KLAIPĖDOS UNIVERSITETO VEIKLOS VERTINIMO IŠVADOS

INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW REPORT OF *KLAIPĖDA UNIVERSITY*

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Vertinimo sekretorius: Review secretary:	Dr. Tara Ryan
Grupės nariai (kategorija): Panel members (category):	Assoc. Prof. Dr. Armand Faganel (academic)
	Prof. Dr. Janusz Uriasz (academic)
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CONTENT

I hereby certify that this is the final text of the institutional review report of Klaipeda University
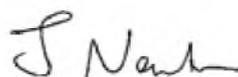
Prof. Dr. Jethro Newton

I. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

1. The purpose of the external review is to determine the quality of the performance of a higher education institution based on the findings of the external review, to create prerequisites for improvement of the performance of a higher education institution, to promote a culture of quality, and to inform founders, academic community and the society about the quality of higher education institutions.

2. This review report is based on the evidence given in the self-evaluation report, additional evidence requested by the panel, information provided by the Centre for Quality Assessment in Higher Education (SKVC) and a site visit, where meetings with a wide range of audiences were held.

3. The Panel was composed of the reviewers, appointed following the Experts Selection Procedure, approved by the Director of Centre for Quality Assessment in Higher Education on 31 December 2019 Order No. V-149 and included the following members:

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4. As a result of the external review Klaipėda University is given a **positive evaluation**.

5. Judgment by the area:

Area	Assessment with points
MANAGEMENT	3
QUALITY ASSURANCE	2
STUDIES AND RESEARCH (ART)	3
IMPACT ON REGIONAL AND NATIONAL DEVELOPMENT	4

6. **Twelve** examples of good practice were found and **ten** recommendations for improvement or enhancement were made.

II. INTRODUCTION

2.1. Background of the review process

7. The external review of Klaipėda University (hereafter referred to as the University) was organised by the Centre for Quality Assessment in Higher Education and carried out in April 2021 by an Expert Panel of international experts (the Panel). It was conducted in accordance with the Procedure for the External Evaluation and Accreditation of Higher Education Institutions and Branches of Foreign Higher Education Institutions, Evaluation Areas and Indicators approved by the Minister of Education, Science and Sport of the Republic of Lithuania (hereinafter referred to as 'the Procedure') on 19 of December 2019 Order No. V-1529 and the Methodology for Conducting an Institutional Review in Higher Education approved by the Director of SKVC on 9 of March 2020 Order No. V-32 (the Methodology).

8. According to the Procedure the external review consists of the following stages: submission of a self-evaluation report prepared by a higher education institution to the Centre; formation of an expert panel and analysis of the self-evaluation report; expert panel visit to the a higher education institution; preparation and publication of the external review report with accreditation decision; follow-up activities aimed at improving the performance of the higher education institution, taking into account the external review report.

9. At the preparatory stage of the external review, the Panel received the Klaipėda University Self-Evaluation Report (SER) with ten annexes, and a YouTube video giving an overview of the university infrastructure. The Panel requested additional information, including but not limited to, action plans; visuals of KPI monitoring system; the student feedback procedure; clarifications on staff and student numbers; data on 'drop-out' and student progression; clarifications on student services; organogram of governance committees and their inter-relationship and the associated terms of reference. SKVC also provided additional contextual information to the panel as required under the Methodology for Conducting Institutional Review of a Higher Education Institution, chapter 26.

10. The site visit was undertaken after a training session organized by SKVC staff and preparatory Panel meetings. The Panel *visited* the University on April 27, 28 and 29 2021 where it had thirteen meetings with various internal and external stakeholders. **Due to the worldwide pandemic, the review visit was organised online using the video-conferencing tool, Zoom.** Subsequently, the Panel met to review and agree conclusions and recommendations. The review report was finalised by correspondence and submitted to the SKVC.

11. In line with the Methodology, the external review focused on four areas covered by the evaluation indicators (and related criteria): **management, quality assurance, studies and research (art)** and **impact on regional and national development.** In analysing the evidence collected, the Panel also gave due consideration to the recommendations of the previous review conducted in August 2012.

12. The review of a higher education institution assesses each of the evaluation areas with one of five ratings: **excellent** – 5 points – the area is rated exceptionally well in the national context and internationally; **very good** – 4 points – the area is rated very well in the national context and internationally, without any drawbacks; **good** – 3 points – the area is being developed systematically, without any major drawbacks; **satisfactory** – 2 points – the area meets the

minimum requirements, and there are drawbacks that must be addressed; **unsatisfactory** – 1 point – the area does not meet the minimum requirements, there are fundamental drawbacks.

