



STUDIJŲ KOKYBĖS VERTINIMO CENTRAS

V. A. GRAIČIŪNO AUKŠTOSIOS MOKYKLOS VEIKLOS VERTINIMO IŠVADOS

INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW REPORT

V. A. GRAIČIŪNAS SCHOOL OF MANAGEMENT (AVM)

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I. INTRODUCTION

1. The review of the V. A. GRAIČIŪNAS SCHOOL OF MANAGEMENT (AVM) (referred to below as “AVM” or “the College”) was organised by the Centre for Quality Assessment in Higher Education (SKVC), Lithuania, in its role as the Authorized Agency prescribed by Lithuanian law. The review was conducted in accordance with the prescribed methodology according to the Procedure for the External Review in Higher Education approved by Government Resolution No. 1317 of 22 September, 2010.
2. The College submitted a Self Assessment Report (SAR) with Annexes, and further documentation as requested by the review team. The review team visited the College from 16 – 18 October 2012 and conducted several meetings with the College.
3. The College’s Self Assessment Report was made available in translation for the team. The team considered that there could have been a greater amount of self-reflection and self-evaluation in the report, which was largely descriptive.
4. The expert review team explored the four principal areas of the College’s activities as set out in the ‘Methodology for Conducting an Institutional Review in Higher Education’ (referred to below as “the Methodology”): strategic planning, academic studies and life-long learning, research and/or art activities, and impact on regional and national development. Within each area of activity the review team made appropriate reference to the criteria set out in the Methodology and took due account of the lists of sub-criteria in reaching their decision.
5. The expert team consisted of: team leader: Professor Jethro Newton; team members: Dr. Dalia Foigt, Ms Aistė Kričėnaitė, Professor Ronald Mönch, Professor Turo Virtanen; and review secretary: Ms Tara Ryan.
6. General observations of the review team in respect of the College were the following:
 - a) It has an open, active and dynamic environment and this was manifested in the way in which the College engages with external bodies.
 - b) There is a good atmosphere amongst staff (administrative and academic) and students. This reflects the positive leadership style of the Director.
 - c) It reflects a good, close-knit academic community.
 - d) An awareness of the national and regional challenges and a willingness to address them was displayed.
 - e) There was significant consideration of students and students’ future careers and employability.
 - f) Good, stable, long-standing relationships exist with social partners.
 - g) There is good student involvement in various levels of College structures.

These positive features identified by the team during the site visit further emphasised the fact that the Self-Assessment Report (SAR) did not fully do the College justice: there is a need to improve self-evaluation skills: both the capability for self-critical analysis, and for projecting the achievements and strengths of the College.

The team recommends that it would be beneficial for the College to develop further its capacity for focussed reflection and effective self-analysis.

II. BACKGROUND INFORMATION ABOUT THE INSTITUTION

7. V. A. Graičiūno aukštoji vadybos mokykla, V. A. Graičiūnas School of Management (AVM) was established in 1993 in Kaunas by Eugenija Vagnerienė, who is the owner and Director of the College. The original company was a for-profit entity known as Biznio kolegija, Lithuanian American Joint - stock Company. It received non-financial support from US sponsors, and two Lithuanian Government Ministries provided funding. Following its first five years of operation, AVM operations were transferred to a non-profit entity, and renamed as V. A. Graičiūnas School of Management (in 2006). The original legal entity, Biznio kolegija, remains in existence as the holding company, but has no academic activities (it does offer some translation services). All academic activities and the management of education and training are conducted by V. A. Graičiūnas School of Management which is known by the acronym AVM.
8. The College is governed by the 2009 Law on Higher Education and Research and, as a non-state higher education institution, has been established as a public legal person functioning as a public establishment which is one of the options provided by Article 6, paragraph 4¹.
9. Prior to 2009 AVM was also governed by legislation from 2000, the Professional Education and Training Law. AVM provided three-year education programmes in Business, Tourism and Office Administration under this and other laws, and was one of the first seven Lithuanian colleges of higher education to undergo external institutional and programme accreditation in this context. The external institutional evaluation was concluded in 2005. This Report reflects the findings of the next full institutional evaluation to be conducted since that time. Programme accreditation occurred most recently in 2007, and was also successful.
10. The College has 63 academic staff, eleven of whom hold doctoral degrees, and 94% of whom hold a Masters qualification. The majority of academic staff members are part-time lecturers (55), also holding positions in a variety of other types of organisation, but a significant number have been working with AVM over an extended period of time. Approximately 70% of the lecturers have more than three year's practical experience in their field.
11. Established in Kaunas, the College opened a second campus in Vilnius in 2010. In the academic year 2011/12 there were 823 students (full-time and part-time, close to 600 full-time equivalents) registered across both campuses. There were approximately 675 at the Kaunas campus and approximately 150 at the Vilnius campus. Students attended higher education Professional Bachelor programmes in six fields: Business Law; Tourism and Hospitality; Logistics Business Management; International Business and Communication; Marketing and Sales Management; and Office Management and International Communication. The study of these programmes respectively leads to a Level 6, 180 ECTS qualification on the Lithuanian Framework of Qualifications, which was also referenced in 2012 to the European Qualifications Framework (EQF) Level 6. A variety of short training programmes are also offered in broadly the same subject areas.
12. AVM's **stated mission** is to promote "quality in education by enhancing [a] creative, entrepreneurial, supportive and safe environment. AVM aims to [be] flexible and effective responding to the needs of the learning community to meet the challenges of economic, social and sustainable development by creating and disseminating knowledge."

The associated articulated **vision** is to "be a successful international higher education institution with an entrepreneurial spirit supported by [an] attractive ... learning environment". AVM aims to incorporate the values of "professional know-how, international networking, active partnership, entrepreneurial spirit". (Paragraph 2 of the SAR.)

