STUDIJŲ KOKYBĖS VERTINIMO CENTRAS
CENTRE FOR QUALITY ASSESSMENT IN HIGHER EDUCATION

PHYSICAL GEOGRAPHY FIELD OF STUDY

Klaipėda University

EXTERNAL EVALUATION REPORT

Expert panel:

1. Panel chair: Prof. dr. Alvar Soesoo …….. (signature)
2. Academic member: Prof. dr. Juerg Luterbacher
3. Academic member: Assoc. prof. dr. Susan Hegarty
4. Social partner representative: Izolda Marcinonienė
5. Student representative: Gustė Stakeliūnaitė

SKVC coordinator: Ieva Žemaitaitytė

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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: **Prof. dr. Alvar Soesoo**
2. Academic member: **Prof. dr. Juerg Luterbacher**
3. Academic member: **Assoc. prof. dr. Susan Hegarty**
4. Social partner representative: **Izolda Marcinonienė**
5. Student representative: **Gustė Stakeliūnaitė**

1.3. SITE VISIT

The site visit was organised 11 November 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, and the meetings were conducted in English.

1.4. BACKGROUND OF THE REVIEW

Overview of the HEI

Klaipėda University (KU / University) was established in 1990 by the Resolution of the Supreme Council of the Republic of Lithuania. Since its founding, it has developed into a multidisciplinary centre for marine sciences and studies, strongly integrated into international academic networks. Located in Western Lithuania and the country's only seaport city, the University's identity and strategic focus are shaped by maritime research, Baltic Sea region studies, and the priorities of the blue economy. KU is governed by a Rector, a nine-member Council, and a 35-member Senate (including seven student representatives), each elected for a five-year term.

In response to demographic and institutional restructuring needs, KU reorganized its structure between 2015 and 2019, reducing the number of faculties from seven to three. The University currently comprises:

- Three Faculties: Social Sciences and Humanities, Marine Technology and Physical Sciences and Health Sciences;
- Two institutes: Institute of Baltic Region History and Archaeology and Marine Research Institute (in 2017).

KU provides bachelor's, master's, and doctoral studies, ensuring continuity across all three cycles. As of 1 October 2024, KU enrolled approximately 2,800 students across all levels and implemented 65 first- and second-cycle study programmes, 20 of which are delivered in foreign languages. Because of its unique coastal location and the regional demand for marine-related expertise, KU maintains a strong specialization in marine sciences, supported by modern infrastructure, including the University's research vessel *Mintis*, the training ship *Brabander*, and the yacht *Odyssey*. In 2019, KU and five European universities initiated the EU-CONEXUS – European University for Smart Urban Coastal Sustainability. The alliance expanded to nine EU countries in 2022–2026 and includes 18 associated partners.

The Marine Research Institute (MRI), established in 2017, operates as KU's main centre for high-level marine research. Its modern Scientific Laboratory Building opened in February 2018. MRI brings together researchers specializing in the following study fields: marine and coastal management, hydrodynamic and ecosystem modelling, remote environmental observation, water quality, biological invasions and genetics, seabed habitat ecology, plankton and biogeochemistry, water resources, fisheries, aquaculture, marine engineering and pollution.

Overview of the study field

KU is one of only two Lithuanian universities offering study programmes in the field of Physical Geography. Physical Geography studies at KU began in 2001 with the launch of the bachelor's programme "Hydrology and Oceanography", developed in line with national marine environmental protection legislation and regional needs. In 2008, KU introduced the master's programme "Marine Hydrology", targeting the increasing demand for highly qualified marine environment and water resource specialists. Both programmes are integral to KU's strategic mission to advance Lithuania's maritime identity and regional development goals.

The study field of physical geography is located within the MRI of KU. This Institute is dedicated to conducting high-quality research on the marine environment. The Institute also houses the biological science field of study. The Institute has eight research groups, all focusing on aspects of the marine environment. The members of these teach on the two cycles of the SP.

Previous external evaluations

According to the self-assessment report, the Physical Geography field at KU underwent its most recent external evaluation in 2017. The experts concluded that the study programmes were well

aligned with the university's marine and coastal research profile and that the academic staff were active researchers who contributed to national and international scientific projects. The evaluation identified the research infrastructure of the MRI as an important strength. Recommendations focused on further increasing student involvement in research activities, enhancing cooperation with other Lithuanian universities, and continuing to advance the international dimension of the study field.

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*

Additional sources of information used by the review panel:

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

1) List of Publications 2022-2024;
2) List of Scientific and Applied Projects carried out 2022-2025.

II. STUDY PROGRAMMES IN THE FIELD

First cycle/LTQF 6

Title of the study programme	Physical geography and oceanography
State code	6121CX014
Type of study (college/university)	University
Study cycle	First cycle
Mode of study (full time/part time) and nominal duration (in years)	Permanent (4 years)
Workload in ECTS	240
Award (degree and/or professional qualification)	Bachelor of Physical Sciences
Language of instruction	Lithuanian/English
Admission requirements	Secondary education
First registration date	2001-08-02, ISAK No. 1187
Comments (including remarks on joint or interdisciplinary nature of the programme, mode of provision)	

Second cycle/LTQF 7

Title of the study programme	**Marine Hydrology**
State code	6211CX019
Type of study (college/university)	University
Study cycle	Second cycle
Mode of study (full time/part time) and nominal duration (in years)	Permanent 2 years
Workload in ECTS	120
Award (degree and/or professional qualification)	Master of Science in Physical Sciences
Language of instruction	Lithuanian language
Admission requirements	Higher education
First registration date	2008-04-01, No. ISAK-1444
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 Physical Geography field of study is given a **positive** evaluation.

No.	Evaluation Area	Evaluation points*
1.	Study aims, learning outcomes and curriculum	4
2.	Links between scientific (or artistic) research and higher education	5
3.	Student admission and support	4
4.	Teaching and learning, student assessment, and graduate employment	5
5.	Teaching staff	4
6.	Learning facilities and resources	4
7.	Quality assurance and public information	4
	Total:	30

The **second cycle** of the Physical Geography field of study is given a **positive** evaluation.