13. The decision to give a positive evaluation is made when none of the individual evaluation areas is evaluated unsatisfactorily (1 point). The decision of a negative evaluation is made when at least one of the evaluation areas is evaluated unsatisfactory (1 point).

14. On the basis of the external review report, SKVC takes one of the following decisions on the accreditation of the higher education institution: to provide accreditation for a period of 7 years if performance of the higher education institution is evaluated positively; to provide accreditation for a period of 3 years if performance of the higher education institution is evaluated negatively; to provide non accreditation if the repeated external review results of the higher education institution are negative.

2.2. Background information about the institution

15. Founded in 1990, Klaipėda University is a regional university providing programmes and conducting research in a number of fields, with a deepening focus on interdisciplinary studies and research relevant to the Baltic area, particularly that of marine sciences – the blue economy. Since its last institutional review in 2012, the University has undergone very significant change, in part responding to the recommendations in the 2012 report, but also in response to changes in legislation, changes in national policy, the impact of emigration and population decline, changes in leadership, and changes in funding patterns. Following a full restructuring, the University reduced and consolidated its academic 'units' to five, and significantly reduced the number of study programmes provided.

16. The University provides programmes across all three Bologna cycles, Bachelor, Master, and Doctor, and has two research institutes. In 2020 it had 798 staff of whom 457 are in academic and teaching roles, 168 are researchers and the remaining 173 work in management and administration. The 798 staff (part-time and full-time) support 2,604 students who are distributed across five academic 'units' – Faculty of Health Sciences; Faculty of Social Sciences and Humanities; Faculty of Marine Technologies and Natural Sciences; Marine Research Institute; and the Institute of Baltic Region, History and Archaeology. Faculties were reduced from seven to three, the number of departments were halved, and the University Academy of Arts was transferred to the Lithuanian Academy of Music and Theatre. These changes resulted in a decrease in academic staff by approximately 43% between 2016 and 2020; some staff moved to research positions: the number of researchers has over doubled in the same period. In 2013, the University had 5,335 students, in 2017 there were 3,548, and in 2020/21 there were under 3,000.

17. In total the five academic 'units' provide 84 programmes in 43 study fields across first and second cycles. (Annex 8.) Between 2016 and 2020, 52 persons completed their doctorate in 10 different study fields – the highest numbers being in Ecology and Environmental Sciences, and History and Archaeology, respectively. In the current year (2020/2021) 50% of PhD candidates in Ecology and Environmental science are international students. A number of joint programmes at all three cycles have been in development over the last period, and are at varying stages in their progress towards approval.

18. The depth of the University's involvement in the local city and region, through networks, committee and board memberships, formal collaborations in EU funded projects, and its active role in regional development through research and educational programme provision is a distinctive part of the organisational profile.

19. The *Klaipėda University Development Strategy 2021 - 2030* establishes the newly restructured university's mission, vision and its strategic priorities and directions. The vision is for *a university creating for the future with recognized international achievements in science and studies; and innovations relevant to the well-being of the Baltic Sea Region.* Its mission is to be an *institution promoting the most important harmonious social, cultural and economic progress of the region, which activities are aimed at the development of creative personalities and the creation of public welfare.* These are embodied in three strategic priorities, to develop *creative persons*; to develop *community welfare*; and to provide *value to the region*, which in turn have established objectives, specific actions, intended outputs and associated success factors.

20. The Panel had positive engagement with the University's leadership, its academic and non-academic staff, its researchers, students, graduates and its external stakeholders. Following consideration of the documentation received and the triangulation of matters through the meetings held, as indicated above the Panel gave Klaipėda University a positive evaluation. The Panel made the following overview comments:

- The University Participants were all open to discussion and dialogue with the review team.

- The good atmosphere amongst staff (administrative and academic) and students and assisted the review team in having a constructive dialogue in each meeting.

- Staff are engaged with institutional issues and are committed and motivated.

- Students and graduates were positive about their experience and showed loyalty to their university.

- Staff participants displayed awareness of institutional, regional and national challenges and a willingness to address them in taking the university forward.

- Arrangements that the university made in the transition to blended and distance learning and on-line meetings as a consequence of the COVID-19 pandemic appear to have worked well.

- The Self Evaluation Report (SER) was well structured and contained helpful SWOT analyses. Together with the supporting documentation made available in annexes, and the additional information provided at the request of the review team, the Panel obtained helpful information to assist them in their work.

- There were good opportunities for the involvement and representation of University staff in the development of the self-evaluation and for contributing to organisational learning.

However:

21. The Panel found that the SER did not perhaps fully do the University justice on some matters. Some important areas were highlighted and evaluated effectively, others left room for a greater degree of reflection and self-criticism. Nevertheless, the discussions in meetings enabled the Panel to develop their understanding of the operation and functioning of the University and the

achievements and strengths of Klaipėda University, and also areas which need further development work.