¹ In the SAR the college refers to itself as a 'university college', but no such designation exists under Lithuanian law, which simply provides for Universities or Colleges. It is understood that that is merely a matter of translation. The College is fully aware of its legal status and its corresponding obligations.

III. STRATEGIC MANAGEMENT

Some strengths and areas for development:

- There is preparedness for strategic thinking and there are associated planning processes, e.g. the preparation of activity plans.
- There is ongoing and periodic monitoring of the plans.
- There is good evidence of very active and engaged development work, extending over time, in the area of quality management systems and QA processes.
- These systems take account of the wider European dimension of Higher Education.
- Organisational structures and decision-making is well understood by the staff.
- Decisions are being made and communicated clearly in the context of a small organisation.
- Risk analysis is conducted; and for the purposes of managing change, the Council is careful about not taking undue risk, and being prudent in actions undertaken.
- A code of ethics is in place.

- Looking ahead there is a need to make early decisions regarding plans for growth in respect of new academic programmes.
- The creation of a limited-life Innovation Task Force, led internally, to support the Director's and the leadership's thinking in the area of innovation may be helpful to inform future planning.

13. Governance

AVM is in 99% ownership of the Director, the final 1% being owned by the US sponsors. The Director has established a governance infrastructure to support her in the discharge of her responsibilities and provide a level of oversight with regard to decision-making, particularly in the context of risk. The key organs of governance are the Academic Committee and the College Council. The Council, as explained by its chair, is an advisory group and has no formal legal authority. Nevertheless there is an open and engaged culture where there is full disclosure of information and plans to the Council by the Director, and the Council accordingly approves and/or advises on the plans proposed. The Council has eight members in the majority of whom are external to the organisation. It is chaired by the AVM Head of Institutional Development and the Vice-Chair is the chair of the Academic Council. There is student representation, alumni representation, a representative from the university sector, a representative from the scientific centre, a representative from the national library and a representative from the professional legal field. The 2005 review suggested that AVM consider appointing an external chair to the Council, and whilst a decision was taken at that time not to do so, it is matter which the Director and Council are maintaining under review and may appoint an external person from the business environment in the future. The review team supports AVM's openness to this suggestion and encourages AVM to maintain the matter for future consideration as appropriate.

Academic Council is representative of all academic staff and there is effective student representation with a culture of participative decision-making. Its work is complemented by that of the Programme Committees whose membership is drawn from teachers, students and administrators. They operate in a sufficiently autonomous manner. There is good administration with effective decision-making, and there is external scrutiny of decisions through the external members on the Council.

14. Strategic planning

The College has a planning process which is explicitly linked to its stated vision and mission. Both the Director and the Council explained that plans for professional education emerge from an analysis of the Lithuanian socio-economic environment as well as the educational context of the European Higher Education Area (EHEA). Staff demonstrated an awareness of the EFQ, as well as the Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area (ESG). The current country-specific context is one in which all higher education institutions are facing a reduction in entry numbers due to the combined factors of significant levels of emigration alongside a falling birth rate from the 1990s. This poses very significant challenges for all institutions, but particularly for those such as AVM which are private and therefore not in receipt of direct State funding. Whilst students who receive State funding based on academic merit, calculated on the level of grades in their high school leaving examination, can potentially study in a private institute, and bring their funding to that institute, such private institutes have a responsibility to conduct applied research, but are not funded to do so by the State. Thus Colleges such as AVM face particular challenges which require urgent strategic planning responses.

AVM develops a strategic plan every three years, and associated activity plans are developed annually. Each unit monitors and reviews its own activity plans and they are also periodically monitored and discussed with the Director. There is a focus on implementation of identified actions as evidenced by the “Goal Achievement Plans” embedded in the strategic plan, and by the associated reporting by the Director to the College Council. This is part of the institute’s quality assurance model and is in the view of the panel *fit for purpose*. These plans are also discussed and reviewed by both the Academic Council and the Council. During the site visit, it was explained that the respective Academic Departments/Units present their annual activity plans to Academic Council and their end of year reports. During the various meetings with the different staff groupings it was evident that all staff were aware of the planning processes, and of the involvement of Academic Council in review and monitoring activities. There was awareness and understanding of the ‘Planning Scheme’ presented in Appendix 12 of the SAR. The process is complemented by direct engagement by each unit with the Director reviewing progress made in respect of identified goals. It is evident that there is preparedness for strategic thinking which has led to detailed planning processes, including the annual unit activity plans. The Director prepares an annual report for consideration by the Council, in which progress on the strategic plan is explicitly addressed.

15. The Strategic Plan 2012-2014 appropriately identified five key areas for focussed action. These areas (programme development and delivery; applied research and development; quality assurance; internationalisation; and corporate relations – Annex 16, Strategic Plan) will be specifically commented on later in this Report in the relevant sections. They do reflect key areas for a higher education institution and demonstrate an understanding of the education environment. A possible improvement for consideration here would be that in future strategic planning exercises it may be useful for the College to more explicitly define its strategic objectives in terms of specific, desired outcomes making the link with goals and implementation actions more evident. The *review team recommends* that the creation of a limited-life Innovation Task Force, led internally, to support the Director’s and the leadership’s thinking in the area of innovation in all College development activities may be helpful to inform future planning. Additionally, greater focus needs to be placed on developing explicit targets associated with ‘programme development and delivery’. Looking ahead *the review team recommends* that there is a need to make early decisions regarding plans for growth in respect of new academic programmes.
16. It is further noted that the five areas identified for strategic action include applied research and development. Within this however there is no explicit mention or reference to the

European Research Area. The review team advises that this should be explicitly referenced and its implications teased out into situation-relevant action plans in the next iteration of the College's Strategic Plan. Further discussion of this matter will occur in Section V.