No.	Evaluation Area	Evaluation points*
1.	Study aims, learning outcomes and curriculum	4
2.	Links between scientific (or artistic) research and higher education	5
3.	Student admission and support	4
4.	Teaching and learning, student assessment, and graduate employment	5
5.	Teaching staff	4
6.	Learning facilities and resources	4
7.	Quality assurance and public information	4
	Total:	30

*

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

The study programmes (SPs) in the Physical Geography field of study have been developed to programme aims and learning outcomes are well aligned to both the strengths of the University and its social partners. They are explicitly aligned to the needs of the blue economy and the marine environment. Given the University's strategic location in the port city of Klaipėda, it is totally appropriate that the SPs be focused on marine and ocean science in its First-Cycle and Second-Cycle programmes. The SP, which are quite specialised but very aligned with the region, ensure that the port, the coast and the wider hinterland have people with the appropriate skills to be able to thrive in any geoscience post in the area.

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

The First-Cycle and Second-Cycle programmes' aim and learning objectives match the mission, goals and strategy of University—specifically with that of 'a university that builds for the future, with recognised international achievements in science and innovation significant for the well-being of the Baltic Sea'. This is, effectively, a portrait of the Physical Geography group within KU. Moving the field of study from the Faculty to the MRI allows both SPs to benefit hugely from the expertise and resources of this research-intensive institute. Both the First- and Second-Cycle SPs are seen as a talent garden for the MRI, with many alumni remaining to become researchers in the Institute.

ANALYSIS AND CONCLUSION (regarding 1.1.)

Both SPs, Physical Geography and Oceanography and Marine Hydrology, are the right programmes, of the right size, in the right location. The aims of these programmes are perfectly aligned with the needs of this region of Lithuania, and the programme teams do an excellent job to deliver these programmes.

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 First-Cycle and Second-Cycle programmes in the Physical Geography field of study comply with the relevant legal requirements, including the field Descriptor (Physical Geography) and the relevant Cycle Descriptors. All programme learning outcomes, and the curriculum design is in line with those required by the relevant Acts. These define the structure of the programme, ECTS credits, total programme workload, credits for final thesis (project), contact hours and independent student work.

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

The programme aims, learning outcomes and assessment methods are well aligned, and are appropriate for the learning context. The team have developed a coherent programme in both the First-Cycle and Second-Cycle. They have also been reflective in the process of writing the SER, as demonstrated in the various figures. This shows how the curriculum in both cycles is coherent, has an excellent range of teaching and assessment methods, and is supportive of the students.

1.2.3. Curriculum ensures consistent development of student competences

The SER shows that student learning is progressive, and students move through purposefully structured modules and a curriculum, enabling them to achieve their full potential. The modules follow on from each other—for example, students are first introduced to skills such as spatial mapping and creating beach profiles using measuring tools and tapes, before being introduced to more modern methods in more advanced years, and drones in the Second-Cycle. This structured curriculum was also visible during the site visit. The students achieve their target competencies such as geographical knowledge and critical thinking, and seem to thrive in this environment.

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

Most personalisation occurs through the students being able to choose their own research area to focus on. Students engage in research from early on in their learning journey, often participating in the research projects of the staff through pre-graduate internships, including the possibility of having ship-time. This engages students and enables them to follow their own interest.

Should a student wish to, they can take more modules than those required for their programme of study, as explained in the SER. This enables those who want to be stretched further to dip into other areas of interest. Students are enabled to go beyond the 'regular curriculum' and are encouraged to push the boundaries of their learning.

The University also has a very forward-thinking form of student leave, whereby a student can take leave at any point in their degree and come back at any time to complete the degree. The University ensures that the, when the student returns, they do so under the same conditions as when they left. This has been in place since the foundation of the University, and is open to any student who wishes. During the site visit, the staff spoke of it as being part of the norm of KU.

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

The final theses and their defence are conducted as per the regulations for the field of study and the cycle. Students in the First-Cycle choose their topic on something that is of current interest. The list of thesis topics is published by the lecturers within two weeks of the start of the penultimate semester of student studies. Students chose the topics within the first six weeks of the penultimate semester. All lecturers with a scientific degree and/or a pedagogical title can supervise a thesis. There is a lot of preparation put into the thesis by both students and staff, with students meeting staff every fortnight to discuss progress. For the defence of the thesis, the chairman of the commission presents the composition of the commission, announces its powers and describes the procedure of defence. Subsequently, the student makes a report on the work done during the defence. This is followed by a response from the reviewer, and questions to the student. The supervisor of the thesis can also speak. The chairman of the commission publicly summarizes the results of the defence and then each student is personally informed about the evaluation which they received.

ANALYSIS AND CONCLUSION (regarding 1.2.)

From all of the above, it is clear that the Physical Geography field of study at KU complies with all the legal acts. The curriculum taught aligns well with the requirements at both First- and Second-Cycle. It is evident that the team have thought a lot about the curriculum and the development of both SPs. They have also used the process of the SER to reflect on the offering, and to change as needed.

The students feel supported throughout their degrees, through a curriculum which is appropriately progressive and through the support given by their lecturers. The alumni also spoke very positively about the value of their education through both cycles.

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				X	
Second cycle				X	

COMMENDATIONS

1. The Physical Geography field of study in Klaipėda is a perfect fit for this region and aligns with the strategy and the vision of the University.
2. Housing this field of study within the MRI ensures that the students have access to the highest calibre of research-active lecturers and equipment. This results in highly motivated and engaged students.

RECOMMENDATIONS

To address shortcomings

- None

For further improvement

1. Continue working with the social partners and the students on curriculum development.

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

The study field is implemented in close connection with the MRI environment at KU. Academic staff who teach in the programmes are very active researchers with recent publications in high impact international journals and with participation in competitive projects. The expert group was impressed about the involvement of scientist in the numerous EU projects. Planned scientific activities are clearly underpinned by stable and diversified financial resources, including long-term institutional funding and substantial national and international project budgets, ensuring their feasibility and sustainability. This creates a direct pathway for transferring research on marine and coastal systems, hydrology, oceanography, remote sensing and GIS into teaching. The competence matrix and study plans show a progressive build-up of research skills through methods, statistics, GIS, remote sensing, and field and laboratory practice, culminating in independent thesis work in both cycles. The self-assessment and annexes are exceptionally well written and give a convincing impression about the research profile which is very well aligned with marine and coastal topics that underpin Physical Geography. The project list includes national and international initiatives across ecosystem services, biological invasions, marine biodiversity, hydrological and oceanographic processes, environmental monitoring, and data-intensive applications. Staff research outputs cited in the lecturers list cover Baltic Sea salinity dynamics, marine heatwaves, coastal upwelling, underwater noise and biosecurity, which are directly relevant to the field. Ongoing competence development activities include postdoctoral research, expeditions, method training and project leadership. Generally, the expert group was impressed by the breath of scientific activities and how the scientists include the knowledge in teaching and education of students and involve students actively in the process of research.

