Humanities, Marine Technology and Natural Sciences, Health Sciences) and two institutes (History and Archeology of the Baltic Region, Marine Research). The faculties and institutes have 16 departments, 9 science and/or study centers, 2 museums, 55 laboratories.

The program being evaluated is based in KU's Faculty of Health Sciences (hereinafter – FHS, Faculty). FHS started operating in 2000 and there are 6 departments: Medical Technologies; Holistic medicine and rehabilitation; Nursing; Social work; Public health; Sports, recreation and tourism. There is also a Science Center for Health Research and Innovation. Responding to the needs of the region and the country for the training of specialists, studies are carried out in 8 fields of study: Nursing and midwifery; Medical technology; Social work; Public health; Rehabilitation; Tourism and recreation; Leisure sports; Pedagogy; 15 study programmes are being conducted. FHS implements 7 first-cycle, 8 second-cycle study programmes in eight fields of study. Over 1,100 students study at FHS every year. The faculty employs 125 lecturers, 74 of whom have obtained a PhD.

The Advanced Nursing Program (hereinafter referred to as the program,) which is planned to commence by Klaipeda University (KU) in September 2025 was evaluated by a group of experts formed by the Centre for Quality Assessment in Higher Education (SKVC). The purpose of the external evaluation is to analyse the quality of the Program and provide recommendations for improving the study program.

The group of experts began the external evaluation by examining the Program descriptor and its appendices (hereinafter referred to as the Descriptor). In evaluating the Program, they utilized the laws governing Higher Education studies and other normative legal acts, including the following:

- Methodology for the Evaluation of New Study Programs (approved by the Director of the Centre for Quality Assessment in Higher Education on 31 December 2019, Order No. V-149);
- European Parliament and Council Directive 2013/55/EU of 2013-11-20 on the recognition of professional qualifications, the order of the Ministry of Health of the Republic of Lithuania on 7-4-2014 No. V-766 "On Approval of Advanced nursing practice guidelines";
- Order of the MInistry of Health of LT "On the Lithuanian Medical Norm MN 160:2017 "Advanced Practitioner Nurse" (July 7, 2017, No. V-852) and based on the Law on Nursing Practice and Midwifery Practice of the LT (2001-06-28, No. IX-413);
- The letter dated 12 May 2024 from the Ministry of Health of the Republic of Lithuania No. 10-3992, which approves the KU intention to Run the Master's

Degree Programme in Advanced Practice Nursing', registered with the Ministry on 08-11-2024, Nr. 9-12098.

During the evaluation of the Programme descriptor and its documents, the experts requested an additional document that would outline the mentorship programme that would be implemented alongside the Programme. This was not received by the time of writing this report.

On April 4th 2025, the group of experts visited KU (hereinafter described as the visit) where they met with the Faculty administration, the developers of the Program descriptor, the intended teachers of the Program, and social partners interested in the professionals to be trained under the Program. They also visited the material resources that will be used for studies, including classrooms, libraries, and laboratories. The experts also visited Klaipeda University Hospital. At the end of the visit, the Faculty representatives were briefed on the general observations made by the expert group.

In April 2025 the draft of the Report was prepared and submitted to the SKVC which was sent to the Programme promoters for information and comments on factual errors.

The Faculty has not commented on factual errors. The Faculty was also invited to correct the Programme within 10 working days. Based on expert recommendations, additional documents were submitted by KU team.

Based on expert recommendations, additional documents were submitted by KU team:

- Advanced Practice Provider Mentorship Framework;
- The student assessment in practice document;
- Enhanced statement on recognised prior learning;
- Guideline on Clinical Nurse in APN Mentoring Competence Criteria;
- Study module programme B000M131: Nursing Leadership, Health Policy, Economics and Technologies;
- Study module programme B000M129: Entitlement Health Psychology, Communication, Professional Mentoring and Ethics;
- Study module programme B000M136: Entitlement Research Paper.

Each of these additional documents were scrutinised by the review team in advance of completing the report. In April 2025 the draft of the Report was prepared and submitted to the SKVC.

Following the receipt of the changes made by the Programme promoters to the Programme Descriptor, the expert panel assessed the changes made and added to the report of the Programme evaluation accordingly.

The final report was submitted to the SKVC in May 2025.

II. PROGRAMME ANALYSIS

2.1. STUDY AIMS, OUTCOMES AND CONTENT

The evaluation area is analyzed according to the following indicators:

- *Evaluation of the conformity of the aims and outcomes of the study programme to the needs of the society and/or the labour market (not applicable to HEI's operating in exile conditions).*

  Indicator analysis, expert assessment

KU applied to deliver a new program entitled **Advanced practice nursing with three specialist exit routes Primary Health Care; Anaesthesia and Intensive Care; and Emergency Medical Assistance**. Only two other Lithuanian HEI deliver this program at the moment – Vilnius University and Kaunas University. The expert team, through the program descriptor and in the visit, learned that due to social and economical reasons it is challenging for qualified nurses working in Klaipeda and the surrounding region to participate in the courses being offered in Vilnius and Kaunas. This has led to there being a lack of Advanced Practice Nurses in Klaipeda and surrounding region which is having an impact on the hospitals, the community and preventing advancement of the nursing profession in the region.