17. Quality Assurance

The strategic planning cycle of three-year plans, complemented by annual activity plans, is a key element of the institute's quality assurance (QA) system. The College has demonstrated commitment and higher education maturity in its investigation of various QA models over an extended period of time. Lithuanian legislation for higher education institutions requires that College have a QA system in place. AVM's first QA manual dates from 2000 and a series of different models and systems have been considered since this period. A key focus for AVM was the development of an appropriate set of criteria or performance indicators. The early period was more theoretical, but from 2004-2007 there was a greater emphasis on explicitly setting targets in certain areas and mapping actions taken. This dates from the time when AVM appointed a Quality Assurance Manager (2004). The *review panel views this as a commendable action* of the College and one which is clearly contributing significantly to the development of a quality culture at AVM.

18. There is evidence that models of monitoring and review are in place, which include appropriate mechanisms for student feedback and contribution to decision-making. These models involve the collection of relevant data and its appropriate use. Examples include the collection of feedback from students through multiple modes (on-line, focus group, through student representatives) and the subsequent publication on Moodle of College responses to the student-raised issues.
19. Since 2008 the College has benchmarked itself informally with International Standards Organisation (ISO) standards, the European Framework for Quality Management (EFQM), the European Foundation for Management Development (EPAS) and also the European Foundation for Management Development (EQUIS). AVM has been attempting to develop its own model of quality assurance drawing on these systems and has also conducted site visits to partner institutions in Belgium and Denmark to consider models employed there. Currently AVM is formally applying for both ISO 9001 and EFQM accreditation in respect of some of its administrative functions hoping to achieve this in 2013. This work is being conducted in the context of an ESF funded project (2011-2013) for the development of a Quality Management System (QMS) which involves benchmarking with recognised international standards for quality assurance for higher education. This project has also allowed for further training of staff on QA systems.
20. The College has also referenced the Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area (ESG) in its work on developing a composite or bespoke model of quality assurance. As a small private business college the review team appreciates the context in which AVM has focussed on industrial or business school models of quality assurance. There is good evidence of very active and engaged development work, over time, in the area of quality management systems and QA processes. Nevertheless the review team suggests AVM keeps its quality assurance model as light as possible and frames it around Part One of the ESG, and ensures that academic quality assurance of teaching, learning and core matters pertaining to programme provision is central. In this context any future self-evaluation team, or quality assurance team, would significantly benefit from the inclusion of persons who could provide senior academic leadership to the process.
21. In reflecting on this report and the overall recommendations of the review team, the College may wish to consider the merits of initiating its own external evaluation at some point in the future using external quality assurance experts from the academic field of Business. This would enable AVM to demonstrate to the external world its growing organisational maturity and to benefit from its own independent assessment of the embeddedness of its arrangements for quality assurance, quality management and quality enhancement. The primary

motivation of such exercises is for internal self-awareness and improvement rather than for the consumption of an external audience.

22. Financial management

As indicated in paragraph 14, the College operates in a very particular national policy context in which funding to private colleges is provided only in limited contexts. This was addressed by the Chairperson of Council from a number of perspectives. It is evident that AVM conducts risk analysis; and for the purposes of managing change, the Council is careful about not taking undue risk and being prudent in actions undertaken. This is a **commendable** approach. The review panel also noted the information provided to them that the College maintains financial reserves to ensure business continuity for a reasonable period of time should income significantly drop. In this way students' investment in their education is protected as the College is in a position to teach-out any programmes should such a necessity arise.

23. From the steward to the chairperson of Academic Council and within each of the administrative units, staff presented consistent understandings and were uniformly clear on both the budget allocation process and resources available to them to undertake their responsibilities. Budgets are linked to activity plans, and whilst formal allocations are not made to units with distributed financial accounting at unit level, each activity leader/coordinator liaises with the Director on funding required and available to conduct business. This occurs on a two-phase process and is complemented by quarterly financial reviews. All staff members were satisfied that College activities are adequately resourced and that monies are appropriately administered. The review team was satisfied from the consistent feedback received at the range of meetings conducted that a context-appropriate model of financial management is in place. Discussions on the mapping of the strategic plan to annual activity plans to budget allocation further confirmed to the review panel that organisational structures and decision-making is well understood by the staff and that decisions are being made and communicated clearly in the context of a small organisation. AVM's accounts are externally audited by a firm appointed by the College.

24. The review panel also affirmed that the resources in place were appropriate for the education and training being provided. Discussions took place on the Research and Studies Monitoring and Analysis Centre June 2012, *Findings Regarding the Compliance of AVM Learning Resources with the Minimum Quality Requirements for the Infrastructure and Organisation of Higher Education Studies*. Overall AVM satisfied these requirements, but two areas required investigation. Firstly the floor space of AVM did not meet the absolute standard in place. Nevertheless the review panel noted that the approach of AVM to this matter was acceptable to national authorities: given the student profile and mode of learning the amount of floor space available at any one time for the number of students in the building at that time is fully appropriate. With regard to the second matter relating to drop-out rates, dialogue occurred on the fact that there was some confusion between HEIs and the national agency in the metrics and exactly how student numbers should be reported, which has led to discrepancies in numbers. The narrative provided by AVM in respect of the cohorts where no drop out was recorded was rational and clear. Overall ***the panel was of the view that resources were appropriate and adequate for the activities being conducted.***