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

The curriculum integrates modern tools and techniques from the early semesters, including programming and data analysis, GIS, remote sensing and statistics. Advanced and field-based subjects in hydrology, oceanography, hydrography, synoptic meteorology and geodesy reflect current observational and modelling practices used in the research environment. Annual review and certification processes are described in the self-assessment, enabling timely inclusion of new content and methods informed by staff research and project work.

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

Students participate in practices, fieldwork and project activities conducted by research groups. According to the SER, 16 students, corresponding to about 45% of all enrolled Bachelor's and Master's students, were involved in scientific and applied research activities during 2021–2024. The list of these shows topics aligned with staff expertise and active projects, for example marine heatwaves, sea level oscillations, micro litter, hydrological modelling and remote sensing applications. The programmes use institutional research infrastructure including vessels and laboratories, and the master's thesis has a substantial research volume. These elements provide authentic participation in data collection, analysis and interpretation. The expert committee was impressed by the fact how researchers, teachers and students work together in trust, appreciation and mutual support.

ANALYSIS AND CONCLUSION (regarding 2.1.)

The evidence shows a very clear, convincing and consistent link between science and studies. Staff research activity is very visible and in the forefront of many scientific areas through participation in national and EU projects and high impact publications. The science is diverse and very relevant, and the curriculum embeds modern scientific methods and technologies. Student engagement in research is very clear and the collaboration and interaction with researchers and teachers is excellent. Overall, the study field demonstrates an excellent and strong integration of research and teaching that is fully consistent with the programmes' aims and the institutional marine specialisation.

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					X
Second cycle					X

COMMENDATIONS

1. High quality teaching, supervision and mentoring is delivered by very active, motivated and successful researchers whose recent high impact publications and national and EU project roles fully align with the study field, ensuring up-to-date scientific content in studies.
2. The curriculum clearly includes advanced methods and tools such as programming, GIS, remote sensing, statistics and field practice that build research skills progressively.
3. Students have authentic opportunities to participate in research through practices, laboratory and field activities, and theses that reflect current projects and staff expertise. The relationship between students and researchers is excellent.

RECOMMENDATIONS

To address shortcomings

- None

For further improvement

- None

AREA 3: STUDENT ADMISSION AND SUPPORT

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

FACTUAL SITUATION

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

Admission to the programme is carried out through the national centralised system (LAMA BPO), which ensures uniform criteria, clear requirements, and transparent communication for all First-Cycle applicants. Non-EU applicants and Second-Cycle admissions are managed by KU through institutional procedures that are publicly available and approved annually. Competitive scores are calculated according to national regulations, using subject weightings relevant to the field.

Across 2022–2024, the programme shows a steady increase in applicant numbers, including first-priority choices (from 23 applicants, 6 of them first priority in 2022, to 51/11 in 2023 and 69/13 in 2024), suggesting improving visibility and demand. Although national minimum thresholds for admission were reduced in 2024, the programme's own lowest and average competitive scores did not decline and in some cases increased, indicating stable applicant quality. The number of students ultimately signing study agreements remains modest but sufficient to form groups (5 in 2022, 12 in 2023 and 4 in 2024). By contrast, Second-Cycle admissions in Marine Hydrology show signs of limited sustainability, with 8 applicants and 4 enrolments in 2022, only 3 applicants and no formed intake in 2023, and no admission in 2024.

During the site visit, students confirmed that admission information is communicated clearly and early through introductory sessions, individual consultations, and the student ambassador initiative, which they considered helpful in understanding expectations and support options. Moreover, dropout rates were not highlighted as a significant issue during the period, and the programme generally maintains its enrolled student cohorts, although small group sizes mean that each individual withdrawal has a proportionally higher impact on the stability of the cohort and the overall sustainability of the programme.

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

The University has clear, formal procedures for recognising foreign qualifications and partial studies completed abroad. Academic recognition of qualifications obtained outside Lithuania is handled centrally in accordance with national legislation and SKVC guidelines. Applicants submit the necessary documents through the KU admission system, and decisions on recognition are made based on the established criteria.

For non-formal and informal learning, the University applies a structured process for evaluating and accrediting prior experience, allowing applicants to have competencies assessed and credited up to 50% of the programme scope. This process is managed by institutional commissions, involving portfolio analysis, interviews, and evidence evaluation. Staff and students confirmed during the site visit that these recognition procedures are well established and consistently applied. Students also reported that information regarding the recognition of foreign qualifications and prior learning is accessible and that guidance is provided when submitting applications.

With regard to the recognition of study periods completed abroad, the SER data shows that no students from abroad came to the University for full-time field studies in the relevant field and cycle during the last three years, meaning that the share of incoming students remained 0%. During the same period, outgoing mobility requiring formal recognition of at least 15 ECTS credits did occur, though in limited numbers: 4 students in 2021, 2 in 2022, and 1 in 2023 completed part-time studies or practice abroad. These numbers suggest that the recognition procedures are available and applied in outgoing mobility cases, but the lack of incoming students may indicate that further development of conditions for incoming mobility could be needed for the programmes.

ANALYSIS AND CONCLUSION (regarding 3.1.)

Admission and recognition procedures are clearly regulated, transparent, and in line with programme requirements and national legislation. Application data for 2022–2024, together with stable or improving competitive scores, indicate a reasonably well-prepared intake, although small cohorts and the discontinued master's intake show sustainability risks at second-cycle level. Procedures for recognising foreign qualifications, prior studies, and non-formal learning are clearly established and consistently applied. Overall, the criterion is met, but further attention should be given to ensuring the long-term sustainability of all programmes, considering the small student numbers.

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

The University provides opportunities for student academic mobility, primarily through the Erasmus+ programme and various bilateral agreements with international institutions. Despite these opportunities, student mobility remains relatively low. According to the institutional data, there were no incoming Erasmus+ students during the evaluation period, which may suggest limited international visibility and attractiveness of the programme for foreign students. This is consistent with the University's observation in the self-evaluation report that factors such as the limited number of English-taught courses, geopolitical concerns, and external challenges like the COVID-19 pandemic have reduced the willingness of foreign students to engage with the programme.

Outgoing mobility has shown some fluctuations: 4 students in 2021, 2 in 2022, 1 in 2023, and 7 in 2024 participated in long-term mobility activities such as studies or internships abroad. Additionally, some students engaged in short-term blended intensive programmes (BIP). The number of outgoing students rose slightly in 2024, which may reflect efforts to improve mobility outreach and support. However, overall numbers remain modest and show that student participation in mobility activities is limited.