From the Program descriptor and expert group meetings with the Faculty administration, the developers of the Program descriptor, the intended teachers of the Program it was apparent that the APN program had been developed not only using the laws and governing acts of APN but also by triangulating the course content and evaluations of other APN programs around the world.

It was stated in the program descriptor that there was no documented evidence of the need for APN studies in Government publications but they did state it was known from discussions in the sector there is a need. This was confirmed in the visit. During expert group meetings with social partners as future employers, it was obvious that there is not only a need for the program, but that there was also significant support for the program which will be beneficial for KU staff and the students of the program. It is anticipated that there will be 20 students per year admitted to the Programe.

The expert group concluded that the APN program is meeting a societal need in Western Lithuania region and believe it will have an important impact on the health care system.

- *Evaluation of the conformity of the study programme aims and outcomes with the mission, objectives of activities and strategy of the HEI.*

  Indicator analysis, expert assessment

KU has prepared and accepted the KU development strategy 2021-2030 where it is stated that ,,The University aims to contribute to the implementation of the Lithuanian Progress Strategy 2030 by creating a smart society, smart economy and smart management". There are some specific strategic directions of KU development strategy of addressing implementation of educational innovations to develop creativity and leadership and innovative systems for the health and socio-cultural needs of the individual and community.

The Faculty of Health Sciences has been running the first-cycle Nursing study programme since 2001 and the second-cycle Nursing since 2005 which has an important impact on welfare of society and the health care system in the Western Lithuania region. Furthermore in 2020, Faculty of Health Sciences approved a new science strategy ,,Health 360", the aim of which is to ensure smart health solutions by promoting the health and well-being of all age groups.

The expert group concluded that the new APN programme follows the mission, objectives and strategy of the KU and wishes to prepare nursing professionals who could significantly contribute to the health care system in Lithuania.

- *Evaluation of the compliance of the study programme with legal requirements.*

  Indicator analysis, expert assessment

KU prepared a new study programme Advanced practice nursing according to European Parliament and Council Directive 2013/55/EU of 2013-11-20 on the recognition of professional qualifications, the order of the Ministry of Health of the Republic of Lithuania on 7-4-2014 No. V-766 "On Approval of Advanced nursing practice guidelines", Order of the Ministry of Health of LT "On the Lithuanian Medical Norm MN 160:2017 "Advanced Practitioner Nurse" (July 7, 2017, No. V-852) and based on the Law on Nursing Practice and Midwifery Practice of the LT (2001-06-28, No. IX-413).

The design of APN program is the second cycle study programme focused on gaining practical professional competences of nurses. Three different specializations are prepared for future students: Primary Health Care; Anaesthesia and Intensive Care; and Emergency Medical Assistance. All 3 specializations offer 18 ECTS of specific in-depth theoretical knowledge and 30 ECTS of clinical practice and will be offered as parallel for all 3 specializations. Students will have to choose one specialization at the beginning of the first semester.

The expert group read the documentation carefully and concluded that the program aims, learning outcomes and modules (specializations) meets the legal acts and requirements.

- *Evaluation of compatibility of aims, learning outcomes, teaching/learning and assessment methods of the study programme.*

  Indicator analysis, expert assessment

The Program is sequenced logically. The Learning outcomes are described at the academic level required and are appropriate and relevant for the program and each of the specialist clinical outcomes. There is generally the appropriate level of balance between clinical and theory and during the visit it was apparent to the experts that although some subjects have a high amount of independent study support from the academic team is available to students as they participate in this aspect of their studies at dedicated times each week.

The assessment methods of the students are appropriate and relevant for all theoretical courses and there was additional evidence submitted that assured that the students would be assessed adequately in practice by prepared clinical mentors. However within this document there was not adequate information about how mentors should respond when students are failing in practice. This needs to be included within the mentorship framework.

Study program consists of only one research methodology based subject with contact hours, namely Methodology and Statistical Solutions for Quantitative and Qualitative research in Nursing Science. There are 2 more obligatory subjects: Scientific Work (6 ECTS, second semester, no contact hours) and Master Thesis (30 ECTS, fourth semester, no contact hours). For learning and Individual student work for all subjects, much relevant literature is available either in physical form or as online remote access in Lithuanian and English language.

- *Evaluation of the totality of the study programme subjects/modules, which ensures consistent development of competences of students.*

  Indicator analysis, expert assessment

The study program is logically designed. The general and in-depth theoretical knowledge and clinical practice is balanced over the first three semesters, in the last 4th semester students will have time to prepare and defend their Master thesis and Qualifying Exam. Obligatory and elective theoretical subjects have 6 ECTS which is referred to 160 hours. 1 ECTS is equal to 26,6 hours in this study programme. Theoretical subjects with 6 ECTS have from 15-20 hours of Theory, from 10-15 hours of Practice, 15 hours of online supervision and 115 hours of Independent student work. For elective Clinical practice subjects only Independent student work is listed, although students will need support and supervision from clinical mentors.