25. The review team confirmed that a ***code of ethics*** is in place.

26. The team's judgement on the area of Strategic Management is ***a positive evaluation.***

IV. ACADEMIC STUDIES AND LIFE-LONG LEARNING

Some strengths and areas for development

- An ongoing process is in place for the modernisation of academic programmes taking account of external (national and European) frameworks.
- There are three state universities and some nine colleges in Lithuania offering studies in law. The AVM BA in Law is a strong programme and competitive in its environment.
- There is an attractive range of relevant, vocational and professionally-orientated programmes which are valued by external stakeholders, and by graduates and students themselves.
- There is in place a monitoring and follow-up system for considering the careers and pathways of graduates.
- There is external engagement with partners (cooperation and involvement) for the development and review of the curriculum and of academic programmes.
- If AVM intends to seek to recruit more globally the College must take steps to enhance the language capability of all relevant staff.
- While recognising the constraints placed upon the College at national level AVM is urged to seek to develop suitable programmes of study at Level 5, and this should include making representations at national level, for example, through the Directors' Conference.
- AVM is urged to continue to make further progress with both staff and student inward and outward mobility in the European context.

27. *Stakeholder involvement in programmes*

AVM has an attractive range of relevant, vocational and professionally-orientated programmes which are valued by external stakeholders and by graduates and students themselves. They include the following study areas which can be pursued in a variety of modes (full-time, part-time, blended learning) and which lead to professional bachelor degrees at Level 6 on the Lithuanian Framework of Qualifications and also at Level 6 on the European Qualifications Framework:

- Business Law (VTE)
- Tourism and Hospitality (TURS)
- International Business and Communication (TVK)
- Marketing and Sales Management (MPV)
- Logistics Business Management (LVV)
- Office Management and International Communication (IATK)

AVM has also provided training programmes for civil servants (clerks in the court services and police officers) and tailor-made, training programmes for Lithuanian Public Administration Training Association (VALA) employees.

Stakeholders (social partners/employers/local representative organisations) praised the range of programmes provided and cited improvements in local public services based on training received at AVM; examples given included better-trained, mid-level, court clerks and also better trained police officers with greater legal-administrative skills. The Law Society and AVM have a signed Memorandum of Understanding which provides for work placement training opportunities for the College's students.

28. The model of review of the curriculum and of academic programmes includes useful external engagement with partners (cooperation and involvement). Stakeholders are consulted on the relevance and efficacy of programmes provided. The Chamber of Business and the

Employers' Association both offer feedback to AVM as do individual employers and the Law Society. Examples of feedback acted upon by AVM included the amendment of the assessment of the law programme to better allow learners to demonstrate relevant learning; previously the Law Society advised the assessment was too broad for the intended learning outcomes stated. This group also noted that it was inappropriate to have too much influence on a curriculum and teacher practice, reflecting a healthy understanding of the relationship between educational institutions and the employer sector and suggesting AVM is presenting itself appropriately as an academic institution.

29. The level of workforce competencies was an area of concern raised by the regional bodies in particular the Kaunas Public Logistics Centre, which led to AVM taking an initiative to develop a system of Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) and provide associated training for adult learners. This has been welcomed by students and employers and has allowed learners to gain advanced entry to programmes as well as certification of experiential learning. The *review panel commends* the College on this initiative which assists students and employers and recognises national policies on access to education. The use of Moodle enables nationwide access to the RPL initiative is an example of *good practice*.

30. *Lifelong Learning*

This initiative is implicitly linked with models of lifelong learning. The review panel notes the College's stated commitment to this area and the examples of good practice in its RPL model and in its adoption of various forms of blended learning. Little *public information* is provided by AVM on this on the College website and the review panel suggests that the website be updated with more relevant and focussed information, in particular reflecting lifelong learning opportunities. This information should include the publication of procedures in respect of the RPL model along with information on access to academic programmes and/or certification possible as well as qualifications attainable based on the recognition of prior experiential or certified learning.

31. The commitment to lifelong learning is evident in the flexibility of the College in responding to student circumstances by adapting modes of provision for individuals. This approach is adapted across all the programmes AVM offers. An additional consideration as identified above in the section on Strategic Management is a consideration of the programme portfolio. A response to local and regional needs and the needs of learners may also be offered through the provision of Level 5 programmes. Whilst recognising the constraints placed on the College at a national level, *it is recommended* that AVM seek to develop suitable programmes of study at Level 5, and this should include making representations at national level (for example, through the Directors' Conference).
32. As part of its strategic plan the College has put in place an ongoing process for the modernisation and internationalisation of academic programmes taking account of national and European qualifications and educational frameworks. The modernisation programme includes the redevelopment of the programmes for provision through the medium of English; the modularisation of programmes with appropriate assignment of ECTS; and the revision of the curriculum with associated intended learning outcomes to ensure students are provided with learning opportunities so that they will be ready to work in an international business environment. This work is currently funded through an EU Structural Funds project and is focussed on two academic programmes: Marketing Management and Tourism; International Business and Law. It is planned to extend this approach to other programmes. The *review*

team commends this work and strongly recommends that all staff is supported in attaining an appropriate level of English language skills to enable them to provide these programmes. It is further advised that the work to extend this approach to all programmes is undertaken in a timely manner.