Additionally, the University's involvement in EU-Conexus provides another form of internationalisation, offering students in the Physical Geography and Oceanography programme opportunities to participate in Minors Blended and Virtual Mobility activities. However, the full extent of participation in these opportunities remains unclear, and it appears that the overall uptake of these international learning experiences is still low.

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

Students are introduced to the study programme and its requirements through several structured activities at the start of their studies. After the University-wide introductory events, first-year students participate in programme-specific sessions organised by the MRI Study Organisation Group and programme administration. These sessions provide information on the study plan, expectations, assessment procedures, internships, and available facilities. Students are also introduced to lecturers, laboratories, and safety procedures before beginning practical work. Curators and tutor-lecturers assigned to first-year groups further support students' initial integration into university life.

Furthermore, continuous academic counselling is ensured throughout the study period. Programme managers, lecturers, and administrative staff offer consultations at scheduled hours and via digital platforms, including Moodle, email, and online meetings. Students confirmed during the site visit that teachers remain accessible and responsive, and that feedback on their progress is provided regularly. For final thesis preparation, students receive individual supervision, with opportunities to consult additional lecturers when needed.

Financial and social support mechanisms are well developed as well. Students have access to Senate scholarships, incentive scholarships, pedagogical support scholarships, social scholarships, and one-time financial aid. Information about these opportunities is published and explained to students, who reported that it is clear and accessible. Additional social support is provided through the KU Student Union and dormitory self-governance structures, which help address everyday issues and encourage community involvement.

Psychological and personal support is available through university counselling services, offering individual psychological consultations by appointment, as well as pastoral care provided by the university chaplain. These services contribute to the overall well-being of students and support them in managing academic or personal challenges.

Overall, during the site visit students reported that they receive clear information, timely support, and that their feedback is taken into account, indicating that the academic, financial, social, psychological, and personal support provided is relevant and functioning effectively.

3.2.3. Higher education information and student counselling are sufficient

Students receive structured and timely information about their studies through several coordinated channels. Before the start of the academic year, programme-related information is communicated through institutional platforms, and once students enrol, the Study Organisation Group provides clear guidance on study procedures, schedules, and administrative requirements. Introductory meetings at the institute level help students understand how studies are organised, what academic expectations apply, and which support services are available. This ensures that essential information is accessible early and presented in a coherent way.

Throughout the programmes, counselling is maintained through regular communication between students and academic staff. Lecturers make themselves available during allocated consultation hours and through virtual environments such as Moodle, email, and online platforms, allowing students to seek clarification on academic matters at any stage of their studies. Students noted that staff are approachable and responsive, and that questions raised during or after classes are addressed without delay. Programme managers also provide ongoing guidance on matters such as subject choices, internships, and study progression, ensuring continuity of support.

Overall, the range of information channels and the availability of staff for academic counselling indicate that students receive sufficient and continuous guidance to navigate their studies effectively.

ANALYSIS AND CONCLUSION (regarding 3.2.)

The University provides a broad and structured support system covering academic, financial, social, psychological, and personal aspects, and students reported that these services are accessible and effective. Introductory activities and programme-level guidance ensure that students receive essential information at the start of their studies, while continuous academic counselling is available through regular consultations, digital platforms, and supervisory arrangements. Financial and social support measures are well developed and clearly communicated, and psychological support is available when needed. However, student participation in academic mobility remains low, with no incoming students and only modest outgoing numbers despite the existence of Erasmus+ and EU-Conexus opportunities. The small size of student cohorts further limits the potential for mobility, international exposure, and peer learning, and also raises concerns about the long-term sustainability of the programmes, as each individual decision to participate or withdraw has a proportionally greater impact on overall engagement and study process dynamics.

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				X	
Second cycle				X	

COMMENDATIONS

1. The University provides a comprehensive range of academic, financial, social, psychological, and personal support services, which students report as clear, timely, and effective.
2. The student ambassador initiative effectively contributes to programme visibility and strengthens communication between prospective students and the academic community.

RECOMMENDATIONS

To address shortcomings

- None

For further improvement

1. Further promote and support outgoing student mobility, so that more students make use of Erasmus+ and similar opportunities.
2. Enhance the international visibility of the programmes in order to attract more incoming exchange students.
3. Systematically address small cohort sizes by increasing programme visibility, strengthening student recruitment, and improving retention to support the long-term sustainability of the programmes.

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

Both the First-Cycle and Second-Cycle programmes are in person, with a focus on integrating research and skills into the curriculum. The curriculum of both cycles is reviewed annually, and the teaching and learning takes a number of forms, from lectures, exercises, laboratory work, team and individual projects, oral presentations, discussions, tests etc.

The team in KU is enthused by teaching and by research. It is obvious that their research informs their teaching, and this is passed on to the students. This enthusiasm for the passing on of knowledge results in the lecturers engaging in innovative teaching methodologies, including problem-based learning, inquiry-based learning, group work and other forms of active pedagogies. The students respond to this, being motivated and engaged. This leads to a student population which is thriving and achieving (and perhaps surpassing) the intending learning outcomes.

Graduate employment is monitored by the central unit of the University. Over 50% of graduates are employed on graduation, in a wide range of locations including: the Environmental Protection Agency (Hydrology Department), UAB Innoline (Sustainability Division specialist), Environmental Protection Agency, Western Environmental Research Division (senior specialist), Lithuanian Hydrometeorological Service (LHMT) (meteorologist). Graduates from the First-Cycle can also continue on to Second-Cycle studies in Klaipėda, and during the site visit we met quite a number of both Masters students and PhD students who were graduates of the First-Cycle.

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

KU believes that the university must be open to all. This is enshrined in the KU Code of Academic Ethics, which includes a statement that lecturers create appropriate conditions for students with special needs during their assessments, so that all can perform on an equal footing. There is support for students with visual impairments through the KU library, including software for accessibility.

The SER team note that little progress has been made nationally in looking at social exclusion from Higher Education. The percentage of students who have confirmed disabilities within Lithuanian HE is very small. It is praiseworthy that KU have highlighted this within the SER, and have committed, as a University, to undertake measures to work towards solving this.

ANALYSIS AND CONCLUSION (regarding 4.1.)

