SKVC

TOURISM AND LEISURE FIELD OF STUDY

Klaipeda University

EXTERNAL EVALUATION REPORT

Expert panel:
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4. Social partner representative: Zita Krūkonytė-Teryaeva
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I. INTRODUCTION

1.1. OUTLINE OF THE EVALUATION PROCESS

The field of study evaluations in Lithuanian higher education institutions (HEIs) are based on the following:

- Procedure for the External Evaluation and Accreditation of Studies, Evaluation Areas and Indicators, approved by the Minister of Education, Science, and Sport;
- Methodology of External Evaluation of Study Fields approved by the Director of the Centre for Quality Assessment in Higher Education (SKVC);
- Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area (ESG).

The evaluation is intended to support HEIs in continuous enhancement of their study process and to inform the public about the quality of programmes within the field of study.

The object of the evaluation is all programmes within a specific field of study. A separate assessment is given for each study cycle.

The evaluation process consists of the following main steps: 1) Self-evaluation and production of a self-evaluation report (SER) prepared by an HEI; 2) A site visit by the review panel to the HEI; 3) The external evaluation report (EER) production by the review panel; 4) EER review by the HEI; 5) EER review by the Study Evaluation Committee; 6) Accreditation decision taken by SKVC; 7) Appeal procedure (if initiated by the HEI); 8) Follow-up activities, which include the production of a Progress Report on Recommendations Implementation by the HEI.

The main outcome of the evaluation process is the EER prepared by the review panel. The HEI is forwarded the draft EER for feedback on any factual mistakes. The draft report is then subject to approval by the external Study Evaluation Committee, operating under SKVC. Once approved, the EER serves as the basis for an accreditation decision. If an HEI disagrees with the outcome of the evaluation, it can file an appeal. On the basis of the approved EER, SKVC takes one of the following accreditation decisions:

- **Accreditation granted for 7 years** if all evaluation areas are evaluated as exceptional (5 points), very good (4 points), or good (3 points).
- **Accreditation granted for 3 years** if at least one evaluation area is evaluated as satisfactory (2 points).
- **Not accredited** if at least one evaluation area is evaluated as unsatisfactory (1 point).

If the field of study and cycle were **previously accredited for 3 years**, the re-evaluation of the field of study and cycle is initiated no earlier than after 2 years. After the re-evaluation of the field of study and cycle, SKVC takes one of the following decisions regarding the accreditation of the field of study and cycle:

- To be accredited for the remaining term until the next evaluation of the field of study and cycle, but no longer than 4 years, if all evaluation areas are evaluated as exceptional (5 points), very good (4 points) or good (3 points).
- To not be accredited, if at least one evaluation area is evaluated as satisfactory (2 points) or unsatisfactory (1 point).

1.2. REVIEW PANEL

The review panel was appointed in accordance with the Reviewer Selection Procedure as approved by the Director of SKVC.

The composition of the review panel was as follows:

1. Panel chair: **Assoc. prof. dr. Rong Huang**
2. Academic member: **Prof. dr. Agita Livina**
3. Academic member: **Assoc. prof. dr. Philipp Wegerer**
4. Social partner representative: **Zita Krūkonytė-Teryaeva**
5. Student representative: **Rugilė Kriaučiūnaitė**

1.3. SITE VISIT

The site visit was organised on 23rd October 2025 onsite.

Meetings with the following members of the staff and stakeholders took place during the site visit:

- Senior management and administrative staff of the faculty(ies);
- Team responsible for preparation of the SER;
- Teaching staff;
- Students;
- Alumni and social stakeholders including employers.

There was no need for translation at meetings during the visit.

1.4. BACKGROUND OF THE REVIEW

Overview of the HEI

Klaipėda University (KU) is a multidisciplinary higher education institution in Lithuania, founded in 1991 following the restoration of the country's independence. It serves as a key centre for marine sciences, regional development, and applied research in the Baltic region, maintaining strong international cooperation within the EU-CONEXUS European University alliance. KU is governed by a Council (9 members), a Senate (35 members, including students), and a Rector supported by three Vice-Rectors overseeing studies, research and innovation, and infrastructure. The University currently comprises three faculties—the Faculty of Social Sciences and Humanities, the Faculty of Marine Technology and Natural Sciences, and the Faculty of Health Sciences—alongside two research institutes: the Institute of Baltic Region History and Archaeology, and the Marine Research Institute.

After a structural reform in 2019, KU streamlined its faculties and departments, now operating with 18 departments, 7 research and study centres, 2 museums, and over 60 laboratories. Over more than three decades, KU has developed a strong academic and research profile, offering 37 first-cycle and 36 second-cycle programmes, including its long-standing Recreation and Tourism programme established in 1998, which plays a central role in training specialists for Lithuania's tourism and leisure sector.

Overview of the study field

The Tourism and Leisure study field at KU is positioned as part of the university's interdisciplinary approach to regional and coastal development, integrating social sciences, geography, and business management. It contributes to KU's strategic emphasis on sustainable coastal and regional growth, aligning closely with the university's research in marine and environmental studies. The field benefits from active cooperation with regional tourism enterprises, municipalities, and international partners through projects such as EU-CONEXUS and HORIZON, which strengthen the integration of applied research and innovation in tourism and recreation. Within this framework, the study field supports KU's strategic goal of linking academic knowledge with the practical needs of Western Lithuania's tourism and leisure sector, promoting digitalisation, sustainability, and labour market responsiveness.

In 2024, the programmes were updated to align with the new Descriptor of the Study Field of Tourism and Leisure (Order No. V-1547, 30 September 2022), with revised learning outcomes, new and elective course units, and adjusted ECTS allocations while maintaining the total study scope. Graduates now obtain a Bachelor of Business Management degree and guide qualification, preparing them for careers as recreation and tourism managers, planners, or entrepreneurs. These updates were introduced in response to feedback from social partners and national policy changes, with a two-year transition period to ensure full implementation of the new Descriptor.

Previous external evaluations

The first- and second-cycle study programmes in the field of Tourism and Leisure at KU underwent international evaluation in April 2022, resulting in the first-cycle Recreation and Tourism programme being accredited for three years and the second-cycle Recreation and Tourism Management programme for the maximum seven-year period by the Centre for Quality Assessment in Higher Education.

Documents and information used in the review

The following documents and/or information have been requested/provided by the HEI before or during the site visit:
- *Self-evaluation report and its annexes*

- *Final theses*

The following additional sources of information have been used by the review panel:
1. Module descriptions of all elective modules, modules in E-Tourism and Health Tourism specialisation.
2. Annex 1.
3. Answer to the question regarding the needs of society and labour market.
4. General Requirements for Independent Written Papers of Klaipeda University Students (2020).
5. Composition of the thesis defense committee (2022, 2023, 2024).
6. Six departmental meeting minutes (2022 to 2024).
7. Templates of Survey.

II. STUDY PROGRAMMES IN THE FIELD

First cycle/LTQF 6

Title of the study programme	**Recreation and Tourism**
State code	**612ILX059**
Type of study (college/university)	University
Study cycle	First cycle
Mode of study (full time/part time) and nominal duration (in years)	Full time, daytime schedule (3 years)
Workload in ECTS	180
Award (degree and/or professional qualification)	Bachelor of Business Management
Language of instruction	Lithuanian, English, Russian
Admission requirements	Secondary education
First registration date	**19-05-1997**
Comments (including remarks on joint or interdisciplinary nature of the programme, mode of provision)	

III. ASSESSMENT IN POINTS BY CYCLE AND EVALUATION AREAS

The **first cycle** of the Tourism and Leisure field of study is given a **positive** evaluation.

No.	Evaluation Area	Evaluation points[*]
1.	Study aims, learning outcomes and curriculum	3
2.	Links between scientific (or artistic) research and higher education	4
3.	Student admission and support	3
4.	Teaching and learning, student assessment, and graduate employment	4
5.	Teaching staff	4
6.	Learning facilities and resources	4
7.	Quality assurance and public information	3
	Total:	25

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[*]

1 (unsatisfactory) - the area does not meet the minimum requirements, there are substantial shortcomings that hinder the implementation of the programmes in the field.
2 (satisfactory) - the area meets the minimum requirements, but there are substantial shortcomings that need to be eliminated.
3 (good) - the area is being developed systematically, without any substantial shortcomings.
4 (very good) - the area is evaluated very well in the national context and internationally, without any shortcomings.
5 (exceptional) - the area is evaluated exceptionally well in the national context and internationally.

IV. STUDY FIELD ANALYSIS

AREA 1: STUDY AIMS, LEARNING OUTCOMES AND CURRICULUM

1.1.	Programmes are aligned with the country's economic and societal needs and the strategy of the HEI

FACTUAL SITUATION

1.1.1. Programme aims and learning outcomes are aligned with the needs of the society and/or the labour market

As indicated in the Self-Evaluation Report (SER) (point 21, pp. 8–9), the aim of the first-cycle *Recreation and Tourism* study programme is to train high-skilled tourism and recreation professionals, familiar with the regularities and issues related to the recreation and tourism operation and service, who are able to maintain and improve the quality of recreation and tourism services and be able to participate in the process of analysis, administration, planning, and management.

Annex 2 indicates the Recreation and Tourism programme has 15 learning outcomes which address knowledge and its application (3 learning outcomes), abilities to conduct research (3 learning outcomes), special abilities (4 learning outcomes), social abilities (3 learning outcomes), and personal abilities (2 learning outcomes).