III. ANALYSIS BY EVALUATION AREAS

3.1. Management

> *Compliance of the higher education institution's strategic action plan with the mission, assurance of its implementation:*

> - *The strategic action plan is consistent with the mission of the higher education institution, legal acts regulating research and study activities and it takes into account the provisions of the national research and study policy, the European Higher Education Area and the European Research Area;*
> - *The parts of the strategic action plan (analysis of the current situation, priorities and aims, objectives of the activities, implementation means, resources, planned performance indicators) are appropriate and justified;*
> - *Regular monitoring of the implementation of the strategic action plan is carried out and the results are used to improve performance management.*

Context

22. As indicated in the introduction, the nine years since the University's last institutional review has been a period of significant change. In addition to the internal challenges and demands facing the University, the Government of Lithuania carried out a national optimization reform of the network of state higher education institutions in 2017-2019[1] which mandated changes to both the University's provision and structure. One particular national objective, to consolidate the provision of education for the arts (music, theatre, dance), resulted in the transfer of the University Academy of Arts to the Lithuanian Academy of Music and Theatre. An optimisation plan was developed by the University following this transfer, to ensure that it restructured appropriately, re-defined its mission and strategy, and established objectives and models for effective performance in the new context. The key document describing these plans, *Action plan for optimization of Klaipėda University activity for 2018-2019* (Optimisation Plan), along with the *Strategic Development Plan 2012-2020*, the *Development Strategy 2021-2030*, and to a lesser extent the report of the 2012 institutional review, set the framework and context for this current review. These documents were provided to the Panel in advance of the review and were discussed and referred to frequently during the review meetings. It was noted the Optimisation Plan was approved by the Government of Lithuania in May 2018. The Panel noted that the implementation of the Plan was focused on strengthening the quality of research and studies, and the University's contribution to the regional community and labour market, and also ensuring efficient management of resources. A number of benefits were noted, including improved links with social partners and enhanced institutional planning processes. Similarly, the Panel noted evidence of successful implementation in a number

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[1] Resolution of the Seimas of the Republic of Lithuania "On Approval of the State University Network Optimization Plan" No. XIII-533 of June 29, 2017, Vilnius.

of performance areas identified in the *Strategic Development Plan 2012-2020,* including the Marine Valley initiative and the reorganisation of the University's management structures.

23. During the period 2014-2020 a number of funding streams were obtained which enabled implementation of certain elements of the Optimisation Plan; for example, improvements in infrastructure and its management were assisted through the allocation of EU Structural Funds.

Strategy

24. The 2011 Strategic Plan identified three goals: development of biomedical, physical and technological sciences and studies, establishment of the national marine science and technology centre; development of humanities and social sciences and their studies, nurturance of artistic creativity and arts studies; and improvement of the University governance. These were linked to specific metrics to evidence achievement and a system of monitoring and oversight was established with indicators set for periodic milestones of 2015 and 2020. Continuous monitoring of the plan was undertaken by a standing Strategic Planning Group established by the Rector. Six monthly reports were made to the Rector and any required amendments approved by the Council. While it was a period of very significant change with national decisions having impact on the institution and its structure, the University did achieve many of the targets identified, e.g. the development of Marine Valley, the establishment of a quality system, increased international student numbers, the significant involvement of local and regional representatives in university decision-making structures.

25. The current University Strategic Plan for the period 2021/2030 was approved by the University Council in October 2020. It was prepared and approved following a significant period of consultation, which involved all staff and student representatives of the university, as well as external stakeholders. The mission and vision are clear, located within the Law on Science and Studies of the Republic of Lithuania, and the strategy is explicitly aligned to national policy instruments on regional development as well as European research and development initiatives which focus on aspects of the regional ecosystem, e.g. Strategy for the Baltic Sea Region. The University is very cognisant of its membership of the European Higher Education Area and the European Research Area and the opportunities that arise from funding calls and partnership arrangements.

26. Great care has been taken by the University to reflect on the various legal and policy instruments which focus on its regional context and how higher education can contribute and enable development. It has noted the challenges of operating in what can be diverse legal and policy frameworks; from local, to regional, to national, to international contexts there can be differing emphases or requirements. Nevertheless the University has sought to align its strengths with related objectives of key European and national instruments.