KU is a hub of enthusiastic learning, where students are encouraged to think big. The learning methods, which are reviewed annually, are innovative, and are aligned to help the students achieve the best learning. This creates an energy where all feel encouraged to learn and to thrive. Many of the students remain to complete the Second-Cycle programme, a PhD and indeed some of the Faculty are alumni of the programmes. All those who are involved in the teaching of students are equally enthusiastic and energetic and see that they have a privileged position in facilitating learning.

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

Student learning is monitored at subject, course of study and programme level. This happens informally, through conversation in class, and annually through regular surveys and feedback. Students are provided with regular feedback on their progress. In turn, students provide the lecturers with regular feedback, which is used to ensure that the course is at the right level, and the right content, for the student needs.

There are formal measures in place to gather feedback from students, through formal meetings with the students, and through the close communication with the student body. This feedback is acted on, as we could see on the site visit, and the student body felt that they had ownership over their learning experience because of it.

4.2.2. Graduate employability and career are monitored

Graduate employment and graduate outcomes are monitored and gathered centrally by KU. There is an alumni group, which gathers every year as part of the Sea Festival 'Dragon Competition'. The Physical Geography team monitors the labour market, to ensure that the programmes are aligned with marked needs. Social partners have been involved in designing some of the modules on the curriculum. This ensures that the curriculum is appropriate for the needs of all stakeholders.

It is noteworthy that research suggests that the income of First-Cycle graduates is growing over the past number of years. This shows that the graduates are highly qualified and are being placed in positions which are commensurate with their academic achievements.

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

There is a clear set of procedures and policies to ensure academic integrity, tolerance, and non-discrimination. The KU Code of Academic Ethics governs these matters. On beginning their studies at KU, all students sign a contract in which they undertake to comply with the requirements academic discipline and student ethics.

All students are encouraged to use the plagiarism prevention tool Oxsico. This encourages students to reflect on their work, and to self-check it. As a result, there has been no case of violation of the principles of academic integrity over the past three years.

There is a clear policy around the use of Gen-AI, and students were able to articulate this. They spoke of how they can ethically use Gen-AI and knew of the limitations. They also were aware of how to reference Gen-AI. This is a testament to the clear communication of the policy on Gen-AI on the part of the faculty. There is a very useful Academic Ethics module which students complete in semester 1.

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

The information about how students can submit a complaint or an appeal are available on the KU website. Students who do not agree with the assessment of the exam/credit have the right to appeal within 3 days. The grounds for appeal are clearly stated. There have been no appeals or complaints in the past three years.

ANALYSIS AND CONCLUSION (regarding 4.2.)

The teaching and learning activities that happen in KU are innovative, appropriate to the subject field, and aligned to enable students to achieve the best results, acquire skills and participate in research. The team at KU take teaching seriously, but that doesn't mean that it is stagnant. They have developed two programmes which are dynamic, and where student learning is at the centre.

Students feel empowered to take control of their learning journey. They feel heard and valued. The students spoke about the sense of community and of 'family' within the programme. This results in happy, engaged students, and happy lecturers.

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					X
Second cycle					X

COMMENDATIONS

1. Very enthusiastic teaching staff who want to share their knowledge with students.
2. Well thought through programme which uses engaged and active pedagogies, when and where they make sense.
3. Very clear policy on the use of Gen-AI, which the students were able to articulate excellently. Students spoke of the usefulness of Gen-AI, and of its abuses. This policy and its implementation within the field of study is something which could act as a case study for others.

RECOMMENDATIONS

To address shortcomings

- None

For further improvement

- None

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 Physical Geography field KU is delivered by a relatively small, stable team of lecturers and researchers associated with the MRI and the Faculty of Marine Technology and Natural Sciences. According to the SER, 30 lecturers contribute to the study field, 17 of whom are permanently employed at least half-time, and 11 come from other Lithuanian and foreign institutions. The staff includes 3 practitioner-lecturers and a strong representation of active researchers.

It was proven during the site visit that teaching staff who deliver study field subjects and work at least part- time and for at least 3 years at the evaluated HEI as a share of all teaching staff who deliver field subjects within field study programmes are indicated and commented on.

The SER confirms that 87% of lecturers are researchers, and 42% hold the rank of professor, exceeding national minimum requirements and ensuring high academic expertise and clear alignment between research activities and the subjects taught. MRI employs scientists, researchers, doctoral students, and practitioners, providing a broad and competent staff base. It is also evident from the SER that all teaching staff of the programme have at least B2 level English and they are indicated as teaching staff in the programme in case the subject is delivered in a foreign language.

Younger staff, including doctoral students and recent PhD graduates, are gradually integrated into the teaching process through supervised teaching, laboratory work, and field practices. This gradual generational transition ensures long-term sustainability. Many of them are also trained in drone applications, AI-assisted analysis, and digital teaching methods. The SER highlights that young lecturers are encouraged to undertake international internships and join international project groups, strengthening long-term academic sustainability.

Students expressed very positive views about the teaching staff. Satisfaction survey results for 2021–2024 show an overall programme rating of 4.3/5, with particularly high scores for teaching quality, academic integrity, lecturer communication, and the clarity and consistency of teaching → 4.4–4.9 across several indicators. Students praised lecturers as *competent, supportive and engaging*.

Staff qualifications comply with national legislation and the 2022 Descriptor for the Physical Geography and Public Geography field. The staffing level ensures an excellent student–teacher ratio, enabling individual supervision and accessibility. Small cohort sizes allow close monitoring of student progress and extensive consultation opportunities.

ANALYSIS AND CONCLUSION (regarding 5.1.)

The staff qualifications and competencies are fully adequate to achieve learning outcomes in both study cycles. Scientific activity is exemplary, and teaching is strongly research informed. The system of gradually involving young researchers supports sustainability, though the small staff size and overlapping responsibilities remain structural risks.

First-Cycle benefits from small groups and high lecturer accessibility but would gain from more structured didactic innovation and digital method integration. **Second-Cycle** demonstrates strong research mentoring and advanced subject integration but relies on the same limited group of supervisors.

Strong integration with MRI research activities ensures that teaching reflects current scientific developments, especially in marine sciences, GIS, remote sensing, and hydrological modelling.

The SER provides evidence of active scientific engagement:

- 70% of lecturers specialise in research areas directly aligned with the study field;
- A growing number of lecturers improved their scientific qualifications during 2021–2024;
- Around 65% improved their didactic competences in the same period.