From the answer to the panel's initial clarification question, it is noted that the needs of the bachelor's degree programme are periodically monitored through collaboration with social partners and engagement with local communities. Labour market needs are identified in consultation with industry representatives, while societal and community needs related to recreation and tourism are assessed through the implementation of tourism projects, seminars, training sessions, and creative workshops. Based on recommendations from social partners, digital technologies have been strengthened in the curriculum, including the integration of GIS and map storytelling technologies into the "Tourism Geography" course, with additional credits allocated to this area following a reduction in the scope of "Professional Ethics." The "Learning Practice" course has been replaced with "Ecotourism Practice" to develop students' ability to organise tourism services in natural environments and to strengthen competencies as ecotourism and nature guides. Social partners also support the programme by offering access to sports and water equipment at cost price. Furthermore, new tourism concepts and thematic routes—such as Art Tourism, Geotourism, and Experience-based Nature Tourism—are being developed to reflect community needs, with the potential introduction of a Community-Based Tourism study programme under consideration.

However, the answer does not include references to statistical data or strategic documents at the regional, national, or international levels of the tourism sector. In addition, as the programme includes a relatively large cohort of Ukrainian students across different study levels, consultations limited to local and regional social partners may not fully capture the needs and perspectives of this group of international students.

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

The mission of KU is revealed in point 28 of the SER (p. 11) which is to be "an institution promoting the most important harmonious social, cultural and economic progress of the region, which activities are aimed at the development of creative personalities and the creation of public welfare". KU's vision for: "a university creating for the future with recognized international achievements in science and studies; and innovations relevant to the well-being of the Baltic Sea Region" (SER, point 29, p. 11). Its strategic priorities include creative person, value to the region, community well-being (SER, point 30, p. 11).

The Development Strategy of KU for 2021–2030, the KU strategic 2030 guidelines in the field of health sciences *Sveikata 360°*, and the strategy of the *Smart Urban Coastal Sustainability (EU-CONEXUS)* alliance focus on the development of health tourism and coastal tourism.

ANALYSIS AND CONCLUSION (regarding 1.1.)

The programme demonstrates an active and systematic approach to monitoring societal and labour market needs through regular consultation with social partners and engagement with local communities. These consultations have led to tangible curriculum updates, including the integration of digital technologies such as GIS and map storytelling, and the introduction of the "Ecotourism Practice" course to strengthen students' professional competencies in sustainable and nature-based tourism. The involvement of social partners in providing resources and opportunities for practical training further supports the relevance of the study process to real industry conditions. Additionally, the development of new tourism concepts and thematic routes indicates responsiveness to emerging trends and community needs within the tourism and recreation sectors.

However, the evidence presented does not include references to statistical data or broader strategic frameworks at the regional, national, or international levels that would demonstrate alignment with wider tourism development priorities. Furthermore, while engagement with local and regional stakeholders is strong, the consultation process does not appear to explicitly address the needs of international student groups, such as the relatively large cohort of Ukrainian students enrolled in the programme. Expanding stakeholder engagement to include international or cross-cultural perspectives could therefore enhance the inclusiveness and global relevance of the programme's development.

The Panel concludes that the programme actively engages with social partners and communities to ensure the curriculum remains relevant and responsive to local and regional tourism needs. However, to strengthen this approach, the Panel recommends that the programme should more systematically incorporate statistical and strategic data at broader levels and ensure that the perspectives of international student groups are adequately considered in future needs analyses and curriculum planning.

The study programme in the field of Tourism and Leisure is fully aligned with KU's strategic priorities of fostering creative people, creating value for the region, and promoting community well-being. Its primary contribution lies in generating regional value through science-based, sustainable coastal development and innovative, practice-oriented studies. The programme supports these goals by equipping students with competencies in management and related sciences, data analysis, applied research, and forecasting within tourism and recreation business contexts. Students develop the ability to interpret research results, model problem-solving strategies, assess tourism changes, and apply statistical, geoinformation, and econometric methods. Furthermore, the programme promotes critical reflection and social responsibility, ensuring graduates understand the broader economic, cultural, and environmental impacts of their professional activities. In total, seven of the new programme's learning outcomes directly contribute to achieving KU's strategic goal of creating value for the region. Therefore, the review panel concludes that the aim and learning outcome of the Recreation and Tourism programme conform with mission, goals and strategy of KU.

1.2.	Programmes comply with legal requirements, while curriculum design, curriculum, teaching/learning and assessment methods enable students to achieve study aims and learning outcomes

FACTUAL SITUATION

1.2.1. Programmes comply with legal requirements

The learning outcomes of the Recreation and Tourism programme are outlined in Point 26 and Annex 2 of the SER. Point 26 indicates clear changes comparing with old programme learning outcomes.

The Bachelor's programme comprises 180 ECTS credits, including 135 ECTS for study field course units (23 ECTS within the selected specialisation), 15 ECTS for practical training, 15 ECTS for the final thesis, and 15 ECTS allocated to general university and elective courses, with specialisations offered in Health Tourism and E-Tourism. The credit structure follows the European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System (ECTS) and the principles set out in the ECTS Users' Guide (2015), ensuring a student-centred approach. KU's Study Regulations specify contact and independent work hours, define a minimum of 3 ECTS per course unit, and require periodic attestation and annual curriculum reviews to maintain academic quality and alignment with institutional and stakeholder feedback.

The meeting with the senior management during the visit confirms that in every study programme including the Recreation and Tourism programme, when they are preparing the programme, they need to follow the government regulations, which is mandatory. They have annual programme reviews and constantly monitor policy updates.

The meeting with the teaching staff confirms that elements of professional ethics, quality assurance, and social responsibility are included in most modules. Research ethics is introduced in the first-year methodology course, where students study principles of academic ethics.

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

The aim of the programme is presented in Point 21 of the SER, while the programme learning outcomes are outlined in Point 26 and Annex 2. Annex 2 also illustrates the relationship between the programme learning outcomes and the corresponding course units. Annex 3 provides detailed information on the teaching, learning, and assessment methods applied across individual modules.

The Recreation and Tourism programme incorporates a variety of general and specialised research methods. These include systematic, comparative, statistical, econometric, geoinformation, spatial, and qualitative analyses, as well as the use of analytical tools such as PEST and SWOT analyses, surveys, and excursion planning. The application of these methods is embedded within relevant course units.

A selection of module descriptions was provided upon request. These descriptions include explanations of the content, teaching and learning methods, and assessment approaches used to achieve the intended course learning outcomes. In some instances, module learning outcomes are not explicitly stated (for example, in *Health Tourism Investment Project Management*, *E-Marketing*, and *Tourism E-Services*). The available documentation does not specify how individual module learning outcomes correspond to the overall programme learning outcomes. Multiple academic sources in Lithuanian and English are provided as core and additional sources in different modules.

1.2.3. Curriculum ensures consistent development of student competences

Annex 2 includes the new learning outcomes of Recreation and Tourism Programme. Within these learning outcomes, the learning outcomes 4 to 15 are directly related to students' competences. Point 39 of the SER and Annex 1 Study Plan illustrates the structure of the programme.

Point 41 explains the most recent changes to the study plan. It indicates that these changes were made taking into account the feedback and recommendations of the graduates of the study programme, as well as the aim of applying modern digital technologies.

The meeting with the SER team indicated that the student competences outlined in the descriptor are addressed individually within the curriculum but are integrated across different module designs. Elective modules are adapted according to the semester in which they are delivered, taking into account students' abilities and the corresponding level of academic requirements.

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

As indicated in Point 42 of the SER, students' possibilities to personalise studies are regulated by KU *Study Regulations* (2024), KU Rector's Orders on the *Description of the Examination Session Procedure in the Autumn/Spring Semesters of Academic Years 2022-2023, 2023-2024, 2024-2025* (the document is prepared every semester), the *Description of the Procedure of the Choice of Electives at KU*, and other documents (e.g., resolutions of the Faculty Council).

The students have following a range of possibilities to individualise their study plan (Point 42, SER, p. 14):

1. Students can personalise up to 20 ECTS of their study plan.
2. Students can choose two foreign language course units (3 ECTS) — options include English, German, and Spanish (updated annually).
3. Students may choose between two specialisations: Health Tourism and E-Tourism (each 23 ECTS).
4. Flexibility options include:
   - Individual exam session schedules for justified reasons (illness, parenthood, or work commitments).
   - Participation in mobility programmes, choosing external courses or internships beyond the standard plan.
   - Freedom to select internship locations, final thesis topics, or to complete studies earlier.
5. Students can participate in international opportunities, such as:
   - Study schools, research and study projects, and field trips (fully or partially funded).
   - EU-CONEXUS Minors, allowing participation in modules taught in English with international peers and earning additional credits.
6. Students may take a temporary academic leave for personal or health reasons and resume studies afterward.

The meeting with students during the visit provided limited information, which was mainly due to the small number of local students in each cohort and the larger proportion of Ukrainian students, who demonstrated limited awareness of the personalised learning opportunities available within the programme.

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

As indicated in Point 46 of the SER (p. 15), KU regulates the preparation and defence of final theses through the General Requirements for Independent Written Papers (Senate Resolution No. 11-35, 2020; updated 2025) and the KU Study Regulations (2024). Thesis topics are announced at the beginning of the penultimate semester, with students able to choose or propose their own. The Dean, based on the Head of Department's recommendation, approves the thesis topics, supervisors, and the working schedule, which includes regular consultations, progress reports, and evaluation deadlines. Supervisors must hold an academic degree or title.

The Bachelor's Final Thesis Defence Committee consists of a chairperson and two academic members from the programme, and the defence is public (Point 47, p. 15). Assessment criteria include the relevance of the topic, research quality, validity of methods and results, independence of conclusions, and presentation competence. Between 2022 and 2024, nine bachelor theses were defended, five of which were prepared in response to social partner requests, with research findings shared with municipal institutions and communities. Annex 5 provides a list of these theses. Titles of these projects indicate relevance to communities and regions. Each thesis follows a standard structure—introduction, literature review, methodology, results, conclusions, and recommendations—and demonstrates applied research within recreation and tourism contexts.