33. AVM indicated that the process of internationalising its programme portfolio is a key objective. Whilst the project described in paragraph 32 addresses this objective, reference was also made to the possible recruitment of students from other countries to study in Lithuania. The panel was not convinced of the case for this approach and advises that significant planning and risk analysis is required on this matter. Nevertheless the overarching objective to internationalise is one which should benefit the College and its learners and the panel recommends that AVM considers the variety of approaches possible to this concept.
34. A specific project cited in the SAR and discussed during meetings with the panel was the development of a 'triple degree' with institutions in Denmark and in Kosovo. The panel noted the merits of the project, but cautions the College to employ appropriate, internally-documented due diligence processes in the selection of its partners and to take due consideration of good practice on legal agreements underpinning such arrangements and all necessary certification of learning. In this context it is suggested that AVM consults the following documents: *Convention on the Recognition of Qualifications Concerning Higher education in the European region*, Lisbon (1997); the Committee of the Convention on the recognition of qualifications concerning Higher Education in the European Region, *Recommendation the Recognition of Joint Degrees*, Strasbourg (2004); the OECD/UNESCO *Guidelines for Quality Provision in Cross-Border Higher Education* (2005); and the UNESCO/COUNCIL OF EUROPE *Code of Good Practice in the Provision of Transnational Education* (2007).
35. As part of its focus on internationalisation AVM has been involved in the Erasmus mobility programme for some years, sending students outwards on work placement and also sending teachers abroad. Students have been on placement in Spain and Belgium, and expressed satisfaction with the experience and the supports provided. Staff have taught in Belgium, Bulgaria, Demark and Finland. It is not evident to what extent such staff share their experiences or any good practices they may have observed abroad and the review panel advises that the College engages in periodic reflection on how such exchanges contribute to its academic development. During some meetings it was suggested that not all staff appreciate the opportunity to participate in an Erasmus teaching agreement. The panel supports the work done to date and *strongly recommends* that the College increase the numbers of both staff and students participating in Erasmus exchanges. Additionally it *is recommended* that AVM encourage incoming students and teachers to add to its international awareness and engagement. This reinforces the need to increase English language skills.
36. As indicated in paragraph 27 AVM has initiated models of blended learning. This was cited in the SAR and in discussions with teaching staff, the quality team and management its context was explained. In its close monitoring of students at risk of drop-out, the College has adopted a system of 'suspended learning' or transferred students to different modes of learning in order to ensure students are able to continue with their studies notwithstanding difficulties with finances or with moving location, including issues of emigration. Both the close monitoring of student progression and the associated provision of tailored, personalised

supports to students at risk is highly *commendable*. Where models of blended learning are being developed as part of a programmatic review of AVM's suite of programmes, it is suggested that AVM consider carefully the associated modes of assessment to ensure they are fit for purpose in light of the programme variants being developed. Different modes of provision may require different modes of assessment to ensure all intended learning outcomes are being met.

37. In the meeting with students the review panel confirmed that the consultation and feedback model described in the SAR and in other meetings with AVM staff was as described and believed to be effective. Both staff and students also described in detail their use of Moodle which appeared to be very effectively utilised across all programmes for both academic and administrative matters. Intended learning outcomes along with assessment models and schedules are provided. Notices are issued, feedback collected and responses disseminated to the satisfaction of all parties. Chat rooms are also well-used with engaged, academic dialogue amongst students.
38. The review panel noted the satisfactory track record of graduates progressing to other institutions and successfully completing Master level programmes. The graduates that the panel members met were committed to AVM and were of the view that their AVM qualifications had significantly helped them in their respective careers to date, including in their progression to university programmes. Collection of this information is enabled by the monitoring and follow-up system for considering the careers and pathways of graduates which is in place. It was confirmed across a range of meetings that a European Diploma Supplement is issued to all graduates and that ECTS credits are recorded for all learners.

39. ***Work Placement on Programmes***

In keeping with the professional orientation of its programmes, and its focus on responding to the needs of the local and regional socio-economic environment, AVM has a work placement component on all of its professional bachelor programmes. In second year it is for one month and in the final year the placement is for five months, and as part of 'preparedness for work' students seek their own placement. They are offered assistance where they are not able to source one on their own. AVM's local partnerships ensure that all students normally obtain a placement. An extensive project/final year thesis is prepared by each student in respect of the placement. Considering the titles of the projects, the review panel considers the placement to be an important element of the programme, and one which could contribute to local businesses as well as the students. From time to time, students are offered permanent work arising from the placement, and whilst this reflects well on the students, AVM encourages the student to complete their studies and facilitates him/her by allowing flexibility in the time and mode in which students complete, a strategy the review panel supports.

40. AVM has a Career Centre which is the unit which supports students in gaining work placements and also assists students in career planning. Information is provided via Moodle and through class announcements. The Centre is also involved in surveying alumni every three years on where they have gone, what they are working at, etc., but it is done by tracing individual paths, and not in a systematic way. This information is used to inform programme development. The review panel suggests this is conducted in a more planned and uniform manner, utilising the information in light of the strategies of the College. Graduates of AVM with whom the review panel met demonstrated their commitment and loyalty to the College

by indicating a desire to offer work placements or jobs to students or graduates of the College.

41. ***Enhancement of Teaching and Learning***

AVM has demonstrated a commitment to enhancing the quality of its teaching and learning through a model of peer observation which is organised by programme committees. A standard form is utilised by the teaching colleague to record observations and these forms are returned to the programme committee for consideration, and where necessary the development of a quality improvement plan. The College has also established a practice of having periodic ‘open lectures’, where all staff can attend an open session provided by another member of staff to share good practice. Recent examples of these sessions indicate that they are well attended. The review panel ***commends this good practice***, but advises that AVM reflects on the degree to which this is incorporated into the quality assurance system; these dimensions of teaching and learning should be part of the quality culture and should be routinely monitored and reviewed. In the finalisation of its QA model AVM should ensure that matters relating to teaching and learning are at its core.

42. Students are also invited to complete forms seeking feedback on staff teaching, amongst other matters, and these forms (completed via Moodle) are also considered by the programme committee leading to appropriate actions. The students cited a number of examples of feedback being swiftly and satisfactorily being acted upon.