The close link between teaching and active marine and environmental research ensures a high scientific level. The teaching staff excellence in science can be exemplified by good number of the scientific publications. There is also a positive trend in the number of publications, for example in 2022 the group published only 10 peer-revived publications (7 of them in Q1 category), in 2023 18 publications (13 in Q1) and 2024, 33 publications (13 in Q1, 15 in Q2). The staff is actively participating in international and national research projects. For example, during 2022 – 2025, 24 international projects were active, including several Horizon, Interreg, Erasmus and other financial instruments. The project portfolio is diverse, ensuring a good coverage of thematic topics which are relevant to Cycle 1 and 2 teaching subjects.

While teaching teams are highly dedicated, the SER notes that further development of pedagogical and digital teaching competences would be beneficial, particularly in First-Cycle. At Second-Cycle, small cohorts and research integration support strong supervision and high-quality mentoring.

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

The SER provides evidence that KU supports staff mobility through Erasmus+ and EU-CONEXUS networks. Lecturers are encouraged to participate in short-term internships at foreign universities and institutes, and preference is given to those who have not previously participated in mobility programmes. Examples include internships in Spain and Latvia undertaken by several MRI lecturers.

However, mobility is uneven—core researchers are highly mobile, while teaching-oriented staff and early-career lecturers participate less frequently. Short-term mobilities dominate; long-term teaching exchanges remain rare. Heavy teaching and project load often limit mobility opportunities. While not all staff make use of mobility opportunities, the institutional framework to support mobility is well established.

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

Staff development at KU is governed by the 2022 Qualification Improvement Procedure, which grants every academic staff member five working days annually for training and professional development. Competence development covers subject-specific, scientific, pedagogical, and general skills (e.g. digital competences, communication, intercultural skills).

Training opportunities are available through:

- KU Lifelong Learning Centre;
- University funds (Science, Studies, International Relations);
- Ministry of Education subsidies;
- Erasmus+ and international project funding.

Multiple professors completed EduLab didactic training in 2023, enhancing modern teaching and assessment methods. Lecturers participated in digital teaching and AI-in-education courses (2024,

Erasmus+ KA2-HED) and Soft Skills for Digital Teaching workshops. Continuous research-based competence improvement through projects (RESTORE4C, DEMERSAL, WaveWise, EcoSERVE, etc.) ensures that lecturers' scientific knowledge remains current.

Lecturers undergo periodic certification and evaluation procedures (every 5 years) that assess scientific, pedagogical, and general competences, ensuring continuous quality improvement.

ANALYSIS AND CONCLUSION (regarding 5.2.)

KU provides a supportive and structured framework for staff development, mobility, and competence enhancement. The SER demonstrates active participation in pedagogical and scientific training, particularly through project involvement and international cooperation. Staff evaluations are systematic and contribute to quality improvement.

Pedagogical training is not yet uniformly implemented, but the institution is addressing this through updated training programs and the Lifelong Learning Centre.

Main strengths:

- Clear institutional procedures for qualification improvement.
- Active involvement in EU-CONEXUS and Erasmus+ mobility.
- Multiple lecturers trained in didactics and digital teaching (EduLab, KA2).

Main areas for further enhancement:

- Systematic integration of pedagogical training across all teaching staff.
- Continued encouragement for broader participation in mobility programmes.

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				X	
Second cycle				X	

COMMENDATIONS

1. High scientific qualification and research-teaching integration.
2. Strong project participation ensuring real-world and field-based learning.
3. Active didactic and digital competence development (EduLab, AI teaching).
4. Clear institutional support for mobility and qualification improvement.
5. Excellent student satisfaction and accessibility of staff.

RECOMMENDATIONS

To address shortcomings

- None

For further improvement

1. Strengthen pedagogical and digital teaching competencies systematically. Broaden structured pedagogical and digital training for all lecturers.
2. Encourage wider participation in international teaching exchanges and mobility programmes.
3. Recruit additional early-career and international staff to diversify expertise.
4. Strengthen teaching-performance evaluation criteria beyond research metrics.
5. Reduce administrative burden to allow more time for teaching development.

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.

Study activities are closely connected with the MRI, which allows the university to use MRI's scientific and financial resources. Modern facilities and equipment provided through the Integrated Programme for the Development of the Lithuanian Maritime Sector at the Science, Studies and Business Centre support students and teachers in their research and studies. Expert panel verifies that most lectures take place in the main university building, but larger auditoriums from the Faculty of Marine Technology and Physical Sciences (JTGMF) and other faculties are also used when needed. All classrooms are equipped with modern technology (internet, computers, speakers, video projectors, etc.).

During the visit experts could visit the training ship "Mintis" and were introduced with modern underwater research equipment such as drop-down cameras, remotely operated vehicles, and acoustic devices used for seabed exploration. Modern drones and another equipment were shown in the laboratory inside the faculty. For outdoor practice, coursework, and thesis preparation, necessary equipment for measuring meteorological, hydrological, and hydro-physical parameters is available and used.

Wi-Fi is available in all university departments. When necessary, MRI also provides online teaching and learning using Zoom, Teams, or Moodle platforms. Students gain practical experience through collaboration with social partners who maintain close relationships with the university. The Environmental Research Department (ATD) of the Environmental Protection Agency is especially popular for external practice. Students participate in monitoring programmes of the Curonian Lagoon and the Baltic Sea, conducted on the ship "Mintis" and ATD vessel "Vėjūnas".

Following the integration of the EU Conexus student co-working space on campus, students can study or relax there at any time. All university buildings have elevators and full access to auditoriums and laboratories for people with disabilities. In fact, environment for studies and living is fully applied to them.

Teachers and students use all services and resources of the KU Library (KUB), including the KUB Virtual Library (https://vb.ku.lt). The main study programme literature can be easily found using a "one-stop-shop" system. The university licenses 29 databases, providing lecturers and students access to thousands of e-documents.

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

In spite the existing study facilities and scientific infrastructure are up to date and do not require major renovation, new equipment remains essential for scientific research and teaching. International and national scientific projects carried out by MRI, as well as investment projects funded by KU, help to modernize facilities and improve the quality of studies. Teachers and students are familiar with AI tool and the usage is growing rapidly and it will help in routine work and studies in the future. In some exclusive cases (interrupted GPS signal, for instance) the university searches for recourses to solve the problems promptly.

ANALYSIS AND CONCLUSION (regarding 6.1.)

After the visit, the expert panel confirmed that the KU Physical Geography SER reflects the facts accurately and fully meets the aims of the study program. One of the main arguments for a very

positive evaluation is the continuous updating of learning facilities, which are actively used in the study process. In addition, scientific and financial resources are supported by both employees and social partners.