During the visit, the meeting with the SER team indicated that the Bachelor programme defense committee typically consists of two academic staff members and one social partner. However, it was noted that, in practice, the committee has sometimes comprised three academic staff members, as efforts to include social partners have not always been successful. Additional information on the composition of the defense committees from 2022 to 2024 shows that all committees during this period were composed of three academic staff members, with two individuals serving continuously across the three years. The document entitled *General Requirements for Independent Written Papers* was requested; however, it does not contain information regarding the composition of the defense committee.

ANALYSIS AND CONCLUSION (regarding 1.2.)

A review of the aim and programme learning outcomes indicates that they are in accordance with the Law on Science and Studies of the Republic of Lithuania, the Descriptor of Study Cycles, and the Description of the Requirements for the Implementation of General Studies. As for the Descriptor of the Study Field of Tourism and Leisure (Order No. V-1547, 30 September 2022), KU's updated learning outcomes are largely compliant with the national descriptor requirements. They fully meet the standards for knowledge, research, special, and personal abilities.

For social abilities, KU's learning outcomes (11–13) largely correspond to the requirements of Order 21.4, with clear attention to communication, collaboration, and proficiency in Lithuanian and at least one foreign language. However, the elements related to professional ethics, responsibility for the quality of activities, and social responsibility (as specified in Order 21.4.3) are only indirectly addressed through the existing outcome on civic activity. A review of Annex 1 – Study Field Programme Plan confirms that several modules already embed these themes in practice. Therefore, the review panel concludes that the Recreation and Tourism programme meets the legal requirements for its field and cycle. Nonetheless, the Panel recommends that Learning Outcome 13 should be refined to explicitly reference ethical and responsible professional conduct.

An analysis of the SER and Annexes 1, 2, and 3 indicates that KU places a strong emphasis on research training by integrating a wide range of research methods and applied inquiry across both general and specialised modules of the Recreation and Tourism programme. The curriculum systematically incorporates diverse methodologies, including statistical, econometric, GIS, and qualitative approaches, reflecting an intention to develop students' analytical and investigative competences. However, during the meeting with students, only limited examples of research-related learning experiences were shared, despite repeated encouragement from the Panel. This raises uncertainty about the extent to which students are actively engaging with and benefiting from the programme's research-focused components.

A review of Annex 3 confirms that a wide variety of assessment methods is employed to evaluate student performance, supporting a comprehensive and student-centred approach. Nonetheless, the number and diversity of assessments across modules may risk creating an excessive workload. To ensure that assessments remain purposeful and proportionate to learning outcomes, the Panel recommends that the programme team periodically review the assessment system to confirm that assessment volume, frequency, and type are appropriately balanced. Meetings with teaching staff confirmed that assessments are developed in accordance with university regulations and designed with input from social partners and student feedback, which provides a strong foundation for such refinement.

A review of the module documentation shows inconsistencies in the presentation of module learning outcomes and an absence of clear alignment between module and programme learning outcomes. To address this, the Panel recommends that the programme team conduct a systematic review of all module descriptions to ensure that each includes clearly defined learning outcomes and demonstrates explicit alignment with the corresponding programme learning outcomes. This will enhance internal consistency and transparency across the curriculum.

The programme considers development of student competence. All the modules are clearly sated in Annex 2 indicates how they are related to different learning outcomes. Health tourism and e-tourism specilisations in the programme are gradually introduced and well-integrated within the overall programme. The meeting with the SER team and the teaching staff further confirm the development of student competence in a holistic manner. Therefore, based on the available evidence, the Panel concludes that the Programme is developed to ensure consistent development of competences of the students.

Although the programme has multiple elective mdoules as shown in Annex 1, due to the small number of the students in each cohort, in reality, the students are not free to choose but influenced to follow whether it is be their peer group or decision of their lecturers. The meeting with the students confirms that they were aware of different specialisations. However, small cohorts make impossible to choose but follow the decisions. The students were not forthcoming with their opinions despite multiple encouragement fromt the Panel. The meeting with alumni and social partners indicates their awarenesses of different personalised learning oppotunities. However, they all graduated before 2022. Based on the available evidence and the visit, the Panel concludes that although the programme has multiple options for the students to individualise their study, it needs to increase its recruitment and honour options for the students to choose.

The KU practice largely complies with the requirements of both the Descriptor of the Study Field of Tourism and Leisure (Order No. V-1547, 2022) and the Descriptor of Study Cycles (Order No. V-1012, 2016) for first-cycle (bachelor's) studies. The process ensures independent, applied research integrating theoretical and practical knowledge, with topics often linked to real regional or industry problems, satisfying the field's emphasis on practice orientation and stakeholder relevance.

However, the current composition of the Final Thesis Defence Committee does not explicitly include a practicing tourism specialist or a lecturer from another higher education institution, as required by Clause 35 of the Descriptor of Study Field of Tourism and Leisure. This omission represents a partial non-compliance with the field requirements concerning professional participation in assessment. Therefore, the Panel concludes that while the design, supervision, structure, and evaluation of theses meet the cycle-level standards for first-cycle applied research, the programme team should revise the committee composition to ensure inclusion of at least one a practicing tourism professional or a lecturer from another higher education institution—to achieve full compliance with the field descriptor and to enhance external objectivity and professional relevance in thesis evaluation.

AREA 1: CONCLUSIONS

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

COMMENDATIONS

- None

RECOMMENDATIONS

To address shortcomings

1. The programme team should revise the final thesis defense committee composition to ensure inclusion of at least one external member—either a practicing tourism professional or a lecturer from another higher education institution—to achieve full compliance with the field descriptor and to enhance external objectivity and professional relevance in thesis evaluation.

For further improvement

1. The programme team should more systematically incorporate statistical and strategic data at broader levels and ensure that the perspectives of international student groups are adequately considered in future needs analyses and curriculum planning.

2. Learning Outcome 13 should be refined to explicitly reference ethical and responsible professional conduct.

3. The programme team conduct a systematic review of all module descriptions to ensure that each includes clearly defined learning outcomes and demonstrates explicit alignment with the corresponding programme learning outcomes.

AREA 2: LINKS BETWEEN SCIENTIFIC (OR ARTISTIC) RESEARCH AND
HIGHER EDUCATION

2.1.	Higher education integrates the latest developments in scientific (or artistic) research and technology and enables students to develop skills for scientific (or artistic) research

FACTUAL SITUATION

2.1.1. Research within the field of study is at a sufficient level

As indicated in Point 50 of the SER, the core research of the Department of Social Geography and Tourism is the Competitiveness of the Coastal region, including Social and Spatial structures of the coastal region, coastal tourism planning and strategic development of Western Lithuania in the framework of the Baltic Sea region.

In 2019, the European University network for Smart Urban Coastal Sustainability (EU-Conexus) was established that strengthens the integration of the latest scientific and technological achievements in coastal zone sustainability and coastal tourism development. The European university consortium provides opportunities for students and staff in different ways such as joint research groups, new mobility forms, shared virtual libraries (SER, Point 78, p. 23).

A lot of research has been conducted in local communities and local business ecosystems. Research is carried out in cooperation with specialists of Western Lithuania and other social partners (SER, Point 58, p. 18). There are several scientific articles co-authored with researchers abroad (Poland, Latvia, Ukraine, Finland, Spain, the USA) (SER, Point 65, p. 20). The international forum "Innovations in Tourism – Here and Now!" (2022) organised in collaboration with scientists from Germany.

Eight international projects have been implemented during this period, six of which are financed by the EU Interreg program and focus on applied research (SER, Point 73, p. 21). KU is the project leader of four international projects from seven. Project topics are directly connected with tourism and recreation, such as nature-based tourism, wellness tourism, coastal tourism, off-season experiences, Baltic small ports and communities, seaside resorts, heritage, the heritage of the Curonian Lagoon, and tourism promotion.

Four projects funded by National institutions during this period (including the Research Council of Lithuania, the Lithuanian Council of Culture and the State Sports Support Fund), covering such research themes as unique natural resources for the improvement of mental and physical state, promotion of physical activities, studies of Klaipėda Old Town architecture and archisculptural installations for Klaipėda.

The Research project on natural resources and stress mental and physical state in collaboration with the Department of Health science is funded by the Ministry of Economy and Innovation.

During the evaluation period, two lecturers obtained PhD degrees in research related to tourism and recreation, including one from the University of Eastern Finland, which also strengthens international cooperation. The other teacher`s PhD was supervised by a professor from the Department of Social Geography and Tourism (SER, Point 61, 62, p.19).

KU provides 14 days long research mobility for academic staff once every 5 years (onsite, 23.10.2025.).

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

The main research topics for 2022-2024 are: Coastal tourism, Health tourism, Research on the South Baltic Seaside Resorts and Resort Areas and Tourism innovations.

The connection between research results and study courses and study content is excellently reflected, and research results in the form of methodological materials, book chapters, and articles are precisely indicated in the study courses (SER, Point 67-69, p. 20). For example, articles Expression of Behaviour and Attitudes Toward Sustainable Tourism in the Youth Population: a Search for Statistical Types, and Current Trends and Issues in Research on Biodiversity Conservation and Tourism Sustainability are analysed during the Sustainable Tourism and Introduction to Recreation and Tourism lectures. Article The Role of the Leader in the Integral System of Ethics Management in Municipalities is analysed in the teaching of the Leadership and Change Management course. Articles Changes in Tourism Market Geography in the Conditions of Uncertainties: a Case of Klaipeda , Changes and Perspectives of Tourism in a Reshaped World, and Curonian Spit Coastal Dunes Landscape: Climate Driven Change Calls for the Management Optimization are included in the teaching of International Tourism Geography and GIS Technologies and Recreation and Tourism Management (SER, Point 67, p. 20).