- *Evaluation of opportunities for students to personalise the structure of the study programme according to their personal learning objectives and intended learning outcomes*

  Indicator analysis, expert assessment

It is necessary for students to select what clinical speciality they would like to specialise in during their first semester: **primary health care, anaesthesia and intensive therapy or emergency medicine**. This decision will determine some of the modules that they undertake and the clinical placement areas they are allocated throughout their course of study. Students will also be able to select the focus of study for some of their modules making the course appropriate and relevant to their area of speciality.

Main distinctive features of the area:

1. Study programme Advanced Practice Nursing is well and logically designed.
2. The structure of the program and study design are coherent to aims and learning outcomes.

Areas for improvement:

1. It is recommended that the Department enhance the mentorship framework to provide specific advice to students and mentors about the process to be followed when students are failing in clinical practice.

Corrections made based on expert recommendations *(to be completed if the experts submit a proposal to revise the programme within 10 working days)*

Within a 10 day period the department submitted a document entitled - Guideline on clinical nurse in APN mentoring competence criteria - that detailed clearly how the mentors should support and monitor a student that is failing in practice and detailed what support was available to the mentors and students. The experts therefore concluded that this recommendation was met.

2.2. LINKS BETWEEN SCIENTIFIC (ART) AND STUDY ACTIVITIES

The evaluation area is analyzed according to the following indicators:

- *Evaluation of the sufficiency of the science (art) activities implemented by the HEI for the field of research (art) related to the field of study.*

  Indicator analysis, expert assessment

At the Department of Nursing they follow the KU strategy about scientific direction "Towards sustainable health and well-being". During 2020-2023 department teachers prepared 11 publications and scientific pedagogical staff of the Department of Nursing published 127 publications with the topics: patient safety, application and development of nurses' competencies in studies and practice, leadership of nurses, solutions to ethical dilemmas in nursing, decision-making in nursing practice, development of the nurse's professional identity in studies and practice, nurse's professional dignity, empowering patients and their relatives for self-care, stress experienced by nurses, soft/general competences of nurses, ect.

Many projects and research topics are ongoing and have international partners: Current topics of ongoing research for the APN master's programme: relationships between nursing students and patients, stress management of nurses in health care institutions, quality of adolescent mental health, post-traumatic stress and symptoms of secondary traumatic stress, the link between nurses' mental health and the clinical learning environment, the role of patients in the clinical education of nurses, nurses' cooperation of teachers with nursing students in clinical settings and supervision, perception and management of pain in newborns, oncodiagnostics, work performance of the operative team, otolaryngological diagnostics, occupational stress, physical functionality and quality of life in pulmonary hypertension, moral courage of nurses, implementation of integrated health care, physical capacity of patients after myocardial infarction. There are plans for further studies (see below) that the review panel confirmed on the visit would be supported by management financially.

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- *Evaluation of the link between the content of the study programme and the latest developments in science, art and technology.*

  Indicator analysis, expert assessment

Advanced nursing practice is an area which is not known in many countries, not even in the EU. In Lithuania five nursing specializations are currently approved (mental health, anesthesia and intensive care, community nursing, operative nursing, emergency medical care), but this is not sufficient for advanced practice in nursing. They are already very research active with many of the staff publishing internationally in a wide range of topics and areas related to APN course. Additionally, the management of KU and the Department, teaching staff and program developers

have many new ideas about research and collaboration at all levels of nursing studies national and international.

Program developers should consider adding more contents relevant for future nurses regarding technologies: clinical decision support system and AI support, e-health, digital solutions in health and social care, telecare, smart technologies, remote patient monitoring, risk tools, apps ect.; and some solutions relevant for organization and management such as: electronic records, AI supported triage system, AI supported word/shift schedule, digital debriefing, errors analysis tools, health data analytics, ect.
And expert panel also suggest adding more contents of transcultural nursing due to different social and age groups, migrations, ect.

Main distinctive features of the area:

1. Respective number of publications and research.
2. Open for suggestion in future research and collaboration.

Areas for improvement:

1. Expert panel suggests that the Department consider adding some specific, important and relevant course contents about digitalization, AI technologies, ect, and transcultural nursing into the program.

Corrections made based on expert recommendations *(to be completed if the experts submit a proposal to revise the programme within 10 working days)*

Within a 10 day period the Program promoters submitted two updated module descriptors that demonstrated they will be explicitly covering the topics Artificalt Inteligence (AI) and transcultural nursing in the Program. The AI topic was added to the module <u>Nursing Leadership, Health Policy, Economics</u> and <u>Technologies and Research Paper</u>. The topic of transcultural nursing was added to the module <u>Health Psychology, Communication, Professional Mentoring and Ethics.</u> The experts concluded that this recommendation is now met.