27. The University is a member of CONEXUS, one of the seventeen "European Universities" selected by the European Commission in 2019 to be "*transnational alliances of higher education institutions from across the EU that share a long-term strategy and promote European values and identity. The initiative is designed to significantly strengthen mobility of students and staff, and foster the quality, inclusiveness and competitiveness of European higher education*".[2] The CONEXUS initiative was referred to in a variety of meetings during the site visit, and there was

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[2] See https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/IP_19_3389

awareness of the diverse opportunities which may arise from it. the University demonstrated awareness and understanding of the 2020 *New ERA for Research and Innovation*, and to define its goals and strategy building on its internal strengths aligning to external policy drivers of development.

28. As indicated in paragraphs 15 and 21 of this Report, the University has taken account of its current policy situation and identified its strategy by considering its own strengths and opportunities as recently restructured. An action plan for the implementation of the first two years (2021-2022) of the Development Strategy 2021 – 2030 has been approved (February 2021)[3] and a Strategy Implementation Committee has been established (December 2020). The Council approved both of these management tools and also advised each academic unit to prepare its own two year plan to align to the University plan, but reflecting its own areas of responsibility. The University Action Plan contains a SWOT analysis as well as targets, deadlines and indicators of the achievement of the targets and identifies resource needs. It appears to be a comprehensive approach to the implementation of the plan.

29. Cognisant of the importance of ensuring that the University has the resource capacity to implement the Development Plan 2021 – 2030, in 2020 a new division was established to provide better financial management of oversight of resource planning. This newly created Strategic Development and Economics division sits alongside a Financial Account Division, also restructured in 2020. Both entities report to the Chief Financial Officer, and are under the overall authority of the Vice-Rector for Infrastructure and Development.

30. A key internal mechanism to monitor achievement of objectives and targets is the annual report of the Rector. During various meetings, this report was referred to, and various departments observed that their local reports are used to inform the final content of the Rector's report. National reporting requirements are also maintained such as the five yearly report to the Government Strategic Analysis Center (STRATA) of data on scientific and artistic activities and the annual data on research and art activities provided to the Research Council of Lithuania. As indicated in paragraph 21, the Action Plan also identifies qualitative and quantitative indicators; samples were also provided in the SER. To evidence the approach used in monitoring, examples of changes and improvements arising from the implementation of the 2018-2019 Optimisation Plan were cited, such as the establishment of the Marine Research Institute and the transfer of the Department of Medical Education to the Faculty of Health Sciences.

Effectiveness of process management of the higher education institution:
• *A clear structure for governance, decision making and distribution of responsibilities is defined;* • *Regular process management analysis is performed, preconditions for process improvement and risk management are planned;* • *Stakeholders are involved in the management process at an adequate level.*

Governance and decision-making

31. The statute of Klaipėda University, updated by the Seimas of the Republic of Lithuania in June 2010, following recommendations of the University Senate transformed it from a state budget institution to a public institution. It clearly established decision-making and governance structures, locating and prescribing diverse responsibilities and authorities in each of the Council, Senate and Rector.

32. The Rector of the University is designated as the sole governor by the Statute (section 3, paragraph 41), and the role and responsibilities are clearly indicated. The Senate and Council are collegial bodies with respective memberships of 40 and 9. The structure of the University is specified as consisting of faculties (study institutes), academic and research centres; research institutes; departments; the library; the botanical garden; publishing house; and other units established by the University.

33. Faculty and department staff, as well as students, are all represented on both the Senate and the Council, and there are mechanisms for reporting upwards and communicating downwards between the different levels. For example, each head of department – both academic and functional – prepares annual performance reports on their area. They are considered by departmental committees and on approval submitted to the Rector for approval. Performance indicators are analysed by the responsible functional units and discussed with the study and research units in order to clarify the problems and provide measures to increase operational efficiency. The restructuring of the institution over the period under review reduced the number of levels of reporting and the Panel endorses the statement that this has made management processes faster and more effective.

34. It is evident that a professional approach to planning and management has been established to complement the governance structures legally created. During dialogue at the site visit, it was also demonstrated that there are good relationships between the Students' Union and the wider student body with the University's management: there is positive engagement of the students with the academic governance bodies, as well as with the University community in general.

Process Improvement

35. A Quality Management System (QMS) based on ISO standards (ISO 9001, ISO 14001, OKSAS 18001 and SA 8000) was established in 2018. ISO standards typically focus on process management and the University implements this model effectively. Annual internal audits are conducted and three yearly reaccreditation with ISO standards has been maintained to date. Examples of processes improved were given in both the SER (recording of student feedback) and during meetings with staff (model of analysis used by the Marketing Department). Additional discussion on the QMS is contained in paragraphs 76-80.

36. The introduction of a system to retain and manage data in respect of projects, tenders, financial returns – ePovas – has also been a tool which has brought greater ease and transparency to the management of the university and its various projects. It was cited by a number of parties as a useful system.