Lecturers participate in international research networks, and the number of scientific publications has increased by 5% compared to 2024 versus 2022. 40% of all publications are published in indexed databases as WoSc, and SCOPUS as well as in such journals as Tourism Recreation Research and International Journal of Spa and Wellness. 30% of publications are prepared with foreign co-authors. The teachers published a textbook in Lithuanian, "Nature tourist: Who is He and How to Find Him?". The book is used in the teaching such courses as Resort Management, Tourism Structure and resources, Recreation and Tourism Research (SER, Point 63-64, 68 p. 19). The study programme team organises international forum with international and national participants since 2018. In 2022 was organised an international forum "Innovations in tourism – Herte and Now!" (SER, Point 73, p. 21).

The social partners indicate that they invite submissions of topics for bachelor's theses (onsite, 23.10.2025.)

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

Point 58 of the SER indicates that the main methods of students involvement in the research are: quantitative and qualitative research methods, including field trips, business modelling and review of the management theories. Fifteen students participated in an international hackathon of the Light in the Dark project in 2025 to develop innovative week-long off season tourism packages.

It is mentioned in Point 87 of the SER that participation in the organisation of conferences and events as volunteers by acquiring skills to organise events. Participation in conferences, seminars and summer schools as listeners and participants with presentations, for example, 4 students participated with a presentations.

Topics of the students` Final Thesis are related to the Department`s Scientific and Technological Research (SER, Point 89, p.24). Social partners would be involved more frequently in the final thesis defence committee (Onsite, 23.10.2025.). Students are not using GIS for their Final Thesis (onsite, 23.10.2025.), they have a study course on International Tourism Geography and GIS Technology.

Research skills, including analytical skills, are not sufficiently developed during the studies (onsite, 23.10.2025).

Academic staff are proud that there are graduates who obtained PhD. The Young Scientists Conference is organised (Onsite, 23.10.2025.).

KU vessels are primarily dedicated to scientific research and maritime expeditions and are therefore not effectively utilised for study and research activities in the field of recreation and tourism studies

(Onsite, 23.10.2025). Their use for teaching purposes is constrained by several factors: a one-day charter of a fully crewed vessel costs approximately €1,500; sailing ships have limited capacity (up to 20 persons at sea and up to 58 on inland waters); and many students experience difficulties sailing at sea due to wave conditions. Furthermore, non-EU students, particularly Ukrainian students, are not permitted to sail on the Baltic Sea without additional approvals from the State Border Guard Service and the Migration Service. As a result, educational activities are largely restricted to inland waters, such as the Curonian Lagoon, where sailing is safer, less costly, less physically demanding for students, and does not require coordination with border or migration authorities.

ANALYSIS AND CONCLUSION (regarding 2.1.)

Applied research activities within the programme are closely aligned with the field of study and demonstrate clear relevance to regional development priorities, particularly in the area of coastal tourism. The teaching team is actively involved in applied research projects, including those supported by the EU Interreg programme, which strengthens the programme's regional engagement and practical orientation. Students participate in research activities from the first year onward, allowing for early exposure to research processes and contributing to the integration of research and learning.

The programme's research outputs are consistent, with an average of nine publications per year indexed in relevant databases. These outputs reflect ongoing scholarly activity and support the visibility of the study field. The recent renewal of the academic staff, including the attainment of doctoral degrees by two lecturers in the evaluation period, contributes to the sustainability and further development of research capacity. A gradual generational change is taking place within the research and teaching team, supporting the continuity of expertise and the introduction of new perspectives.

Despite these positive developments, it was noted that students experience some difficulties in applying research methods effectively in their independent work. Strengthening research and analytical skills throughout the study process, as well as in final theses, would further enhance learning outcomes. Additionally, participation in the EU-CONEXUS consortium provides valuable opportunities to expand research collaboration and to engage students in international research activities, which could further strengthen both research capacity and the analytical competencies of students.

Based on the available evidence and the additional documentation, the Panel concludes that KU integrates the latest developments in scientific research and technology and enables students to develop skills for scientific research.

AREA 2: CONCLUSIONS

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

COMMENDATIONS

1. The team of lecturers in this field of study is actively involved in applied research projects (EU Interreg programme) related to the development of tourism in the region.

2. The academic staff is being renewed in this field; during the evaluation period, two lecturers obtained doctoral degrees in the subject area of the study program.

3. On average, there are nine publications per year that are indexed in databases.

4. Students studying throughout the years are involved in the research.

RECOMMENDATIONS

To address shortcomings

- None

For further improvement

1. Strengthen research and analytical skills among students both within the framework of study courses and in their final theses.

2. Within the EU-CONEXUS consortium, strive for joint research projects, involving students in the research process and strengthening research and analytical skills in the international research community.

AREA 3: STUDENT ADMISSION AND SUPPORT

3.1.	Student selection and admission is in line with the learning outcomes

FACTUAL SITUATION

3.1.1. Student selection and admission criteria and procedures are adequate and transparent

Admission to undergraduate studies at KU follows the national framework for higher education admissions coordinated by the Lithuanian Higher Education Institutions Association for Organising Joint Admission (LAMA BPO). This ensures that all admissions to first-cycle programmes are regulated, transparent, and merit-based. The admission procedure is published annually on both the LAMA BPO and KU websites, with detailed rules approved by the KU Senate and aligned with the Ministry of Education, Science, and Sport guidelines.

The programme admits students through both general and individual admission routes. Lithuanian citizens apply through the national joint admission system, whereas foreign candidates apply directly via KU's international admissions portal. The programme is offered in Lithuanian, English, and Russian, reflecting KU's strategic objective of internationalisation and inclusion of diverse student groups.

Between 2022 and 2024, student interest and applicant quality demonstrated a positive trend. The number of applicants rose from 41 (in 2022) to 63 (in 2024), while the average competitive score increased from 8,19 to 8,34. The highest competitive score reached 9,29, suggesting that the programme is attracting academically strong and motivated students.

The minimum competitive score for entry (4,37) ensures that only applicants with sufficient academic preparation are admitted. Weighting of subjects in the competition score—including History, Geography or Foreign Language, Mathematics or IT, and Lithuanian Language and Literature—is consistent with the interdisciplinary learning outcomes of the programme, which integrate cultural, environmental, and technical dimensions of tourism and recreation.

The SER describes the overall admission framework and procedures; however, it does not provide complete numerical data on applicant numbers by first and lower priorities, nor detailed figures on signed study agreements (state-funded and non-funded). As a result, a full quantitative analysis of annual admission dynamics cannot be conducted based solely on the SER. Nevertheless, based on the qualitative information available, the programme demonstrates stable enrolment patterns supported by a transparent and centralised admission process (LAMA BPO). The KU confirmed during the site visit that the programme attracts a consistent number of applicants each year, ensuring sustainability, but detailed statistical data should be included in future SERs for completeness and monitoring purposes.

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

KU has developed a comprehensive and systematic mechanism for recognising foreign qualifications, prior learning, and partial studies, consistent with European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System (ECTS) principles and the Lisbon Recognition Convention.

Students participating in Erasmus+ mobility sign a Learning Agreement before departure, guaranteeing full academic recognition of credits obtained abroad. After returning, results are recorded in both Lithuanian and English in the Diploma Supplement, with transparent indication of the country and institution where the studies were undertaken.

Recognition of non-formal and informal learning is regulated by the KU Senate Resolution No. 11-5 (2020), allowing for recognition of up to 50% of programme credits. Two commissions are established: one for candidate admission and one for assessment and recognition. Assessment is

based on verified documentation such as certificates, professional references, and prior learning evidence.

Although no students in the programme applied for such recognition between 2022–2024, KU has the legal and procedural framework fully in place. Still, the lack of utilisation of these mechanisms suggests limited awareness among students and potential applicants—particularly adults, part-time learners, or those with professional experience.

ANALYSIS AND CONCLUSION (regarding 3.1.)

The admission system is transparent, structured, and compliant with national and European frameworks. The progressive increase in applicant numbers and competitive scores demonstrates improving quality and visibility. The alignment between entry requirements and programme learning outcomes ensures that incoming students possess the necessary competencies to succeed. Based on the available evidence and the meeting with the SER members, the Panel concludes that the student selection and admission at KU is in line with the learning outcomes.

However, the system also reveals notable weaknesses: a declining domestic applicant base poses long-term sustainability risks, as the programme increasingly relies on international students. Limited outreach and marketing efforts targeting Lithuanian secondary schools restrict awareness of the programme domestically. While recognition systems for foreign and prior learning are well-defined, they are not actively promoted or utilised, suggesting a gap between regulation and practice.

3.2.	There is an effective student support system enabling students to maximise their learning progress

FACTUAL SITUATION

3.2.1. Opportunities for student academic mobility are ensured

KU's participation in Erasmus+ and other international partnerships provides formal opportunities for student academic mobility. Information about available programmes is regularly distributed twice a year. Between 2022 and 2024, 11 students participated in mobility for internships - two at the World Tourism Organisation (Spain) and nine in hospitality establishments in Greece.

However, no incoming students were recorded, and overall mobility participation remains low relative to potential. Interviews with students confirmed that financial constraints, part-time work, and geopolitical instability (e.g., the war in Ukraine) discouraged participation.

To counteract this, KU integrates local field-based learning and Ecotourism Practice into the curriculum. These activities provide valuable experiential learning and compensate for reduced mobility, though they do not replicate the intercultural or linguistic exposure of international exchanges.

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

KU's student support framework is underpinned by the Code of Academic Conduct (2019) and Social Inclusion Strategy (2023–2024), ensuring equality and inclusivity. Facilities for students with special needs include lifts, adapted equipment, and assistive technologies such as Braille printers.

Financial support mechanisms are well-developed and accessible. Students may apply for social scholarships, one-off emergency assistance, or tuition fee reductions (25–50%). The Practice Fund supports travel and accommodation costs for fieldwork, ensuring equitable access to practical experiences.