2.3. STUDENT ADMISSION AND SUPPORT

The evaluation area is analyzed according to the following indicators:

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

Indicator analysis, expert assessment

Organisation of admission to KU is through LAMA BPO (Association of Lithuanian Higher Education Institutions for Centralised Admissions)- centralised system. The admission rules are approved by KU Senate and are detailed on their website. Individuals who hold a university bachelor's degree in nursing and midwifery or have completed relevant supplementary studies can enrol in these studies. Their competitive score is calculated through.

The selection and admission process for the second cycle studies in Advanced Nursing Practice at Klaipėda University is designed to be clear, well-structured, and accessible to all prospective students. Applicants are required to hold a bachelor's degree in the field of nursing or midwifery, or to have completed relevant additional studies, thereby ensuring that candidates possess the essential theoretical foundations and clinical competencies necessary for advanced professional practice. Admission is based on academic merit and follows a transparent, competitive ranking system that considers the weighted average of undergraduate grades, the final thesis or examination score, and, where applicable, additional achievements such as published scientific work or relevant professional experience. The detailed evaluation criteria, including the calculation of additional points, are publicly available, promoting fairness and openness throughout the process. Comprehensive information on admission requirements, procedures, timelines, and required documentation is easily accessible through both the Klaipėda University website and the national LAMA BPO platform, further enhancing transparency and standardization. The two-stage admission process ensures efficient allocation of study places and provides opportunities for applicants not admitted during the first round, with clearly defined priority rules applied in cases of identical competitive scores, thereby reinforcing the fairness and integrity of the selection procedure.

Applicants who have not previously undertaken state-funded master's level studies are eligible to apply for state-funded place on the program. Enrolling in the same or a lower-level study programme are not entitled to state-funded place. Individuals eligible for enrolment in APN master's studies course include those who have obtained a university bachelor's degree prior to admission, those holding a university bachelor's degree in general practice nursing or midwifery from the health sciences study group, and individuals with a professional bachelor's (college) degree who have completed additional nursing studies.

While it is preferable that applicants have at least three years of work experience in nursing practice, prior to being admitted to the course, this is not a mandatory requirement. One additional point is awarded to applicants who meet this criterion. The competitive score is calculated based on a predetermined formula, which includes the average of the grades from the diploma supplement and the grade of the bachelor's thesis or the average of final exam grades.

The KU website clearly presents the admission grades from the previous year, allowing prospective students to compare their results. The site is well-structured and provides all necessary information in both English and Lithuanian. Additionally, it features a chat box for inquiries and an accessible version for visually impaired users. According to university regulations, at least eight students must choose one of the three specialisations for the course to be offered.

It is clearly stated on the webpage of KU the grades of previous year admissions, so the student can compare his results, the webpage also has all the information in a clear, well-structured

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

Indicator analysis, expert assessment

Procedure of recognition of foreign qualifications and education is carried out by the Study Service based on the 2012 Description. The European Credit Accumulation and Transfer System (ECTS) is utilised. The process is 30 days from submission. Application process is clear through KU webpage https://apply.ku.lt, It can be evaluated as equivalent, giving certain rights but only in specific field, evaluation with additional requirements and rejection of recognition, this depends on the institution,

programme, provided documentation or Study Quality Assessment Center recommendations. The evaluation can be appealed within 10 working days Academic Recognition of Foreign Qualifications Concerning Higher Education Appeal Committee under the CQAHE. The procedure and requirements for recognition and appealing is very clearly stated on the website.

Partial study results of the same degree can be credited 100 percent for harmonized study content and up to 75 percent for unharmonized content. Informal and self-education can be credited up to 50 percent, but it is required for the person to be at least 23 years old and having at least 3 years of professional experience and a minimum of secondary education. The crediting process is followed by an individual study plan for the student, which is considerate.

The recognition process for foreign qualifications at KU is efficient and transparent, with clear guidelines for evaluation, credit transfer, and appeals, ensuring fairness for applicants while maintaining academic standards. The procedure is well-structured and user-friendly, offering flexibility for credit transfer (including informal education) and a reasonable appeals mechanism. However the expert panel did seek clarification from the KU academic team what subjects could and could not be considered for the recognition process for this particular Program as this was not clear in the documentation. In the opinion of the experts there are some subjects that students should not be exempted from the recognition process. Additional information was provided during the visit which assured the review team that only theoretical modules were to be considered.