Risk Management

37. The University advised in its Self Evaluation report that "the analysis and identification of potential risks to University performance is carried out in strategic documents, including strategic action plans", and the Panel noted that in the Klaipėda University Performance Optimization Plan for 2018-2019 (Table 13) an assessment of risks is provided; nevertheless a dedicated organisational risk register for the University has yet to be established. The Panel also noted that a risk register will be established to accompany the new two year action plan 2021-2022, which as noted above has been established to drive and monitor implementation of the new strategy. The Panel encourages the University to use this opportunity to comprehensively complete the task recommended in the 2012 institutional review to design and implement a comprehensive Risk Register and Risk Assessment Plan to cover all strategic activities and operations and to adopt a whole university model and do so as a matter of priority. The model/style of risk register used in the Optimization Plan could be used by the university in general, but it would be improved if it included a score for impact as well as a score for probability. Additionally, each Faculty and Institute should undertake the same activity for their level and responsibilities; there may also be merit in devising a register for specific major projects. Local plans may feed into the institutional plans where appropriate. The institutional register should be systematically reviewed by the Council at fixed periods.

38. It is noteworthy that the SWOT analysis included in the SER identified the absence of fully developed Risk Management processes as a weakness. The management of risk is an important activity for any organisation, not least a university with many obligations to students and society in general. Its identification as a risk shows a both a self-aware organisation and one building a relationship of integrity with its stakeholders by sharing a true reflection of its internal challenges.

Stakeholder Involvement in Management Processes

39. Management can be considered from two perspectives – operational and strategic. From an operational perspective, typically, stakeholders have less immediate involvement in management, as heads of department or unit exercise their management responsibility directly. However influence in decision-making is achieved through staff participation in departmental meetings as well as the consideration of student feedback in relevant forums.

40. The principle of subsidiarity is implemented with operational responsibility being allocated to the parties closest to where the impact of the decisions will be experienced. This is complemented with systematic reporting of activities to higher bodies – from Department to Faculty to Senate, with activities ultimately captured in the Rector's annual report. During meetings at the site visit Vice Rectors, Deans, Department Heads described processes and communication structures in a way that suggests organisational cohesion.

41. The creation of the Strategy Implementation Committee in December 2020 with representatives of all University units is also a clear mechanism to involve stakeholders in management processes. A document listing the membership was made available to the Panel. This Committee was complemented with the establishment of the "Open Forum" in Spring 2021, which brings both internal and external stakeholders together virtually, and facilitates discussion about the strategy and its implementation across all university and community parties. These interactive sessions are also broadcast live on various social media ensuring that access to information is as encompassing as possible.

42. External stakeholders are represented at Council. They include a CEO of a Joint Stock Company, the Mayor of Klaipėda, and a representative of the Lithuanian National Museum. The Panel learned that these external members are able to contribute through formal membership of Council as well as a variety of informal consultation and information exchange mechanisms across all units of the University. These opportunities and structures were referred to by both external stakeholders and University staff during the meetings and were described in the SER and its appendices.

Publicity of information on the performance of the higher education institution and its management effectiveness:
• *Systematic collection and analysis of the performance data, results (including student employment and graduate career monitoring) is in place, data is used for the improvement of performance of the higher education institution;*   • *Information on the performance of the higher education institution is clear, accurate and accessible to the academic community and the public, and is provided regularly to the founders and members of the legal entity.*

Public Information on the performance of the HEI and its management effectiveness

43. The University collects a significant amount of data on its activities, and has identified data requirements as part of its action planning and monitoring of institutional performance, for example in the 2021-2022 two year action plan. The University also presents data as required to a variety of national bodies such as the Research Council of Lithuania or the Government Strategic Analysis Centre (STRATA). The Panel noted that the development of the Quality Management System has enabled the capturing and recording of a more extensive and systematic set of data. It is also acknowledged that the ePovas system is driving improvements in the management of projects by providing a central repository for the recording of all data and information relating to funded projects.

44. It is noted that there are some gaps in collecting data which could contribute a better understanding of University impact and achievement of its goals. For example, there is insufficient information on careers monitoring and graduate destinations; it is not clear what proportion of graduates gain employment in areas relating to their field of study. This contributes to the recommendation in paragraph 75.

45. It is also noted that data collected on drop out or persistence is restricted to year 1 of a programme. In addition, Table 11 of the SER shows data relating to students completing studies on time but does not distinguish between the percentages who 'dropped out' and completed in total, noting that persons sometimes complete in longer than standard study period duration. This matter is discussed further under Area 3, 'Studies and Research'. In paragraph 118.