There are some gaps in students' practice regarding the meteorology (usage of different numerical weather prediction models, satellite and radar data during the internship at Lithuanian Hydrometeorological Service or using Erasmus possibilities). In this case weather simulator tool could help students to monitor process and to understand weather environment better.

During the visit, the experts confirmed that administrators and teaching staff address technical and resource-related issues promptly, and students did not face any disruptions in their studies. There are good conditions for studying, living, and resting for persons with disabilities, and video cameras are installed to ensure contingency monitoring and rapid response.

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				X	
Second cycle				X	

COMMENDATIONS

1. Strong cooperation with MRI as a scientific partner and employer, particularly in the field of marine research and environmental protection and facilities they use are in high level
2. KU is a unique institution for marine research and mostly reflects Klaipėda's needs as a seaport city by preparing highly specialized professionals.

RECOMMENDATIONS

To address shortcomings

- None

For further improvement

1. Strengthen cooperation with LHMT and organize at least one month of student internships at the LHMT Klaipėda Marine Department.
2. To create a simulator for weather prediction in the south-eastern area of the Baltic sea.
3. More practical usage of numerical weather prediction models, satellite meteorology and radar data in marine weather forecasting
4. Pay more attention to programming (R, Python) education.

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 operates a well-established, ISO-certified internal quality assurance (QA) system covering study, research, and administrative processes (ISO 9001:2015; ISO 14001:2015; ISO 45001:2018). These standards ensure that procedures for planning, delivering, monitoring, and improving study programmes are formally defined and implemented across the institution, providing a unified and traceable framework for quality assurance activities.

Quality management procedures are described in documented processes such as:

- Preparation, Evaluation and Improvement of Study Programmes;
- Process of Study Implementation;
- Stakeholder Feedback Management;
- Internal Audit and Monitoring Procedures;
- Study Programme Committee Regulations;
- Guidelines for Learning Outcomes Formulation and Assessment.

Responsibilities are clearly distributed among university bodies (Senate, Rector's Office, Academic Affairs), faculty structures, and the MRI, where the Physical Geography field is situated. Programme-level oversight is carried out by the Committee of Physical and Life Sciences Study Fields and Programme Heads, who evaluate programme performance annually, using evidence from AIS (Academic Information System), internal reviews, and student surveys.

The QA system includes annual internal reviews, subject recertification every 3 years, monitoring of learning outcomes, evaluation of thesis quality, and systematic documentation of programme-related decisions via AIS and SharePoint. These tools provide traceable documentation and ensure that information flows consistently between programme committees, MRI leadership, and central university administration.

A strength of this system is the regularity and predictability of QA cycles; however, the level of *critical depth* in programme-level analysis varies, and some improvement actions remain descriptive rather than measurable.

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

Students, employers, alumni, and other social partners participate in quality assurance through multiple mechanisms:

- **Students** are represented in Senate, faculty councils, MRI Council, study field committees, and programme committees. They participate in regular consultations with the KU Students' Union and provide structured feedback through semester-based surveys.
- **Social partners** from hydrometeorological services, marine and environmental institutions, protected area administrations, port authorities, municipalities, and consulting companies contribute to thesis defence committees, provide practice placements, and offer targeted feedback on graduates' competencies and labour-market relevance.
- **Alumni** are invited to programme-level consultations, contribute to discussions on curriculum relevance, and participate in project-based activities, though their involvement remains occasional.

While stakeholder involvement mechanisms are formally established and functional, participation is strongest among students and a core group of employers. It was mentioned during the site visit that engagement of a broader range of employers and alumni occurs more irregularly, often depending on personal connections.

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

Information on study programmes—including intended learning outcomes, admission requirements, accreditation decisions, and curriculum structure—is made publicly available through the KU website, faculty webpages, and the national AIKOS system. Programme specifications, subject descriptions, and annual performance data are systematically collected and managed through the AIS, ensuring consistent documentation and traceability of study-related information.

Internally, a wide range of quality-related data is collected, analysed, and used for programme improvement. This includes student survey results, student progression and completion statistics, thesis defence outcomes, feedback from thesis committees, and input from employers and social partners. The SER provides examples of how this information has been used to improve field studies: student feedback has led to revisions of subject content and teaching methods, particularly by strengthening practical components and fieldwork in First-Cycle; analysis of thesis quality and defence outcomes has resulted in clearer alignment between learning outcomes, research methodology subjects, and final thesis requirements, especially in Second-Cycle; monitoring of student progression and completion data has informed improvements in study organisation, introductory guidance, and academic support in the early stages of studies; and feedback from employers has contributed to reinforcing applied competences in data analysis, modelling, GIS, and remote sensing across both cycles. Recommendations from previous internal reviews and external evaluations have also been incorporated into programme development plans and reflected in updated curricula and teaching approaches.

All internal quality information, improvement decisions, and supporting documentation are recorded in AIS and SharePoint, enabling evidence-based decision-making and continuity of quality assurance processes. However, although information is systematically collected and actively used for internal improvement, its public presentation remains fragmented. Programme-level quality assurance results—such as summaries of implemented improvements, graduate employment indicators, and outcomes of evaluations—are not consistently consolidated into a single, easily accessible public source. As a result, while internal transparency and use of information for quality enhancement are strong, outward-facing transparency for prospective students and external stakeholders is still developing.

7.1.4. Student feedback is collected and analysed

KU implements a structured and systematic student feedback system:

- **Standardised electronic surveys** are conducted every semester for each subject, covering teaching quality, course organisation, lecturer communication, and assessment clarity.
- **Programme-level surveys** gather broader perspectives on workload, academic support, and learning environment.
- **Meetings with student representatives** supplement quantitative feedback and allow more nuanced discussion of study issues.
- **Feedback is analysed** by teaching staff, the Programme Head, and the Study Field Committee, and is incorporated into programme updates, syllabi revisions, and teaching method adjustments.

Student feedback results are discussed during faculty or institute meetings, and internal reports document actions taken.

ANALYSIS AND CONCLUSION (regarding 7.1.)

KU maintains a comprehensive and formally robust quality assurance system, supported by ISO certification and clearly defined procedures. Responsibilities for quality assurance are well-distributed across institutional levels, and programme monitoring is regular and well documented. MRI's involvement strengthens the relevance and scientific grounding of the Physical Geography field.