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

Indicator analysis, expert assessment

Academic support is adequate with major medical databases provided for student research and knowledge needs. In the website there is also information about Virtual Learning System and Career Center. Importantly, for international students a Student Integration Specialist and their contact information are provided to help manage potential issues and offer support. EU-CONEXUS coworking space is available for students 24/7. The students also can get consultations with lecturers and/or thesis supervisors face-to-face and virtually in various platforms at assigned hours, which enables for deeper learning, solving issues and problems that are study-related. First year students are provided with curators to adapt to university. Students are also provided with a lot of possibilities of internships for week-semester period. KU provides students with 15 partner organizations for internships and collaboration. The Klaipėda University hospital has over 1300 beds, plenty of mentors for the mentorship of students. The mentors will be trained by the Continuous Education Center (through postgraduate/ post-diploma studies), where nurses can get additional qualification hours. They will be practitioners who received mentorship training although it is not mandatory. Evaluation of skill assessment will be ensured through a diary and mentor evaluation.
Mentors of student practice will be paid and get time for personal contact and for mentoring of students with patients. However, as mentioned in section 2.5 it is not detailed how the workload modelling will be implemented to accommodate this.

KU offers an extensive financial aid program with a wide range of scholarships. High-achieving students may qualify for Council Scholarships (awarded to those with strong academic performance over at least three semesters) or Senate Scholarships (granted to students with outstanding academic results and extracurricular involvement over four or more semesters, with an average of nine awarded annually). Through subsidies of accommodation, tuition reductions, and social scholarships, the university offers significant assistance to underprivileged students.

In addition, the university provides substantial support to underprivileged students through accommodation subsidies, tuition reductions, and social scholarships.

There are special provisions for students with disabilities, including €128 in semester-based study compensations and €160 monthly stipends. KU distributes approximately 28 special scholarships annually and collaborates with 14 partner organizations to provide additional scholarships. With half of their program fees going directly toward dissertation work, doctoral candidates receive specialized research support.

Social engagement is provided through various activities organised by KU: choir, folk art ensemble, student theatre, guitar studio, dance groups, sports teams and clubs, as well as volunteering section. The university website also offers many useful links to help students integrate smoothly into university life and different cities. Additionally, it provides information about visiting professors and upcoming events.

Psychological support according to the website is provided by counselling psychologists, it is a free consultation service, the phone number and email of the specialist is provided. Additionally, pastoral care is provided. The website also provides links and hotlines for support.

- *Evaluation of the sufficiency of study information and student counselling.*

  Indicator analysis, expert assessment

KU provides study curators who help students adapt and can be contacted by phone or email. Counselling about study programmes or subjects is provided through appointed admissions by the head of the programme and lecturers. Supervisors are provided for thesis writing. Additionally, during final thesis writing, students can get access to other lecturers. The student counselling is ensured by lecturers having official assigned hours for the sole purpose of consulting and advising students. Consultations can be in different formats - emails, call platforms.

Main distinctive features of the area:

1. Wide range of social support available for students.
2. Clear website navigation.

Areas for improvement:
    None

2.4. STUDYING, STUDENT PERFORMANCE AND GRADUATE EMPLOYMENT

The evaluation area is analyzed according to the following indicators:

- *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.*

The teaching and learning process is organized in semesters, four in total. In all semesters APN master's students are expected to pass 30 ECTS. The study process of the APN master's program progresses in a systematic and logically structured manner across all semesters.

The curriculum is built coherently, starting with theoretical fundamentals and advancing toward specialized expertise and clinical practice, culminating in research work and qualification. The first semester lays a strong theoretical foundation through three core subjects (18 ECTS) and the initiation of specialization studies (6 ECTS), along with the first clinical practice (6 ECTS). This phase supports students' development in core competencies such as clinical assessment, diagnostics, and pharmacology. Specialization studies begin early, allowing students to focus from the start. The second semester deepens research and clinical skills. It includes two field-specific subjects (12 ECTS), one specialization subject (6 ECTS), and an extended clinical practice (12 ECTS). Research competence is significantly developed through a dedicated research methods course and the preparation of a term paper, serving as an introduction to the final thesis. The continuation of specialization studies supports the logical build-up of expertise. The third semester emphasizes broader professional competencies such as leadership, communication, ethics, and health policy. Alongside these, students continue specialization studies (6 ECTS) and engage in clinical practice III (12 ECTS), gaining more in-depth practical experience. This phase demonstrates a pedagogically sound progression toward greater responsibility and expanded practice roles. The final semester is dedicated to the preparation of the master's thesis (30 ECTS) and the qualifying examination. This phase represents the culmination of prior studies and allows students to integrate their research and clinical expertise. Supervision is provided by qualified professionals with extensive academic and clinical backgrounds.

The APN master's program employs a diverse and pedagogically well-grounded range of teaching and learning methods, which encourage students to be active participants in their own learning process. The Program utilizes informational methods such as lectures, seminars, discussions, and counseling. These are not limited to knowledge transfer but aim to develop contextual understanding, independent thought, and professional judgment. Hands-on learning is embedded through practical-operational methods including clinical placements, teamwork, the use of simulation tools, and data collection activities. These strategies help students to integrate theory into clinical practice, build confidence, and develop practical competences essential for advanced nursing roles. Problem-solving methods, such as clinical case analysis and simulations, directly involve students in active learning. These methods bridge theoretical knowledge and practical skills, stimulating critical and analytical thinking. The programme also incorporates soft skill development through group work, reflection, public presentations, and solution-focused discussion. These activities help students improve communication, teamwork, and ethical reasoning. Students are encouraged to take ownership of their learning through methods such as situation analysis, peer discussions, and reflective practice. These strategies enhance creativity, autonomy, and metacognitive skills. Research-based learning methods such as literature review, research project design, and presentation of findings are embedded throughout the programme. This ensures that students not only gain theoretical knowledge of research but actively apply it.