46. The Panel observed that there is a lot of detailed data about the University presented on its website, including in the English language. Programme information, entry requirements, scholarships, research initiatives, accreditation status are all clearly presented.

47. There is systematic reporting into Senate and Council by Faculties and Institutes, and decisions of both bodies are not just shared internally but published on the website, as is the Rector's annual report.

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Effectiveness of human resource management:

- *Clear and transparent principles and procedures for the formation, management, evaluation of academic and non-academic staff are established and applied;*
- *The higher education institution has sufficient academic (in-house academic staff) and non-academic staff to meet its operational objectives;*
- *The qualifications of the academic and non-academic staff are appropriate for the purposes of the higher education institution;*
- *Conditions are created for the academic staff to improve the knowledge and skills required for teaching and research activities;*
- *Conditions are created for non-academic staff to develop competencies.*

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Appointment, qualifications and appropriateness of staff numbers

48. As indicated previously, the University's significant restructure led to a reduction in staff numbers – both academic and non-academic. Decisions of the national Government contributed to this situation, and it was influenced also by the reduction in student numbers. Detailed information on changes in staff numbers across a variety of departments and units was provided in the SER and accompanying appendices. These changes were accompanied by changes to the remuneration model in 2019, refining salary models according to fields of expertise and organisation role addressing the different contexts of both academic and non-academic staff. The University also adopted a model of individual bonuses to complement core salary based on performance (SER, paragraph 68). Annual assessments of all staff are conducted by line managers in accordance with the new remuneration procedure, and every five years each member of academic staff (teaching and research) is assessed, and they participate in open competition for the renewal of their contract. Samples of public advertisement of such positions for the University on the website of the Lithuania Science Council website were shared with the Panel. Extensive criteria are provided which include requirements around publications, research activity, and contribution to programmes, etc. The University also adopted a goal to increase the number of international staff employed to assist in driving the opportunities for international research collaborations and engagement with international communities of practice. Between 2013 and 2020 numbers of international employees have more than doubled.

49. As noted in paragraph 16, there has been significant decreases in student numbers over the review period. In 2013 the University had 5335 students, in 2017 there were 3548, and in 2020/21 there were just under 3000. This has also impacted on staff numbers, with a reduction in the latter also, down 26% since 2016, however the current student-staff ratio is higher than typical international comparators. While this is beneficial to students in some respects, as they have extensive access to staff as discussed later in this report (paragraphs 104-108), it can also mean that the classroom dynamic is not as engaging as one might desire. Critically, the University does have the staff resources to deliver on its strategy, though it would be expected that there will be

continued refinement of how units work together and how central services are coordinated and provided over the coming period. This may lead to further revisions in the overall staffing profile.

50. Detailed information on the exact qualification profile of each academic or research unit was not provided (nor indeed age profile at this level), but the University indicated that in 2016, about 59 percent of pedagogical and scientific staff and 19 percent of other staff improved their qualifications, while in 2020 the numbers increased to 85 percent and 36 percent respectively. In addition, the University advised that changes in national requirements, introduced by the Research Council of Lithuania in 2018, increase the minimum qualification requirements for researchers required by university staff. Plans have been established by the University to implement these by subject area to enable an effective transition to the new requirements. The approach is reasonable and will ensure national requirements are met. As indicated in paragraph 47, examples of publicly advertised roles, with detailed qualification requirements adhering to national standards and rules, were provided. It is noteworthy that while staff numbers overall have decreased, within the distribution of staff to different roles in the University, numbers in research roles have doubled over the same period. The University uses the metric of the H-index (Hirsch index) to track the volume of publications and their impact by researcher. One of many ways to track citations, the H-index arose in the physical sciences, and it is suggested the H number attained by persons working the 'hard' sciences is significantly higher than in the social sciences. The average H index of Klaipėda University researchers is almost 4; the H index of 20 percent university researchers is 6 and above; and the H index of 4 percent of researchers – exceeds 20. Hirsch suggested that following 20 years of a career a "successful scientist" would have a h-index of 20, an "outstanding scientist" a h-index of 40, and a "truly unique" researcher would have a h-index of 60[4].

51. The Panel noted that there is provision for academic staff to take sabbatical leave. Though the University provided no statistics, the academic staff who met the Panel spoke positively of this scheme; this included both persons who had availed of the opportunity, and also persons who have yet to do so. Senate has established an Emeritus professorship model to recognise the significant contribution of those active and experienced academics who have worked for the University for many years. This may also assist the University in maintaining links with the extensive expertise in the communities of practice to which the academics belong and continue to engage subsequent to retirement. Honorary degrees or "Affiliated Researcher" status may also be given to persons who have worked with other institutions but have contributed to the teaching or research activities of the University.