Nevertheless, student awareness of psychological and well-being support remains low. During the site visit, it was acknowledged that counselling services exist but are rarely used or visible. Some respondents suggested the creation of online psychological counselling and better promotion of available services.

While the university conducted staff training on student mental health in 2022 and offers occasional seminars, systematic monitoring of support service effectiveness is limited. There is no evidence of student participation in evaluating the quality or responsiveness of counselling services.

3.2.3. Higher education information and student counselling are sufficient

Students are introduced to programme structure and expectations during orientation week. The curator system ensures guidance for first-year students, and consultation schedules are updated each semester.

Academic staff are approachable and maintain open communication channels, which students highly value. However, not all students are aware of where to find official guidance or counselling for specific issues (financial aid, mobility, academic writing).

Feedback collection is governed by the Descriptor of Study Feedback Organisation Procedure (2025). Anonymous surveys are administered regularly, and results are reviewed by programme teams and deans. Despite this, students reported limited visibility of follow-up actions, leading to perceptions that feedback is not acted upon.

Student representation exists through the Student Union and faculty councils, but involvement in programme-level decision-making is mostly formal rather than participatory.

ANALYSIS AND CONCLUSION (regarding 3.2.)

KU provides a comprehensive and multi-faceted student support framework, covering academic, financial, social, and psychological needs. The system is consistent with European standards, and the institutional culture is notably student-centred and respectful.

However, several systemic weaknesses were identified: Low student participation in international mobility limits intercultural exposure and alignment with EU-CONEXUS's strategic objectives. Feedback mechanisms lack transparency, as students are rarely informed about how their opinions shape institutional decisions. Limited extracurricular engagement and community activities, especially for international students, hinder full integration. Digital systems occasionally malfunction, causing administrative inconvenience and frustration.

Overall, the Panel concludes that KU has an effective student support system enabling students to maximise their learning progress in scope but uneven in practice. There is a clear distinction between what exists institutionally and what students experience operationally. KU has the necessary infrastructure, policies, and frameworks, but effectiveness, communication, and engagement require strengthening to ensure students fully benefit from available support.

AREA 3: CONCLUSIONS

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

COMMENDATIONS

1. Lithuanian study programs rating web *Reitingai* KU Recreation and Tourism study program were indicated as a No. 1 at year 2025.

2. Transparent and well-structured admission process, consistent with national and European regulations.

3. Strong interpersonal relationships between staff and students, fostering a collegial and supportive academic environment.

4. Institutional commitment to quality assurance (ISO 9001) and continual improvement across teaching and support services.

RECOMMENDATIONS

To address shortcomings

1. Develop transparent communication of feedback outcomes by systematically informing students about survey results, decisions taken, and improvements made.

2. Regularly evaluate the effectiveness of student support services, using measurable indicators such as utilisation rates, satisfaction levels, and student outcomes, and include students in the review process.

3. Increase student participation in academic mobility programmes by providing financial incentives, short-term blended mobility opportunities, and improved communication about Erasmus+ and other exchange options.

For further improvement

1. Develop a strategic plan to revitalise domestic recruitment, including targeted marketing in Lithuanian schools and regional fairs. Diversify recruitment campaigns to reduce dependency on international student intake and ensure long-term programme sustainability.

2. Further strengthen cooperation with employers and social partners by integrating them into curriculum development, thesis supervision, and the creation of new internship opportunities.

3. Expand and formalise mentoring and peer-support structures, involving senior students and alumni in supporting first-year students and fostering academic belonging.

4. Continue refining internal quality assurance procedures under the ISO 9001 framework, ensuring that student feedback is systematically integrated into annual improvement and audit cycles.

5. Enhance the accessibility and visibility of psychological and well-being support services, including the introduction of online counselling and more proactive outreach to students.

AREA 4: TEACHING AND LEARNING, STUDENT ASSESSMENT, AND GRADUATE EMPLOYMENT

4.1.	Students are prepared for independent professional activity

FACTUAL SITUATION

4.1.1. Teaching and learning address the needs of students and enable them to achieve intended learning outcomes

The Recreation and Tourism first-cycle study programme is structured to ensure the development of theoretical knowledge and practical competences required for professional practice in the tourism and leisure industry. As stated in the SER (pp. 33–36), the programme curriculum and study methods are closely aligned with the revised Descriptor of the Study Field of Tourism and Leisure (Order No. V-1547, 2022). Teaching and learning are based on competence-oriented approaches that combine theoretical instruction with applied and experiential learning.

The programme employs diverse and interactive teaching methods, including project-based learning, simulation exercises, applied research, case studies, role-play, fieldwork, and internships. Students participate in *Ecotourism Practice* and *Internship in Tourism and Recreation Enterprises* (SER p. 39), during which they design tourism routes, collect and analyse real data using *ArcGIS Pro*, *ArcGIS Online*, and *StoryMaps*, and collaborate with regional enterprises such as the Curonian Spit National Park, hotels, and travel agencies.

The *Smart Urban Tourism and Innovations* and *E-Tourism* modules integrate contemporary technologies and sustainable tourism principles, responding to national and EU priorities in digitalisation and environmental responsibility. Learning activities also include educational excursions and the testing of created tourism routes, strengthening applied competences. Lecturers systematically connect scientific research with teaching, using current project results and publications (SER p. 34).

Student learning outcomes are communicated clearly through the *Academic Information System (*AIS*)*, module descriptors, and course syllabi. The balance between independent and contact hours (Mondays in person and other days online) follows ECTS guidelines, and independent study increases progressively throughout the study cycle to encourage autonomy and critical thinking.

Graduates can continue their studies in the same field in KU and at other institutions in Lithuania and in foreign countries.

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

The University ensures inclusiveness and accessibility for all student groups. According to the SER (p. 37), KU provides a range of measures supporting students from socially vulnerable backgrounds and those with special needs. Financial assistance is available through state and university scholarships, social grants, and tuition fee reductions. The Student Support and Career Centre offers academic, psychological, and social counselling.

During the visit, access to study infrastructure for students with limited mobility was demonstrated.

Students with special needs may receive extended examination time, alternative assessment formats, or flexible study arrangements when justified. The University also supports international students and those returning from academic mobility through dedicated induction sessions and mentoring by the International Relations Office.

KU participates in the State Science and Studies Foundation's project Increasing Accessibility to Studies.

ANALYSIS AND CONCLUSION (regarding 4.1.)

The evidence demonstrates that the KU integrates modern teaching methodologies and experiential learning to ensure students are well prepared for independent professional activity. The systematic incorporation of field practice, internships, and digital technologies provides strong links between theory and practice. The emphasis on independent learning and critical thinking supports graduates' adaptability in the dynamic tourism and recreation sector. Moreover, the institution's inclusive policies ensure equitable access and participation for all learners.

Therefore, based on the available evidence, the Panel concludes that students at KU are prepared for independent professional activity.

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

FACTUAL SITUATION

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

KU has a joint system of the assessment of student's knowledge and skills based on Article 43 of the KU Statute, the Study Regulation, and the Procedure for the Assessment of Results (Part III General Requirements for Studies), in accordance with the principle that All grades for a study unit shall be accumulated on the principle of summative assessment grades during the semester. The assessment of achievements shall be based on a criterion-based ten-point grading scale and a cumulative assessment system (SER, Point 139, p. 36).

The monitoring of learning progress is carried out through the AIS, which records academic results, attendance, and feedback. Each course includes at least two formative assessment components—tests, reports, or project work—before the final examination. The minimum grade for interim and final reporting is 5 (poor). Continuous assessment constitutes a minimum of 50% of the final grade (SER p. 44). Examination grades are submitted individually on the same day after the oral examination or no later than 3 working days after the written examination (SER, p. 35). The Final thesis is defended in a public meeting and recorded for the case if an appeal is received.

According to the Point 141 of the SER approximately 10% of students experience difficulties with examinations and other assessments. During the onsite meeting with students, the Panel noted that, although attendance was good and included students from different year groups, both local and international (including Ukrainian). During the meeting, the Panel received limited feedback from students.

The meeting with the teaching staff indicated that there is a growing demand among students for personalised deeper feedback on submitted assignments. Meeting with the students reveals that the tasks to be completed are not always clearly stated at the beginning of the course.

4.2.2. Graduate employability and career are monitored

Until 2024, the graduate career monitoring was carried out in KU departments, and from 2024, graduate career monitoring is organised and carried out by the KU Office of Studies.

The Student Affairs Group of the KU Office of Studies inform, train, and advise students on employability and preparedness for the labour market during their studies. The programme teachers are familiar with the real situation of employment of graduates till 2024 (SER, Point 142-142, p. 37).

During the period 2022-2024, only nine graduates completed the study programme (SER, Point 142-143, p. 35). Table 7 provides a description of all 9 graduates. Two graduates are continuing their studies in the master`s programme Recreation and Tourism Management. According to the most recent data, the majority of programme graduates are employed in the tourism, recreation, and hospitality sectors.

In 2 April 2025, there is no data from the Klaipėda Customer Service Department of the Employment Service (13 municipalities) on the registration of graduates of the *Recreation and Tourism* study programme at the Employment Service (SER, Point 144, p. 37).

Alumni maintain active engagement through guest lectures, mentorship, and participation in programme advisory boards. Cooperation with regional employers, including national parks, hotels, and travel agencies, strengthens alignment between graduate competences and labour-market needs.

The inclusion of guide certification enhances employability nationally and internationally.

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

KU's Code of Academic Ethics (Senate Resolution No. 11-35, 2020; updated 2025) and the Study Regulations (2024) establish procedures to uphold academic honesty, equality, and respect. Anti-plagiarism software (*Turnitin*) is used for all final theses and major assignments. The University regularly organises seminars on academic integrity for students and staff. Cases of unethical conduct are reviewed by the Ethics Commission in accordance with the University Statute.