43. The ***panel commends*** AVM on a well-cared for physical and learning environment.

44. The panel also notes that access to learning resources is viewed positively by students and the students reported that problems with equipment which they brought to the attention of AVM were rectified swiftly.

45. The team’s judgement on the area of Academic Studies and Lifelong Learning is ***a positive evaluation***.

V. RESEARCH AND/OR ART

Some strengths and areas for development

- There is a range of activities and investigations in place to support the production of data for institutional use and for management information purposes.
- There are good links with external partners to support student research.
- There is a good system of consultation in place with the social partners.

- The review team notes that the College is currently working toward maintaining systematic records and a database for recording staff research and scholarship outputs. The College needs to establish tools for measuring and assessing the impact of research and development activity.
- There do not appear to be any particular measures in place for incentivising staff research across all study programme areas (Tourism, Law, Logistics); such interventions may be helpful in strengthening teaching, particularly given the College’s and the College sector’s aspirations in the area of Master level programmes.
- There is a need to put in place a national and international publications strategy.
- There is a need for staff to seek and to develop applied research and knowledge transfer opportunities with employers and other business partners.
- There is a need to put in place an overarching Research and Development strategy that takes into account the foregoing recommendations.

46. The review panel considered the work of AVM in addressing this criterion, Research and/or Art, in light of the particular national context, as described at outset of this Report. AVM's focus is on applied research. It is evident that AVM is cognisant of its position, its national obligations under the legislation and is working towards their greater fulfilment, notwithstanding the constraints that colleges like AVM are under. The prohibition on the College engaging in Masters Level or Doctoral Level work makes it particularly difficult to allocate resources to the development of a research profile. This is a matter of ongoing national debate as is the associated funding model which restricts the type of funding available to higher education colleges, and limits their ability to apply for research monies.
47. AVM has taken the approach of engaging in applied research in two particular ways – an internal-focussed, institutional-centred research and secondly in working on engagements with companies evolving from student project and student placement work. Both of these approaches are linked to the institutional strategy which prioritises programme development for sustainable socio-economic development. The organogram presented outlining the variety of research undertaken (Appendix 6 of the SAR), clearly prioritises the internal focus and its relationship to quality improvement, another key component of AVM's strategy.
48. In developing the outward focus of its research portfolio AVM indicated its interest and willingness to undertake research for local companies, but cited a lack of funding as a barrier to this exercise. Local companies are interested in having research conducted, but often approach AVM to operate on a pro bono basis, or a quid pro quo where the company would offer facilities to AVM rather than payment. This poses objective difficulties for the College in developing a significant research portfolio in this context.
49. The review panel noted that the student projects being conducted under AVM supervision appeared to be well-focussed and of specific local and regional benefit. Notwithstanding comments in paragraph 48, the review panel is of the view that there may be scope for lecturing staff to further develop the work being undertaken in this regard, and adapt it for more focussed knowledge transfer (accepting issues of non-disclosure, and/or intellectual property rights of clients).
50. The College has recently opened a Business and Law clinic, where staff and students can offer to assist clients with problems or queries. This is evolving and has potential to produce interesting applied research with effective knowledge transfer. The panel regards this initiative as clearly focussing on the needs of social and business partners and it may in time be a significant contribution to the areas in which the College is based.
51. Whilst a College focus on applied research has been identified in its institutional strategy (Appendix 16 of the SAR) neither the strategy nor the SAR explicitly references the European Research Area (ERA) and its initiatives and potential opportunities. This is a significant weakness and at initial investigation it would appear that AVM cannot meet the criterion on Research. However, following considerable examination and dialogue it was evident that AVM implicitly undertook the focuses and values of the ERA in its partnership work with other European Higher Education Institutions (Belgium, Denmark, Kosovo); its engagement with its regional social partners on projects such as the Recognition of Prior Learning which has been extended as shared practice across other Lithuanian partners; and in the publications (albeit limited) of some of its staff. It is also clear that the current thematic priorities of the ERA² do not specifically overlap with AVM's fields of study and thus the College's engagement must be focussed towards a broader adoption of ERA principles and good practice as a participant in the European Research community. The AVM work with international educational partners and with its local employer and social partners reflect the principle of sharing resources and approaches to solving problems. The review *panel*

² "ERA Thematic Priorities... include...Joint Programming [many with a science and technology focus], the Joint Technology Initiatives (JTIs), the Strategic Energy Technology Plan (SET) and the 3 public-private partnerships for green cars, energy-efficient buildings and factories of the future,..." (www.ec.europa.eu/research)