52. An innovative model for a "Partnership Professor" has also been created by Senate. From their enquiries the Panel understood that, to date, the progress of this scheme has not yet been evaluated. However, it is designed to enable the recognition of members of the business or civic communities for their involvement in and support of the University. It allows the recipient to adopt the title and through it to indirectly promote the University.

53. Paragraphs 16 and 47 identify the current situation around the employment of the University staff. Discussions with staff indicate that while overall the coherence of the new model is

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[4] Hirsch, J. E. (15 November 2005). "An index to quantify an individual's scientific research output". PNAS. 102 (46):165692. arXiv:physics/0508025

appreciated; there remain central service areas which require further reorganisation to ensure best service to students and an effective working environment for staff. This contributed to the recommendation in paragraph 103 in which a one-stop-shop for student services is recommended.

54. The Panel noted the significant impact within the organisation of the University's participation in the Baltic Gender project between 2016 and 2020. While focusing on the Marine Science Institute and the Faculty of Marine Technologies and Natural Sciences during this period, the University plans to implement approaches developed to encourage gender equality across the institution as a whole.

Supports for Staff Training and Development

55. During meetings with the University's staff, very many positive examples of training and professional supports provided by the University to individuals were cited. The examples crossed all units of the University and staff members spoke of the ease of access to funding, international travel for relevant academic and research activities, or participation in various European initiatives. Support for publishing articles, participating in Erasmus visits, undertaking technical training pertaining to laboratories or specific skills areas was described. The staff with whom the Panel met projected a very positive impression of University activity in this area. As indicated earlier, the University Sabbatical model was also cited as a positive and supportive feature of the academic employee environment. The Panel observed that the restructuring of units and the introduction of new staff performance management and assessment models, including associated remuneration systems, affected all staff categories, academic and non-academic. It is noted that the changes and enhancements to the model of both assessing staff needs for professional supports and the performance management of staff, has to date had a particular focus on academic staff. While the model the University has deployed to support staff, through the provision of training and development is available to all groups of staff, there has been an understandable and appropriate initial focus on the needs of academic staff in the context of the radical changes occurring and the University's focus on its ability to deliver on its new strategy.

Efficiency of financial and learning resource management:
• *Financial resources are planned, allocated and used rationally;* • *Various financial resources for the implementation of higher education activities are attracted;* • *Learning resources for provision of studies and research (art) activities are planned and used rationally;* • *Learning resources for conducting studies and research (art) activities are appropriate, sufficient and available.*

Planning, allocation and use of financial resources

56. The University Statute prescribes the model for budgetary planning and allocation, and a developed procedure (*Description of the Procedure for Financial Management, Budget Formation and Execution of Klaipėda University*) provides for its implementation. Annually the Rector submits a one year budget to Council for approval. It is presented to Council following

consideration by Senate which also establishes Guidelines for budgeting, which address the independence of respective university units, and allocates funding to central services for core operational functions and overheads. In meetings with Deans and other staff, there was awareness and understanding of the processes in place, and there was an understanding of the alignment of budget to the strategic objectives of the University, for example how access to additional funding is linked to increased student numbers.

57. The management of financial resources following approval is undertaken by the Finance and Accounting Division, under the leadership of the Chief Accountant. The monitoring and analysis of the budget is the responsibility of the Chief Financial Officer.

58. Three layers of financial control are in place – internal audit; external audit as appointed through the office of the Rector; and oversight by the State. Annual financial statements are prepared. Overview of financial data is included in the Rector's Annual report and available publicly.

Funding sources

59. The University presented extensive data on its sources of funding, and the comprehensive approach it is taking to seeking diverse opportunities to secure additional financial resources. The State allocation is the largest single component of University funding, and over the period 2018-2020 represented almost 42 percent of all funds received. It has reduced in recent years due to the reduction in student numbers, due to demographics and in particular recently because of the transfer of study fields to the Lithuanian Academy of Music and Theatre.

60. In part due to this situation, and in part due to the University's response to it, the balance in the sources of funding is changing. As proposed in the Optimisation Plan the University is targeting the recruitment of greater numbers of international students to offset dropping local numbers. It is also seeking to increase its revenue from economic and service activities which are income-generating. In particular this stream of funding has increased in the last 3 years and now represents around 50 percent of the University's own funds. This is aligned with the 2012 Institutional Review recommendation that "perhaps commissioning specialist external guidance on marketing and branding, [the University] develop an implementation plan describing, with key performance indicators and milestones, ambitious but realistic targets for greater revenue generation by Klaipėda University in such areas as Contract Research, Intellectual Property Rights, Patents and Spin-off Enterprises".