Tolerance and non-discrimination are core institutional principles. The University fosters an inclusive environment by supporting gender equality, multiculturalism, and diversity through training and events coordinated by the Equality Officer.

There have been no cases of violation of the principles of academic integrity, tolerance, and non-discrimination in the last 3 years (SER, p. 36).

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

Students can submit an appeal on dissatisfaction with the assessment of the examination/credit test within 2-3 days after the examination/credit test by conducting the head of department responsible of teaching the course. In case, when the teacher is a head of the Department, the request must be submitted to the Dean.

Procedures for appeals and complaints are clearly and in detail defined in the Study Regulations (2024). Students can submit appeals related to assessment, study conditions, or ethical issues via the AIS system or in writing to the Faculty Appeals Commission. All appeals are reviewed within statutory deadlines, and students are informed of the outcomes in a transparent and documented manner. In 2022–2024, there were no student complaints regarding the appeal (SER, p. 37).

ANALYSIS AND CONCLUSION (regarding 4.2.)

KU has established a transparent and consistent system for student assessment and progress monitoring. Assessment criteria are clearly aligned with intended learning outcomes, and continuous feedback mechanisms contribute to students' self-assessment and academic development. The study programme demonstrates a well-balanced integration of theoretical and practical components, supporting the acquisition of competences relevant to the tourism labour market. A variety of study methods are applied, including educational excursions to industry enterprises, which strengthen students' practical understanding and engagement with the professional field.

Graduate employability monitoring is systematically implemented and shows positive outcomes, indicating that the programme effectively prepares students with competences that align with regional and sectoral needs. Feedback from regional employers confirms a significant shortage of specialists in the hospitality sector, further underlining the relevance and potential contribution of the programme to regional development.

The institutional culture of academic integrity and tolerance is well established and supported by comprehensive regulatory and procedural frameworks. Appeal and complaint processes are transparent and ensure effective protection of student rights. However, it was observed that not all assessment requirements and procedures are consistently communicated to students at the beginning of courses. This appears to be influenced by the small size of student groups and lecturers' adaptation to specific student needs, which may affect students' ability to plan their workload effectively.

Overall, the Panel concludes that there is an effective and transparent system at KU for student assessment, progress monitoring, and the assurance of academic integrity. Continued efforts to enhance communication of assessment requirements, strengthen data collection on graduate career paths, and expand international learning opportunities would further support ongoing improvement.

AREA 4: CONCLUSIONS

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

COMMENDATIONS

1. The study programme demonstrates a well-balanced integration of theoretical and practical components, ensuring that graduates acquire competences relevant to the tourism labour market.

2. The study program includes a variety of study methods, with a particular emphasis on educational excursions to visit companies in the industry.

RECOMMENDATIONS

To address shortcomings

- None

For further improvement

1. Strengthen systematic collection and analysis of longitudinal data on graduate career paths to inform future curriculum adjustments.

2. Enhance integration of international practical placements and virtual mobility opportunities to expand students' global competences.

3. Continue to innovate assessment methods by incorporating more authentic and competency-based evaluation approaches (e.g., digital portfolios, reflective learning journals).

4. Further develop staff and student training on academic integrity and inclusive pedagogy to sustain high ethical standards and student engagement.

5. It is important to ensure that the terms and conditions of the study course are clearly explained at the beginning of the course and that they are not changed, so that students can plan their workload.

AREA 5: TEACHING STAFF

5.1.	Teaching staff is adequate to achieve learning outcomes

FACTUAL SITUATION

5.1.1. The number, qualification, and competence (scientific, didactic, professional) of teaching staff is sufficient to achieve learning outcomes

The teaching staff of the Tourism and Leisure study programme at KU is composed of an experienced and academically qualified team. The core teaching team includes 14 main lecturers, of whom 9 hold doctoral degrees (PhD) and 5 are lecturers without doctorates. The majority of the teachers have over 10 years of teaching and professional experience at KU. Notably, four lecturers are graduates of the same study programme, contributing to the continuity of teaching traditions within the department. During the visit, teaching staff explained that many lecturers are graduates of this program. Most have gained industry experience before joining the tourism department or continue to work in the sector alongside their teaching, ensuring a continuous flow of up-to-date professional knowledge.

The teacher–student ratio improved from 1:5 (2019–2022) to 1:4.14 (2022–2025), which supports individualized supervision, student engagement, and quality learning. The teaching workload is distributed among staff actively involved in research, study, and development projects, with six international projects involving department members during the review period.

Teaching is closely linked to the staff's ongoing research activities. Most courses are linked to long-term practical and research projects, integrating scientific methodologies and results into the curriculum. Eight teachers are engaged in national and international research, regularly publishing in peer-reviewed and international journals. All teaching staff demonstrate strong language competencies, with fluency in at least two foreign languages (mainly English and Russian), supporting the delivery of courses in Lithuanian, English, and Russian and facilitating international cooperation. During the visit, senior management clarified that the overall 1,500 working hours of a full-time lecturer position are clearly divided between teaching, administrative tasks, and research. They noted that a financial incentive system exists to encourage scientific publications. During the visit, teaching staff confirmed a favourable work distribution between teaching and research.

ANALYSIS AND CONCLUSION (regarding 5.1.)

The teaching staff of the Tourism and Leisure study programme at KU are well qualified and generally sufficient to ensure the achievement of the intended learning outcomes. Most lecturers hold doctoral degrees and have extensive academic and professional experience, providing a solid foundation for effective and research-informed teaching. The inclusion of new academics since the previous evaluation has strengthened the team's capacity and disciplinary coverage. However, the balance between senior academics and younger lecturers could be further developed to ensure succession planning and long-term sustainability.

The favourable teacher–student ratio allows for personalised learning and effective supervision, contributing positively to teaching quality. Nevertheless, continued attention is needed to maintain this ratio should student numbers increase. The strong involvement of staff in national and international projects and research activities enhances the academic quality of the programme, although not all staff demonstrate equally strong research output at the international level.

Overall, the composition, qualifications, and engagement of the teaching staff fully support the achievement of the programme's objectives and learning outcomes. Therefore, the Panel concludes that teaching staff at KU is adequate to achieve learning outcomes. Their commitment to continuous improvement, research integration, and student-centred teaching ensures the sustainability and ongoing development of the Tourism and Leisure study programme at KU.

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

FACTUAL SITUATION

5.2.1. Opportunities for academic mobility of teaching staff are ensured

Lecturers in the Tourism and Leisure study programme may apply annually, during the spring semester, to participate in Erasmus+ teaching or training mobility activities. Applications must identify the host institution, specify the purpose, and demonstrate the expected benefits for the programme and the university.

Institutional support for mobility is strong, and most applicants receive funding. Participation is based on existing cooperation agreements with foreign universities offering recreation and tourism-related programmes. Typical destinations include institutions in Poland, Croatia, Turkey, Germany, and Finland, reflecting active international partnerships.

Between 2022 and 2024, programme teachers completed 12 mobility visits, evenly distributed over three years. The majority were teaching assignments, while two focused on professional internships. Two mobilities were carried out under the Erasmus+ 171 programme, involving collaboration with universities in Israel and Georgia. Over the same period, the programme also welcomed six visiting lecturers from Bulgaria, Spain, Georgia, Japan, and Sri Lanka, enhancing the international dimension of teaching and contributing to the exchange of academic experience and best practices.

During the visit, senior management reported that academic mobility is limited to approximately four staff members per year, although it was initially unclear whether these were the same individuals each year. A list of staff members participating in Erasmus+ since 2022 was requested during the visit. The provided list clarified the teaching staff participation in Erasmus+ exchange activities. Teaching staff further explained that Erasmus+ should not be considered a fully representative measure of teacher mobility, as other mobility opportunities are available at KU, and lecturers from the tourism department also take part in Erasmus+ activities through other departments.

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

Continuing professional development is a mandatory element of academic work at Klaipėda University. The Descriptor of Professional Development of Teaching and Research Staff, updated in 2022, requires all teachers to systematically improve their qualifications, which are assessed during attestation and reflected in salary components. The Descriptor identifies four areas for competence development: subject-specific, research, pedagogical, and general competences (including digital and communication skills).

Every five years, teachers may be released from teaching for up to one year to conduct research or enhance their qualifications, while retaining their average salary. The University also funds one long-term research visit (14 days or more) per five-year period. Participation in professional development has grown steadily: around 85% of academic staff now engage in training, and over 60% take part in research visits abroad.

Funding from Structural and competitive sources supports around 10 group training sessions annually, covering research methods, innovative teaching, academic writing, foreign languages, and digital learning tools. All academic staff, including part-time lecturers, have equal access to development opportunities and financial support. The Research and Study Promotion Fund and faculty resources cover conference participation, travel, and publication costs, ensuring continuous professional growth.

ANALYSIS AND CONCLUSION (regarding 5.2.)

KU has established a clear and comprehensive framework for the professional development of its teaching staff, covering subject-specific, research, pedagogical, and general competences. Mechanisms such as release from teaching duties, funding for long-term research visits, and structured training sessions ensure systematic skill enhancement. High participation rates in professional development, research visits abroad, and conferences demonstrate the effectiveness of these measures.

KU supports teaching staff mobility through Erasmus+ and other international exchange programmes, providing funding and leveraging cooperation agreements with European and global partner institutions. Academic mobility, including teaching visits and internships, allows staff to gain international experience, share expertise, and enhance the internationalisation of the programme. Hosting visiting lecturers from multiple countries further contributes to this exchange.

In consideration of the available evidence and discussion with the SER team and the teaching staff, the Panel concludes that teaching staff at KU is ensured opportunities to develop competences, and they are periodically evaluated However, while opportunities are well-defined, they may be somewhat unevenly distributed among staff, and further emphasis on the integration of new teaching methods, particularly in digital and hybrid learning, could strengthen pedagogical innovation and overall teaching quality. Furthermore, mobility opportunities remain largely short-term and concentrated on selected destinations, and expanding participation, especially to non-European institutions, could broaden global exposure and have a more lasting impact on teaching and research development.