Independent study constitutes a fundamental component of the learning process, with the study programme requiring a total of 800 hours of student-directed learning. Independent work may also take place as part of group activities, providing students with opportunities to learn from one another and to develop their collaboration and teamwork skills. It is acknowledged that students may encounter challenges during independent study, particularly in relation to time management. In such

cases, appropriate support mechanisms are in place. During the visit, the university representatives clarified that students are encouraged to seek assistance from teaching staff and may receive personalised academic guidance to facilitate their learning.

Students are assessed throughout the learning process via various tasks and feedback discussions, which support continuous development. The evaluation methods are student-centered, and diverse. They emphasize active learning, critical thinking, and practical applications, supporting student engagement and skill development. The assessments are comprehensive and development-oriented, fostering deep learning and continuous professional growth.

The document provides a comprehensive description of further opportunities for graduate studies, covering both international professional development options, such as seminars, conferences, and internships, as well as academic postgraduate studies. The document outlines flexible options for students, allowing them to pursue studies in various fields, including health sciences and social sciences, and to apply for doctoral programs in multiple disciplines. Furthermore, the document justifies the significance of nursing science by highlighting its interdisciplinary nature and the important role of nursing in various sectors, thereby offering a thorough overview of both academic and professional development pathways within the field.

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

  Indicator analysis, expert assessment

The document does not specifically mention a separate counseling service that supports students with special needs before the start of their studies. It does not address, for example, support measures during the application process, individual guidance discussions, or specialized academic counseling services that would assist socially vulnerable groups or students with special needs in gaining access to studies and receiving information about available support options.

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

  Indicator analysis, expert assessment

Students starting their studies at Klaipeda University sign a contract in which they undertake to comply with the academic discipline and student ethics requirements stipulated in Klaipeda University documents. The principles and means of ensuring academic honesty, tolerance and non-discrimination are defined by the code of academic ethics of Klaipeda University (2015; new edition 2019).

Students' written assignments are checked using plagiarism detection software. During the visit to the Klaipeda University on 4th April, the representatives of the university also explained that the university has also developed a program that detects the use of artificial intelligence in written tasks.

- *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.*

  Indicator analysis, expert assessment

Based on the Program descriptor the procedures for submitting and handling complaints and requests for corrections related to the study process are clearly defined and systematically applied.

The study regulations include detailed instructions on when and how a student can request a correction regarding exam evaluations, course work, or thesis defense procedures. Deadlines (2–3 days for the correction request and 3 days for the response) ensure a swift processing of requests. There are multiple opportunities for appeal. Initially, students can submit a correction request to the instructor and, if necessary, escalate the matter to the department head, dean, or the administration and student dispute resolution commission. For the thesis, the decision of the qualification commission is final, although appeals related to defense procedures are handled separately.

To ensure independence and fairness, several parties are involved in the evaluation process: instructors, department heads, deans, and possibly a specially convened commission. The commission hears the student's perspective before making a decision. Transparency and communication are ensured, as students' rights and procedures are publicly available on the university's website.

Main distinctive features of the area:

1. Systematic and student-centered approach to teaching and learning.
2. Comprehensive and transparent procedures for support, appeals, and academic integrity.

Areas for improvement:
None

2.5. TEACHING STAFF

The evaluation area is analyzed according to the following indicators:

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

Indicator analysis, expert assessment

As detailed in the program Descriptor there will be 26 lecturers delivering the APN program. The experts were provided with the CV's of all these staff members and were pleased to see that many of these staff were from the discipline of nursing and a significant proportion of them (46%) were qualified to masters level and beyond. There are 5 Professors and 13 Associate Professors involved in the delivery of the program and the lead of the curriculum working group was a Professor with a nursing background. There are a proportion of the academic staff to be involved in the teaching of the program who are not from a nursing discipline background but the range of other healthcare discipline backgrounds of the teaching staff are appropriate and relevant and in some cases, for example, medical doctors are necessary for the course delivery. All staff involved in the program delivery have the workload capacity at the moment to deliver this program in its initial years of delivery according to the predicted intakes (20 students per year). The expert group were satisfied that the range and number of staff involved in the delivery of the program was appropriate and

relevant to the program and they were assured in the visit by Faculty Management and administrative representatives that as student numbers grew there would be investment in additional staff. The expert group were reassured by this commitment and reinforced that this was necessary for the sustainability of the program.