- recommends* that AVM very significantly strengthens this work, focussing on projects which can lead to knowledge transfer, rather than merely adopting an opportunistic approach to engaging in various projects which have EU funding associated with them.
52. Whilst the review panel acknowledges the objective challenges AVM has in responding to this criterion, and is of the view that AVM meets the threshold based on current SKVC practice in interpreting this criterion to date, the panel also advises that a revised approach to applied research be adopted by the College. The establishment of a clear research strategy and a systematic approach to knowledge transfer is required, with consideration of the research interests and capacities of the staff. The review panel notes that AVM has invited a foreign (UK) expert to be a member of its Council and assist the College in improving its research profile and approach. The panel supports such a strategy and *recommends* that AVM ensures that it obtains sufficient specialised intervention from persons with relevant skills. This may require the engagement of a variety of training or specialist approaches and not be limited to the inclusion of a new member of Council. A model whereby visiting researchers engage with local researchers is often effective in developing an academic community and associated research culture. The introduction of external, international expertise to assist in developing research capability and a research culture has the potential for supporting capacity building and leadership in this area.
53. The review team notes that the College is currently working towards maintaining systematic records and a database for recording staff research and scholarship outputs. Within a renewed applied research strategy the review *panel recommends* the greater systematic documentation of the research output of doctoral qualified staff and the establishment of a clear system to maintain and put it in the public domain. During the site visit the panel considered a small sample of academic papers prepared and presented by AVM staff at various national forums. Some few had been selected for presentation based on peer review. They ranged in topic from research on youth entrepreneurship; unemployment of youth and its consequences; influence of human and social capital on competitiveness of individuals in the labour market; to a focus on quality management; peer review and quality assurance; and an AVM model for evaluating of competencies. The review panel advises that the College establishes a clearer focus for its research and arising publications and has a specific strategy for the dissemination of knowledge in an international as well as a national context. In order to encourage staff in being active researchers it *is recommended* that AVM consider the way in which it may incentivise this work. It is also suggested that an annual report or review of research completed be prepared and published. This may also be a useful document to present to companies and other organisations who may be interested in employing the research capacity of AVM. This may further assist the College in addressing the need to establish tools for measuring and assessing the impact of research and development activity. The review *panel recommends* that this is a key focus in the development of the revised strategy.
54. AVM was able to present during the site meeting a comprehensive table (35 diverse fields) relating to the qualifications and continuous professional development of all of its staff. Amongst other information it included metrics of how many scientific/non-scientific articles each staff member has prepared as well as presentations made at conferences and seminars. It is a very useful repository of information and AVM is to *be commended* on its collation and maintenance. It should be an aid in addressing the recommendation in paragraph 52. The College indicated that it did support its staff in attendance at conferences, but it did appear that the focus is on national rather than international forums. The review panel *further suggests that* in the revision of its applied research strategy AVM identifies specific international conferences which its staff might attend and at which they may present peer reviewed papers.
55. The team's judgement on the area of Research and/or Art is *a positive evaluation*.

VI. IMPACT ON REGIONAL AND NATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Areas of strength and for development

- From the evidence available, including external stakeholder feedback, it is apparent that the College is making a positive impact at regional level, especially in the areas in which the College specialises, e.g. Tourism/Hospitality, Logistics, Law.
- There is a significant, though often informal, exchange of information between the partners on an ongoing basis.
- It is apparent that the College's staff participate in and contribute in various ways to community and voluntary service activities.

- There is insufficient documented evidence of the output of stakeholder engagement.
- The College should take steps to project its profile and image more effectively, including through introducing improvements to the AVM corporate website and more generally in relation to public information.
- The current over-reliance on informal, external networks is a potential weakness, and the College needs to be able to show evidence that they are assessing the impact of external activities and outputs more formally and systematically, and by using appropriate measures.

56. AVM considers the impact of its work on the region and how to better contribute to it through a range of measures including participation in a variety of regional forums, the conduct of focus groups and annual surveys. This was recorded in the SAR at 2.2.6 and confirmed across the meetings held with social partners, administrative, teaching and management staff. The representatives of the social partners with whom the review panel met offered additional illustrations. (See paragraphs 27, 28 and 29 of this report for specific examples.)

57. AVM participates in a range of networks including those listed below. AVM either has a Memorandum of Understanding and or a Cooperation Agreement with most of these organisations:

- a. The Chamber of Commerce, Industry and crafts of Kaunas region*#
- b. Small and Medium Enterprises Association – Kaunas Unit
- c. The Lithuanian Tourism Association - Kaunas
- d. The Lithuania Law Society – Kaunas Unit*#
- e. The Lithuanian Confederation of Industrialists – Kaunas*
- f. The Lithuanian Confederation of Employers - Kaunas region, Kaunas Business Employers' Confederation*
- g. Kaunas Municipality*
- h. Kaunas Labour exchange*#
- i. Kaunas Regional Development Agency*#
- j. Entrepreneur House*#

(Paragraph 2.3.3, Picture 15 of SAR and site visit.)

* Memorandum of Understanding

Cooperation agreement

These relationships are complemented by ones with higher education institutions such as:

- k. Kaunas University of Technology
- l. Vytautas Magnus University
- m. Vilnius University
- n. Vilnius College

- o. Kaunas College
- p. Lithuanian Academy of Applied Sciences

It was evident from dialogue at meetings with graduates and social partners that AVM is well known in the Kaunas region and that there is effective discourse with a shared sense of the national and regional challenges and the ways in which a higher education institution can help in responding to them. Nevertheless there is insufficient documented evidence of the output of stakeholder engagement and the *panel recommends* that systemised models for maintaining such output be developed.