AREA 5: CONCLUSIONS

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

COMMENDATIONS

1. The teaching staff of the Tourism and Leisure study programme are well qualified, with the majority holding doctoral degrees and/or extensive academic and professional experience.

2. The favourable teacher–student ratio enables more individualised supervision, effective student engagement, and enhanced support for learning outcomes.

RECOMMENDATIONS

To address shortcomings

- None

For further improvement

1. Increase number of lecturers participating in Erasmus+ and other exchange activities.

2. Increase number of externally trained staff for teaching courses on business and public management

AREA 6: LEARNING FACILITIES AND RESOURCES

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

FACTUAL SITUATION

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

The study programmes of the study field are carried out at the KU Faculty of Social Sciences and Humanities (FSSH) at S. Nėries str. 5, Klaipėda city. FSSH was established in 2019 by the merger of the Faculty of Social Sciences and the Faculty of Humanities and Educational Sciences. FSSH currently has 29 well-equipped classrooms with 780 workstations. Two classrooms of the Faculty are available for large groups of students: 208 (116 seats) and 204 (80 seats). Other classrooms are designed for groups of 10-30 students. FSSH has a library, 2 gyms, and premises for the Faculty's Student Union. Students also use the Aula Magna premises of the KU Classroom Building (H. Manto Str. 92-2), Klaipeda.

Since the 2022 external evaluation, KU has made improvement in its learning infrastructure and resources for the Tourism and Leisure study field. The Faculty of Social Sciences and Humanities, together with the Department of Social Geography and Tourism, ensures that students and teaching staff have access to modern facilities, digital tools, and field-based learning resources.

Specialised course units such as *International Tourism Geography and GIS Technologies*, *Smart Urban Tourism and Innovations*, and *Ecotourism Practice* now utilise *ArcGIS Pro, ArcGIS Online*, and *StoryMaps*, integrating real-life geospatial applications into the curriculum. These technologies are applied during practical assignments and internships, providing students with up-to-date digital skills in tourism planning and management.

Students benefit from access to regional sites and partnerships with tourism enterprises, including the *Curonian Spit National Park* and local hospitality businesses.

The KU Library provides digital access to scientific databases (EBSCO, Taylor & Francis, ScienceDirect, etc.). The library has three (3) new stationary computers, two laptops, document copying and scanning equipment, two laser printers, two multimedia devices, an environment has been created for individual consultations of students using modern software. This equipment has been acquired with funding from European projects and is regularly updated. As long library is in the basement it is quite noisy from the gym upstairs (evidence from the visit). Furthermore, the modern laboratories described in the SER were not shown during the evaluation.

At the meetings with stakeholders, concerns were raised that lecturers do not always make systematic use of Moodle for uploading course materials. The panel's review of Moodle course archives confirmed that the organisation of materials lacks logical structure, which may hinder students' ability to locate and use learning resources effectively.

Study rooms, computer labs, and classrooms are equipped with updated software and multimedia technologies. The *I*nformation Resources and Publishing Centre ensures continuous availability of digital resources for both staff and students. On the meetings been confirmed that teachers facing various issues with IS and multimedia and it effect quality of lecturers for the students.

Financial resources are allocated annually according to the university's strategic priorities. Funding from national and international projects (including EU-CONEXUS and Horizon Europe) supports infrastructure upgrades, mobility activities, and digital teaching innovations.

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

Resource planning and improvement are part of KU's Strategic Development Plan 2021–2030. The University maintains a continuous cycle of infrastructure renewal, with annual reviews of facilities, library resources, and digital systems conducted by the Faculty Council and the Rector's Office.

Feedback from students, social partners, and alumni informs investment decisions related to learning environments. For example, following recommendations from the 2022 external evaluation, KU prioritised investment in digital and field-based teaching tools for tourism and recreation studies. Regular monitoring of resource usage and satisfaction is conducted through internal surveys and the AIS.

KU has also expanded access to hybrid and online learning infrastructure, ensuring that fieldwork, theoretical studies, and remote cooperation with partner universities are fully supported. Continuous upgrades of software licences and virtual learning tools further ensure compliance with modern study requirements.

Students with mobility or visual impairments can access support services at the university; however, there is no elevator in the Faculty.

The panel was informed that, subsequent to the site visit, the Faculty confirmed the inclusion of a student cafeteria and dining facilities in the University's budget, with implementation planned at the earliest feasible date.

ANALYSIS AND CONCLUSION (regarding 6.1.)

The learning facilities and resources at KU demonstrate progress and are increasingly well aligned with the aims and intended learning outcomes of the Tourism and Leisure study field. The introduction of advanced digital tools—such as GIS technologies and digital tourism platforms (ArcGIS Online, ArcGIS Pro, StoryMaps)—has substantially enhanced both the academic and practical dimensions of the programme. These developments indicate KU's strategic commitment to modernising its learning environment and to strengthening the integration of applied technologies in teaching and research.

Sustainable financial management, underpinned by participation in EU-CONEXUS and Horizon Europe projects, has enabled the University to maintain continuous investment in infrastructure, digitalisation, and academic resources. Collaboration with social partners and engagement in international initiatives contribute to a dynamic and professionally relevant learning environment that supports the development of students' practical skills and employability.

Based on the available evidence, additional documentation, and the onsite visit, the Panel concludes that KU has facilities, informational and financial resources that are sufficient and enable the achievement of the learning outcomes of the Recreation and Tourism programme.

However, the Panel notes several areas that would benefit from further enhancement. The digital infrastructure requires further strengthening to support blended and field-based learning, and coordination between IT services and teaching departments should be improved to ensure reliable technical support. The lack of student amenities—such as canteen or meal preparation facilities—was also observed and should be addressed in future planning.

AREA 6: CONCLUSIONS

AREA 6	Unsatisfactory - 1 Does not meet the requirements	Satisfactory - 2 Meets the requirements, but there are substantial shortcomings to be eliminated	Good - 3 Meets the requirements, but there are shortcomings to be eliminated	Very good - 4 Very well nationally and internationally without any shortcomings	Exceptional - 5 Exceptionally well nationally and internationally without any shortcomings
First cycle				v	

COMMENDATIONS

1. Additional modernisation of the learning environment through the integration of GIS technologies and digital tourism tools (ArcGIS Online, ArcGIS Pro, StoryMaps).

2. Sustainable financial management and continuous resource upgrading supported by EU-CONEXUS and Horizon Europe projects.

RECOMMENDATIONS

To address shortcomings

- None

For further improvement

1. The faculty currently lacks sufficient integration of advanced technological opportunities for students.

2. The absence of a student canteen or facilities where students can store and warm home-prepared meals has been noted.

3. The current state of faculty facilities, particularly in terms of digital infrastructure, requires enhancement to meet the evolving demands of contemporary business education.

4. The faculty should continue to expand its digital learning infrastructure for students.

5. Improve coordination between the IT service and teaching departments to ensure uninterrupted technical support during blended learning and field practice.

AREA 7: QUALITY ASSURANCE AND PUBLIC INFORMATION

7.1.	The development of the field of study is based on an internal quality assurance system involving all stakeholders and continuous monitoring, transparency and public information

FACTUAL SITUATION

7.1.1. Internal quality assurance system for the programmes is effective

KU has a clear internal quality assurance system for its study programmes, regulated by Chapter IV of the 2024 Study Regulations. Internal evaluations are conducted annually to ensure that programmes meet European standards and national regulations. The system is aligned with EU higher education frameworks, including the Bologna and Copenhagen Declarations and the Berlin and Bergen Communiqués, and operates under the ISO 9001:2015 quality management standard, with plans to transition to the ESG standard in the future. Senior management clarified and explained the current state of the transition process into the new quality management System ESG during our visit.

The KU Quality Policy guides all activities related to research, studies, cooperation, administration, and social responsibility. Improvement of studies has been a strategic priority, as highlighted in the Strategic Action Plan 2020–2022. The Department of Social Geography and Tourism organises the study process, ensuring curriculum updates, methodological improvements, monitoring of teaching staff competences, and assessment of student learning outcomes.

Self-evaluation reports are prepared for each programme by a team appointed by the Department head and approved by the Dean. Teams include at least one student and one employer representative. Additionally, the KU Study Quality Commission, composed of representatives from all faculties and two students, reviews study quality issues and provides recommendations for improvement

Quantitative and qualitative information, including student surveys, graduates' feedback, learning outcomes, and career paths, is collected and made publicly available. Student surveys at the end of each semester assess course content, teaching, assessment methods, and teacher competences, and the results guide curriculum updates, methodological improvements, and teacher evaluation.

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

The SER states that at KU, students, teachers, employers, and graduates are actively involved in the internal quality assurance of study programmes. Students participate through representatives such as group elders and members of the Faculty Council, Senate, KU Council, and other committees, providing input on teaching quality, curriculum, and study conditions. Teachers and administrative staff contribute directly to programme development and quality management as members of Field of Study Committees and other working groups, discussing proposed changes during departmental, faculty, and university-wide meetings.

The SER further states that employers engage through annual meetings, cooperation discussions, and participation in final thesis defence committees, offering recommendations to ensure programmes meet professional and industry needs. The report further states that graduates also contribute by serving on committees, working groups, and defence panels, evaluating the entire study period and suggesting improvements to curriculum, teaching methods, and programme content. However, during the visit inconsistencies were observed between the institution's claims and stakeholder accounts regarding cooperation with alumni, employers, and social partners. None of the representatives present at our visit had been invited to annual meetings or discussions, such as a study committee. None of the present partners had served on final defence committees since 2022. The panel contained only one recent alumnus, limiting the opportunity for clarifications, and no evidence was provided of increased visits or engagement since the previous recommendation.