The one area that was not covered adequately within the program Descriptor or during the visit was the identification and preparation of the clinical mentors. The college administration, the developers of the Program descriptor, the intended teachers of the Program and the social partners/ employers all expressed during the visit that there was an adequate number of mentors in all of the clinical areas for each of the three specialist routes but they could not clearly define who these people would be and how they would be prepared as mentors. Additional information was provided to the evaluation team immediately after the visit that provided reassurance that there was a planned and suitable mentorship training framework that would be delivered by the continuous development department in KU. This needs some enhancement particularly in the situation where a student if failing clinically and this is to be addressed (see section 2.1 of the report)

● *Evaluation of the conditions to improve the competences of the teaching staff.*

Indicator analysis, expert assessment

The teaching staff involved in the delivery of this program are all currently members of the faculty at KU and will be expected to continue to develop academically as outlined in the program Descriptor through research and mobility opportunities. During the expert visit the experts were assured in the session with faculty management and teachers of the program that funding is provided for the development of staff competencies specifically in terms of research. For the APN program it is crucial that some of the teaching staff have clinical competency and expertise so that upon graduation the APN are competent and safe. The experts were reassured of this through the academic staff CV's, the evidence that some of the teaching staff still hold a dual clinical role and through meeting many of these types of staff during the visit.

Although it was stated during the visit that all clinical mentors will all have rich and appropriate professional background to undertake this role as stated above this is one area the expert panel would like assurance of. They would like to know how the workload of these individuals will be adapted so they can undertake the role and how they will be prepared to undertake this role competently.

Main distinctive features of the area
1. A highly qualified and relevant academic team.
2. Evidence of conditions to ensure continuous professional development of team.

Areas for improvement:

1. Provide details of how clinical mentors will be selected and prepared for their role.
2. Provide information about how the workload of mentors will accommodate their commitment to students.

Corrections made based on expert recommendations (to be completed if the experts submit a proposal to revise the programme within 10 working days)

Within a 10 day period the Department submitted clarification about how clinical mentors would be selected and prepared for their role. It provided details of the qualifications that a mentor would need to hold to supervise a student and also they provided a document entitled - Guideline on clinical nurse in APN mentoring competence criteria - that detailed clearly what was expected of the mentor in terms of time, competency and supervision. They also stated that they would be employing a part time member of staff that would be responsible for practice management and mentoring. This person will be overseeing the practice placement element of the program so this provides assurance that this part of the program will be adequately resources and supervised. Reassurance was also provided that the practice placement partners would allow staff the time needed to be clinical mentors. The experts therefore concluded that these recommendations are now met.

2.6. FACILITIES AND LEARNING RESOURCES

The evaluation area is analyzed according to the following indicators:

- *Evaluation of the suitability and adequacy of the physical, informational and financial resources of the study programme to ensure an effective learning process.*

Indicator analysis, expert assessment

The physical resources available for the programme at Klaipėda University (KU) are extensive and well-suited for supporting effective learning. The classrooms of the Faculty of Health Sciences are equipped with up-to-date multimedia and video conferencing equipment, ensuring a dynamic and interactive learning environment. Additionally, specialized computer classrooms and a distance learning auditorium further enhance the learning experience. There are also three large auditoriums which are equipped with teleconference broadcasting and reception equipment, making them suitable for larger events and student activities, including conferences and thesis defences. The use of these spaces for both academic and extracurricular activities demonstrate KU's commitment to providing diverse learning environments that cater to different needs and group sizes. Moreover, KU places significant emphasis on inclusivity, ensuring that students with special needs have access to adapted premises. The university has implemented various measures, including lifts for students with mobility impairments, specialized equipment for students with visual or other disabilities, and dedicated classrooms designed to accommodate students with specific learning needs.

For a clinical based Program it is necessary that there are good simulation facilities and at KU the facilities are sufficient for the immediate implementation of the program but there is a more sophisticated and larger clinical skills facility planned that will significantly enhance the teaching environment for both students and staff on this Program.

KU offers a robust array of informational resources that support the study process. The virtual learning environment, Moodle, plays a central role in delivering education, enabling teachers to provide various teaching methods and resources. Moodle integrates tools for video lectures, communication, feedback, and collaboration, ensuring that students have access to a comprehensive learning experience both inside and outside the classroom. The university's commitment to maintaining up-to-date software is reflected in its use of legal software, regular audits, and the availability of educational licenses. Additionally, KU provides students and staff with access to Microsoft Office 365, which facilitates collaboration through tools such as Microsoft Teams and OneDrive. The inclusion of software like SPSS and PSPP for statistical analysis further enhances

the academic resources available to students. KU also subscribes to a wide range of digital resources through 28 databases, ensuring that students have access to a wealth of academic articles, books, and journals. Notably, KU offers remote access to these resources, making them available to students anytime, anywhere.

KU's commitment to inclusivity is evident in the wide range of support services and specialized equipment provided for students with special needs. The university offers various assistive technologies, such as text-to-speech converters, screen magnifiers, and Braille printing services, to ensure that students with visual impairments or learning disabilities can fully participate in their studies. In addition to assistive technologies, KU provides tailored support for students with mobility impairments, including accessible classrooms and lifts. The university also offers psychological and pastoral support for students facing psychological challenges, further ensuring that all students have the opportunity to succeed academically.