58. It was agreed during dialogue between AVM management and the review panel that impact is difficult to measure, but that the range of engagements with social partners is important and can effectively inform practice. Some of the programmes developed are accepted as significant contributors to the needs of the Kaunas region, for example the tourism and the logistics programmes. Since its introduction the Logistics Business Management programme has attracted significant number of students. Tourism and Hospitality has also been a very successful programme over an extended period of time, reflecting a significant market interest and the College's effective analysis of local needs. These important fields of study are also of national relevance. Notwithstanding these indicators of successful local engagement the review panel cautions AVM against excessive reliance on assertion and/or informal local networks in making the case for its compliance with national and regional socio-economic priorities. The *panel recommends* reflection on what more specific performance indicators may be and suggests a trialling of same by the College. The College needs to be able to show evidence that they are assessing the impact of external activities and outputs more formally and systematically, and by using appropriate measures.
59. The College offers professional bachelor programmes on a part-time as well as a full-time basis and also a range of professional short training programmes in the same fields of study. The training programmes, combined with the use of RPL for the attainment of credit in both the professional bachelor and short-programmes, has been effective in allowing flexible access to education in areas where there are local skill shortages. The repeat offerings of training programmes for local civil servants in 2006, as well as programmes for the Lithuanian Public Administration Training Association 2007-2008, illustrate responsiveness to local needs. The changing profile of programmes being provided is also indicative of a College able to change swiftly in response to volatility in the market, though as indicated above the panel suggests that AVM revisits its programme portfolio in light of market challenges.
60. AVM presented to the review panel a table indicating the range of social and educational enterprises in which its staff participate on a voluntary basis (SAR, Appendix 9). Projects of social engagement in which students participate were also discussed during the site visit, and they included a project on help for homeless pets and visits to elderly people. It was evident that the College has a close-knit community in which staff and students work together on various projects to the benefit of students in gaining generic and transferrable skills. A good example of this practice could be seen in the students' engagement in AVM promotional activities, attending school visits and career exhibitions.
61. As a partner of the Vilnius University Career Centre (VU KC) in a number of ESF funded career training projects, AVM has had the opportunity to train staff to support students with career planning and is also able to participate in a national career monitoring project in the year 2013. This will assist AVM in better analysing graduate pathways, supports required, and academic programme efficacy (SAR, 2.2.6 and site visit meetings). The panel suggests that the College investigate other models of collaboration to enable it to further develop both its professional practices and also gain further insight into its activities. Collaborations with other higher education institutions in the region may also enable AVM to reach more students in novel contexts.

62. In general the *panel recommends* that the College should take steps to project its profile, its visibility and its image more effectively, including through the introduction of improvements to the AVM corporate website and more generally in relation to public information.
63. The team's judgement on the area of Impact on Regional and National Development is *a positive evaluation*.

VII. GOOD PRACTICE AND ENHANCEMENT RECOMMENDATIONS

A number of examples of good practice identified by the review panel have been highlighted in the Report. The following are some of them:

- The learning resources made available to students and the supportive learning environment the College has developed. (See paragraphs 12 and 36.)
- The effective arrangements for programme management and administration and the use of the Virtual Learning Environment – Moodle. (See paragraphs 13, 18, 37 and 40.)
- The initiative to establish the Business and Law Clinic. (See paragraph 50.)
- The work undertaken to track the career pathways of Alumni, the use of surveys and the associated attachment of the alumni, who are loyal, committed and bonded to AVM. (See paragraphs 27, 38 and 40.)
- The progress made in developing College Quality Assurance procedures and quality management systems, including the significant institutional leadership of this area. (See paragraphs 14 and 17-21.)
- The flexible and responsive support for individual study paths, including the introduction of blended learning. (See paragraphs 31 and 36.)
- The work undertaken to modernise the study programmes and the programme portfolio. (See paragraph 32.)

The following is a summary of the review panel's recommendations:

1. Strategic Management

- There is a need to improve self-evaluation skills: both the capability for self-critical analysis, and for projecting the achievements and strengths of the College. The panel recommends that it would be beneficial for the College to develop further its capacity for focussed reflection and effective self-analysis. (See paragraphs 3, 6 and 21.)
- There is a need to make early decisions regarding plans for growth in respect of new academic programmes. (See paragraph 15.)
- The creation of a limited life Innovation Task Force, led internally, to support the Director's and the leadership's thinking in the area of innovation may be helpful to inform future planning. (See paragraph 15.)

2. Academic Studies & Lifelong Learning

- While recognising the constraints placed upon the College at national level, AVM is urged to seek to develop suitable programmes of study at Level 5, and this should include making representations at national level (for example, through the Directors' Conference). (See paragraph 31.)
- If AVM intends to seek to recruit more globally the College must take steps to enhance the language capability of all relevant staff. (See paragraph 32.)
- The review team urges the College to continue to make further progress with both staff and student inward and outward mobility in the European context. (See paragraph 35.)

3. Research

- There is a need for staff to seek and to develop applied research and knowledge transfer opportunities with employers and other business partners. (See paragraph 51.)
- The introduction of external, international expertise to assist in developing research capability and a research culture has the potential for supporting capacity building and leadership in this area. (See paragraph 52.)
- The review team notes that the College is currently working towards maintaining systematic records and a database for recording staff research and research and scholarship outputs. (See paragraph 53.)
- There do not appear to be any particular measures in place for incentivising staff research across all study programme areas (Tourism/Law/Logistics); such interventions may be helpful, particularly given the College's and the College sector's aspirations in the area of Master level programmes. (See paragraph 53.)
- The College needs to establish tools for measuring and assessing the impact of research and development activity. (See paragraph 53.)

4. Regional

- There is insufficient documented evidence of the output of stakeholder engagement and the panel recommends that systemised models for maintaining such output be developed. (See paragraph 57.)
- The current over-reliance on informal external networks is a potential weakness, and the College needs to be able to show evidence that they are assessing the impact of external activities and outputs more formally and systematically, and by using appropriate measures. (See paragraph 58.)
- The College should take steps to project its profile, its visibility and its image more effectively, including through introducing improvements to the AVM corporate website and more generally in relation to public information. (See paragraph 62.)

VIII. JUDGEMENT

V.A. Graičiūnas School of Management (AVM) is given a **positive evaluation**.

Grupės vadovas:

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Grupės nariai:

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ANNEX. V.A.GRAICIUNAS SCHOOL OF MANAGEMENT RESPONSE TO REVIEW REPORT

The Institutional Review Report reflects professional and realistic evaluation of V. A. Graičiūnas School of Management (AVM) activities.

Having read the Report some technical data, such as the name of institution and titles of study programs in part I, II, IV and VI has been corrected by the SAR team (blue color in the text).

What is mostly important that the Report as well as the meetings with the Panel of experts will serve significantly for the further development and improvement of the College performance.

Respectfully,

SAR Team