To clarify this point further documents were requested during the visit. However, the general requirements document has no reference to composition of the final thesis committee. Furthermore, the additional documents in relation to the final thesis committee from 2022 to 2024 reveal that there was no a practicing tourism specialist or a lecturer from another higher education institution training tourism or business specialists in the compositions.

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

The SER states that KU systematically collects and analyses information on its study programmes, including feedback from students, graduates, and social partners, external evaluation results, and data on learning outcomes and career trajectories. This information is used to support continuous improvement, informing updates to curricula, teaching methods, and programme content. Self-evaluation reports, surveys, and performance indicators are reviewed at departmental and faculty levels. Recommendations are made by Field of Study Committees and the Study Quality Commission. Relevant data and outcomes are made publicly available through the KU website, programme documentation, social media channels, and annual reports, providing transparency and accountability. Public dissemination allows stakeholders to monitor programme effectiveness and ensures that improvements are visible, supporting ongoing enhancement of study quality. However, during the visit stakeholders reported limited information flow on the study program. To clarify this the participation of external stakeholders in the study program development further documents were requested during the visit. The provided protocols clarified the participation of social partners and external stakeholders in study programm development meetings.

7.1.4. Student feedback is collected and analysed

The report states that the systematic collection of student feedback is a central element of the internal quality assurance system. Feedback is gathered at the end of each semester through student surveys that evaluate course content, teaching methods, assessment approaches, and the academic and communicative competences of teachers. The surveys are analysed by the Department, Dean's Office, and Faculty Council. To further clarify the collection and analysis of student feedback further documents were requested during the visit. The provided template of the student survey, an excel document of a previous student survey, and a description of the feedback process clarified the collection and analysis of student feedback. The survey states three open questions students can answer and the exel list outlines the quantitative part.

Student representatives are actively involved in Field of Study Committees, Faculty Councils, and other university working groups. Feedback also contributes to self-evaluation reports and discussions with social partners. These mechanisms allow for identification of strengths and weaknesses in teaching and learning, fostering the alignment of study programmes with student needs and expectations.

ANALYSIS AND CONCLUSION (regarding 7.1.)

KU has established a comprehensive IQA system that aligns with the ESG and operates in accordance with ISO 9001:2015 requirements. The system effectively encompasses all key aspects of study management, including programme design and development, teaching and learning, internationalisation, student support, feedback mechanisms, and corrective actions.

The involvement of Field of Study Committees, students, academic staff, and social partners enables broad participation in quality assurance processes. Self-evaluation reports, surveys, and performance indicators are systematically used to inform continuous improvement. The public availability of programme information further supports transparency and accountability.

The collection and analysis of student feedback include both qualitative and quantitative data and are generally sufficient. However, given the relatively small student cohort, ensuring full anonymity

in the feedback process remains a challenge. Moreover, while feedback mechanisms are established, the translation of feedback into sustained, measurable improvements in teaching and curriculum design could be further strengthened.

Based on the evidence reviewed, the Panel concludes that programme development is guided by an internal quality assurance system involving multiple stakeholders. Nevertheless, the actual extent of stakeholder participation appeared unclear during the site visit, and discussions with different groups revealed inconsistencies regarding the role of external stakeholders in study quality management. Contrary to initial statements, evidence indicates the absence of a tourism practicing professional or an academic from another higher education institution on the final thesis defence committee. This represents a shortcoming.

Overall, KU's internal quality assurance system is effective and well structured. Strengthening the systematic and demonstrable integration of stakeholder input—particularly ensuring external expert participation in final thesis defence committees—would further enhance its effectiveness and impact.

AREA 7: CONCLUSIONS

AREA 7	Unsatisfactory - 1 Does not meet the requirements	Satisfactory - 2 Meets the requirements, but there are substantial shortcomings to be eliminated	Good - 3 Meets the requirements, but there are shortcomings to be eliminated	Very good - 4 Very well nationally and internationally without any shortcomings	Exceptional - 5 Exceptionally well nationally and internationally without any shortcomings
First cycle			v		

COMMENDATIONS

1. KU has an established, ISO-aligned internal QA system with clear processes, annual monitoring and staff certification mechanisms.

2. The University effectively collects and uses multi-level feedback (course surveys, internship and graduate surveys) to inform curriculum updates and teaching practice.

RECOMMENDATIONS

To address shortcomings

1. KU should ensure the formal and consistent inclusion of tourism industry professionals and academics from other higher education institutions in final thesis defence committees to strengthen quality assurance and transparency

For further improvement

1. Increase the effective participation and information of stakeholders in study quality management.

2. Consider ways to ensure anonymity in student feedback collection.

V. SUMMARY

The Panel wishes to express its appreciation to KU for the comprehensive and well-prepared SER, the additional evidence provided, and the open and constructive discussions held during the site visit. The University's representatives—academic staff, students, social partners, and management—demonstrated a commitment to quality enhancement and transparent engagement throughout the evaluation process.

Main Strengths

The Recreation and Tourism study programme at KU is clearly aligned with the institution's strategic priorities of fostering creativity, promoting regional development, and contributing to sustainable coastal tourism. The curriculum demonstrates responsiveness to regional labour market needs and effectively integrates contemporary themes such as sustainability, digitalisation, and community engagement. The inclusion of modern digital tools, including GIS and data-driven tourism technologies, has substantially strengthened the relevance and practical orientation of the programme.

The programme's design and intended learning outcomes comply with national and European requirements for first-cycle studies, ensuring that graduates acquire the knowledge, skills, and competences expected at this level. Students develop solid analytical and research abilities, and the emphasis on independent learning supports adaptability in the dynamic tourism sector. Research integration is a notable strength: academic staff are active in regional and international projects (e.g., EU Interreg, EU-CONEXUS), with consistent research output and growing collaboration opportunities for students.

The teaching staff are well qualified, with the majority holding doctoral degrees and combining academic expertise with practical experience in tourism and related fields. Staff renewal and participation in professional development and mobility activities contribute to pedagogical innovation and long-term sustainability. A favourable teacher–student ratio enables individualised supervision and a supportive learning environment.

The student admission process is transparent and well aligned with programme objectives. KU provides a comprehensive student support system encompassing academic, financial, and psychological assistance, underpinned by an institutional culture of respect and collegiality. Strong interpersonal relations between staff and students, as well as clear commitment to ISO 9001 quality assurance principles, further support effective learning and continuous improvement.

The University has made substantial progress in upgrading its learning facilities and digital resources. Investments through EU-CONEXUS and Horizon Europe projects have led to a modernised, technology-rich environment that effectively supports teaching, learning, and research. The internal quality assurance system is well established, systematic, and aligned with ESG and ISO 9001 standards, ensuring regular monitoring, stakeholder involvement, and transparency of processes.

Shortcomings

Only a small number of shortcomings requiring direct action were identified:

- Final thesis defence committees require revision to ensure inclusion of at least one external member (industry professional or academic from another HEI) to strengthen compliance with the field descriptor and enhance transparency.
- The student admission and support should be improved by developing transparentcommunication of feedback outcomes, regularly reviewing the effectiveness of supportservices with student involvement, and increasing participation in academic mobility

- programmes through targeted incentives, blended mobility opportunities, and clearerinformation on exchange options.
- Stakeholder participation in quality assurance processes should be strengthened, particularly in formal decision-making and thesis evaluation.

These shortcomings are procedural rather than structural, and the Panel is confident they can be addressed promptly.

Areas for Improvement

While the programme is on a strong trajectory, several areas warrant further attention.
- Module descriptions should be systematically reviewed to ensure clear and explicit alignment between module-level and programme-level learning outcomes, and Learning Outcome 13 should be refined to more clearly articulate ethical and responsible professional conduct. Broader statistical and strategic data—particularly perspectives of international students—should be more consistently integrated into curriculum planning.
- Students' research and analytical skills should be strengthened across study modules and in final theses, and KU should continue building international research collaboration within EU-CONEXUS to deepen research-based learning.
- The student admission and support should be enhanced by revitalising domestic recruitmentthrough targeted outreach, diversifying marketing to reduce overreliance on internationalstudents, deepening cooperation with employers in curriculum and internship development,and expanding structured mentoring schemes involving senior students and alumni toenhance first-year support and belonging. It should also continue refining ISO 9001–alignedquality assurance processes to better integrate student feedback, while improving theaccessibility and visibility of psychological and well-being services through online counsellingand more proactive outreach.
- The programme should strengthen longitudinal tracking of graduate career outcomes and expand international practical placement opportunities. Assessment practices could be further modernised through authentic and competency-based approaches, and students should receive clearer information about course requirements at the start of each module.
- Greater participation in Erasmus+ and other mobility programmes is encouraged, and the programme would benefit from increasing the number of externally trained lecturers specialising in business and public management.
- Digital infrastructure should be enhanced to provide students reliable IT support, while the lack of student canteen facilities remains an issue. Continued expansion of the digital learning environment and improved coordination across departments would strengthen the overall learning experience.
- Stakeholder involvement in study quality management should be expanded, and improvements to student feedback collection—particularly ensuring anonymity—would enhance trust and participation.

Conclusion

Overall, the Panel recognises the Recreation and Tourism study programme at KU as a robust, modern, and regionally meaningful programme delivered by committed and well-qualified staff. KU has made considerable progress in curriculum innovation, research integration, digital modernisation, and the strengthening of support structures. The areas identified for improvement relate primarily to refining existing systems, enhancing student experience, and strengthening stakeholder engagement to ensure long-term sustainability and international visibility.

The Panel thanks the University for its hospitality, openness, and constructive collaboration throughout the evaluation process and commends KU for its commitment to continuous improvement and excellence in higher education.