- *Evaluation of the planning and upgrading of resources needed to carry out the study programme.*

  Indicator analysis, expert assessment

The expert panel observed the University facilities and had the opportunity to visit a large local hospital. The classroom, clinical skills and placement facilities were all of a standard needed to deliver the porgram. However, it was stated at the visit that there is a plan to build a larger more modern simulation center into the future and this will further enhance the facilities for the APN program.

Main distinctive features of the area:

1. Strong management commitment to ensuring adequate course facilities.

Areas for improvement:

1. The institution should commit to the build of a larger more modern simulation center into the future.

2.7. STUDY QUALITY MANAGEMENT AND PUBLICITY

The evaluation area is analyzed according to the following indicators:

- *Evaluation of the effectiveness of the internal quality assurance system of the studies.*

  Indicator analysis, expert assessment

The Program descriptor very clearly outlined the internal and external quality assurance systems of the University faculty and explained how they would be applied to this program. It described the quality assurance process surrounding the development of the program and it was evident to the expert panel during the visit that both internal and external stakeholders had been involved in development of the program. Specific to this program it was also evident that clinical experts had

been involved in the assurance of the speciality routes to ensure that the program was appropriate and relevant for the three clinical specialists routes being proposed.

The structure and content of courses within KU are reviewed annually and staff and students are all involved in this process. The expert panel met with current students of KU and were assured that they are involved in quality review and that the feedback received is enacted upon as necessary. Staff also explained how they receive feedback on their courses and implement enhancements as necessary. The expert panel were assured of the effectiveness of the internal quality assurance system of the studies.

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

   Indicator analysis, expert assessment

 Although the Program descriptor did not describe in full detail how students and other stakeholders were to be involved in the internal quality assurance of the Program it was evident from the university web site and through the discussions with students and stakeholders at the visit that they are involved in the quality assurance processes and evidence was provided of how the academic team use the feedback they receive from both students and stakeholders to enhance the program. The panel was assured that this feedback mechanism will continue as the Program is delivered.

Main distinctive features of the area:
   1. Robust quality assurance processes are in place that include all stakeholders.

Areas for improvement:
   None

III. RECOMMENDATIONS

Recommendations that the higher education institution have to take into account within 10 working days of the receipt of the draft report *(to be completed if the experts submit a proposal to revise the programme within 10 working days)*

1. Enhance the mentorship framework to provide specific advice to students and mentors about the process to be followed when students are failing in clinical practice.

Within a 10 day period the department submitted a document entitled - Guideline on clinical nurse in APN mentoring competence criteria - that detailed clearly how the mentors should support and monitor a student that is failing in practice and also detailed what support was available to the mentors and students. The experts therefore concluded that this recommendation was met.

2. Provide details of how clinical mentors will be selected and prepared for their role.

Within a 10 day period the department submitted clarification about how clinical mentors would be selected and prepared for their role. It provided details of the qualifications that a mentor would need to hold to supervise a student and also they provided a a document entitled - Guideline on clinical nurse in APN mentoring competence criteria - that detailed clearly what was expected of the mentor in terms of time, competency and supervision. They also stated that they would be employing a part time member of staff that would be responsible for practice management and mentoring. This person will be overseeing the practice placement element of the program so this provides assurance that this part of the program will be adequately resources and supervised. The experts therefore concluded that this recommendation is now met.

3. Provide Information about how the workload of mentors will be accommodated to ensure their commitment to students.

Reassurance was also provided that the practice placement partners would allow staff the time needed to be clinical mentors. The experts therefore concluded that this recommendation is now met.

Other recommendations:

1.We suggest that the Department consider adding some specific, important and relevant course contents about digitalization, Artificalt Inteligence technologies, ect, and transcultural nursing into the Program.

Within a 10 day period the department submitted two updated module descriptors that demonstrated they will be explicitly covering the topics AI and transcultural nursing in the program. The AI topic was added to the module Nursing Leadership, Health Policy, Economics and Technologies and Research Paper. The topic of transcultural nursing was added to the module Health Psychology, Communication, Professional Mentoring and Ethics. The experts concluded that this recommendation is now met.

3. The institution should commit to the build of a larger more modern simulation center into the future

There is still a commitment within the University for this to be an ambition but the experts cannot comment any further on this at the time of concluding the report.

IV. GENERAL ASSESSMENT

The **second cycle** study programme Advanced practice nursing at Klaipėda University is given **positive** evaluation.

No.	Evaluation Area	Evaluation of an Area in points*
1	Study aims, outcomes and content	4
2	Links between science (art) and studies	4
3	Student admission and support	5
4	Teaching and learning, student performance and graduate employment	4
5	Teaching staff	4
6	Learning facilities and resources	4
7	Study quality management and public information	5
	Total:	30

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

Expert panel chairperson signature:

Prof. dr. Lynn Kilbride

(signature)