Stakeholder participation is functional; students are well represented, and employers are involved in thesis defences and practice supervision. However, stakeholder involvement—particularly alumni and a broader employer base—remains uneven and occasionally informal. Establishing a structured advisory mechanism for the field and conducting annual alumni surveys would enhance strategic input. Information management through AIS and SharePoint is effective, but public transparency of programme-level indicators (employment, dropout trends, programme improvements) is limited. Consolidating and publishing programme-specific quality summaries would significantly improve clarity and accountability. Student feedback collection is systematic and thorough.

Overall, the QA system is strong at the institutional level but requires additional development at the programme level to ensure systematic stakeholder involvement, consistent communication, and better visibility of results.

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				X	
Second cycle				X	

COMMENDATIONS

1. KU maintains a well-developed, ISO-certified institutional QA framework ensuring consistent procedures and clear responsibility distribution.
2. Students and staff are actively involved in governance bodies and QA structures, demonstrating shared commitment to maintaining and improving study quality.
3. Programme data are systematically reviewed and documented through AIS and SharePoint, supporting evidence-based decision-making and monitoring.
4. The MRI provides strong scientific oversight, ensuring programme relevance to current environmental and marine research.
5. Multiple structured mechanisms exist for collecting student feedback, enabling comprehensive evaluation of teaching and study organisation.

RECOMMENDATIONS

To address shortcomings

- None

For further improvement

1. Strengthen the focus on learning outcomes, teaching quality, and measurable performance indicators within the QA system.
2. Improve visibility and accessibility of programme-level QA information, including employment statistics, dropout data, and summaries of improvement actions.

V. SUMMARY

Physical Geography at KU demonstrates an excellent fit for the University and the region. It is a 'right size, right place, right material'. The location of the study field within the MRI ensures that the curriculum not only meets the requirements of the legal order, but also that students are taught by active researchers carrying out cutting-edge research with excellent facilities. The team offers a very cohesive curriculum in both study cycles and have demonstrated an ability to reflect on the needs of the students, the university and the region.

The study field demonstrates an excellent integration of research and teaching. This is supported by high-quality instruction from active researchers, a curriculum designed for progressive skill development, and authentic opportunities for student engagement in research through theses and practical work. The collaborative relationship between students and staff is also excellent, creating a very clear and convincing link between scientific activity and studies that is fully consistent with the programme aims.

The University applies transparent and well-regulated admission procedures that align with programme requirements, and recognition of foreign qualifications and prior learning is consistently implemented. Students are introduced to their studies in a structured way, receive timely information, and have access to a broad support system covering academic, financial, social, psychological, and personal needs. During the site visit, students confirmed that they are satisfied with the clarity, accessibility, and responsiveness of this support. However, student mobility remains low, and cohort sizes are small, which may affect the long-term sustainability and international visibility of the programmes.

The expert panel was very impressed by the coherence of the view of the teaching and learning activities from faculty, students, alumni and social partners. It was obvious that the study field produced students who are prepared for independent professional activity, and that there is effective and transparent system for student assessment and progression. Students feel supported and valued. They know that they can give feedback and their feedback is heard and acted on as appropriate. They can articulate the policies regarding academic integrity and have an excellent understanding of the uses and abuses of Gen-AI within the academic field.

The teaching staff of the Physical Geography field at KU is highly qualified, research-active, and well aligned with the learning outcomes of both study cycles. Most lecturers are active researchers, many with international recognition, ensuring strong integration of current scientific knowledge into teaching. The staff composition meets and exceeds national requirements, and the excellent student–teacher ratio allows for personalised supervision and close academic support. Opportunities for competence development are well established, with lecturers actively participating in international scientific projects, mobility programmes, and didactic training initiatives. While further strengthening of pedagogical innovation and broader participation in mobility would be beneficial, the overall competence, engagement, and professional development of teaching staff fully support high-quality implementation of both the first and Second-Cycle programmes. Therefore, the teaching staff area is assessed as **very good** for both cycles.

The expert team received a very informative SER. It was a substantive report that described the entire study process and reflected the real situation the experts encountered during the visit. In particular, the panel is grateful for the excursion to the training ship "Mintis," which is equipped with modern technology and provides comfortable living and working conditions for students. To summarize, qualified teachers demonstrated laboratories with a wide range of equipment that students use during practical training. Most of the equipment has been updated and is used for studies and projects in which KU participates. Creative and enthusiastic teachers, along with sufficient financial resources, make it possible to address problems that arise due to drone work disruptions, etc.

The quality assurance system of KU is well-developed, comprehensive, and consistently implemented across the Physical Geography field. ISO-certified institutional procedures ensure structured planning, monitoring, and improvement of study programmes, while responsibilities are clearly distributed across University, Faculty, and MRI levels. Stakeholder involvement is well established, with strong participation from students and core employers, and student feedback is systematically collected, analysed, and used for programme development. Internal information management through AIS and SharePoint is effective, and programme data is regularly reviewed to support evidence-based decisions. Although there is room to further strengthen outward transparency and broaden employer and alumni engagement, the existing system functions efficiently, demonstrates continuous improvement, and fully meets national and institutional expectations. Overall, the quality assurance of the study field is assessed as **very good** for both the First- and Second-Cycle.

The committee wishes to thank the HEI for the very good quality SER, the well-organised site-visit, and the constructive discussions with the review panel. Particular thanks are extended to the SKVC coordinator, Ieva Žemaitaitytė, for her great efforts in coordinating the evaluation process in a very efficient and professional manner. She was always approachable and organised the pre work, the stay as well as the writing process in a very professional way.

VI. EXAMPLES OF EXCELLENCE

AREA 2: The Physical Geography study field at KU demonstrates excellence through its direct integration with the MRI, which gives students regular access to advanced marine and coastal research infrastructure, including laboratories, field facilities, and research vessels. Teaching is delivered by research-active staff leading and contributing to competitive national and international projects that shape the scientific profile of the institution. Student participation in field campaigns and applied research linked to these projects is a structured part of the study process, enabling students to work with real research data and methods at an early stage. This level of research engagement, supported by specialised infrastructure and project-based learning, represents an exceptional integration of science and studies that goes beyond standard practice in the field.

AREA 4: The integration of the study field within the MRI has enabled students to have very direct, hands-on experience of real research from early in their studies. Students can also avail of opportunities to carry out research on the research vessels of the MRI. In addition, the design of both programmes of study is such that all modules are integrated, and the assessment is designed using a whole-of-curriculum lense, bringing students and the social partners in as co-designers of the curriculum.