61. Nevertheless, as with all higher education institutions, the effect of the Covid pandemic on funding has been negative and currently international student income is down.

Learning Resources

62. In April 2020, the University upgraded its software tools by migrating to Office 365 and SharePoint, both of which are used by students and staff. The virtual learning environment, Moodle, was also upgraded to the latest version.

63. As indicated in respect of the budgeting process, there are local planning processes which built on strategic objectives. Related procurement is locally and nationally regulated.

64. The Library is an essential resource for students, and it does have key electronic resources. Students spoke positively of being able to access texts virtually, particularly in the context of

Covid, and indicated that there no issues around 'queuing' for access to texts, suggesting sufficient licences are in place.

65. It was clear from the various meetings that the process to seek and obtain additional texts in advance of the new academic year was in place; the library takes annual submissions from teaching staff. Staff did indicate that the distributed nature of library holdings in different locations in the city was not helpful and plans around the development of a new library were shared – they included a possible plan to locate the library on the campus of another institute engaging in a partnership which would significantly benefit both institutions.

66. A number of staff referred to the useful text matching software which is used by the University to assist in detecting and eradicating plagiarism or other forms of academic impropriety.

Adequacy of Resources

67. It is noted that the State budget would not enable the University to provide the programmes and services it does, and it requires significant top up through the acquisition of monies from other sources, as discussed above.

68. Nevertheless in the period under review the University has secured very significant project funding resulting in the success of the Marine Valley Park, the Blue Academy as well as the acquisition of three ships which in turn bring in funding through the conduct of paid services/research. These are discussed in detail in paragraphs 113-114, 145 and 149.

69. Other important assets and educational resources include the University's Botanical gardens, and the various local partnerships, such as that with local museums, all enable students to access sites of primary educational and research opportunity.

70. **In summary,** the University has made significant progress in it restructuring, strategic revisions, and optimisation. There has been evidence of the effective utilisation of governance and management structures to lead change, identify objectives and plan for their achievement. Challenges of demographics, national and international priorities are known and are being addressed with care and focus.

71. **Judgment:** The area is being developed systematically, without any major drawbacks and is given 3 points.

72. **Recommendations for the area:**

- The University should complete the task recommended in the 2012 institutional review to design and implement a comprehensive Risk Register and Risk Assessment Plan to cover all strategic activities and operations; further, each Faculty and Institute should undertake the same activity at their level.

- The University acknowledges that there are deficiencies in data collection and monitoring of graduate careers and employment destinations and that responsibility is currently decentralised. The Panel recommends that responsibility and oversight of these matters should be centralised under the authority of a Vice Rector, with qualitative and quantitative data collected and analysed for the purpose of annual reporting to Senate. This must result in an annual action plan to secure more effective monitoring and oversight of graduate employment destinations.

73. **Good practice examples:**

- With regard to the new Strategic Development Plan 2021/2030 and completion of the outgoing 2012/2020 Plan, the review team confirmed that the university's processes for consultation development of strategic goals and objectives, and for monitoring progress are embedded transparent. Faculty and Institute planning is well aligned to this.

- The organisational and structural changes introduced since the last institutional review have improved organisational efficiency and are well understood by staff of the university.

- There are good relationships between the Students' Union and the wider student body and the University's senior management, and extensive opportunities for student representation and involvement in academic governance bodies at all levels of the organisation.

3.2. Quality assurance

Implementation and effectiveness of the internal quality assurance system:
- *The higher education institution has approved and made publicly available internal quality assurance documents that are consistent with the Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area;*   - *Internal quality assurance measures of planning, implementation and improvement are appropriate, applied periodically and ensure the involvement of the whole institution and stakeholders;*   - *Processes for planning, implementation, monitoring, periodic evaluation and development of activities are specified;*   - *Students and academic and non-academic staff of the institution receive effective support;*   - *Provisions and procedures for academic integrity, tolerance and non-discrimination, appeal and ethics are specified and applied;*   - *The results of the external review are used to improve the performance of the higher education institution.*

Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area

74. In 2014 the University established a Quality Management System (QMS) to support University activities and assist in ensuring good practice. The QMS adopted by the University is the EN ISO 9001: 2015 (ISO 9001: 2015), and the following particular standards have also been adopted – Environmental Management System LST EN ISO 14001: 2015 (ISO 14001: 2015) and the Occupational Safety and Health System Standard LST ISO 45001: 2018 (ISO 45001: 2018). The 2011 Strategy included a number of goals which identified the adoption of a quality management system as a priority. The ISO model of quality is particularly focused on management processes and the management of processes. It is evident that the University acted in a focussed way developing the system in line with its 2011 Strategic Plan.

75. In noting that the ISO model of quality has a particular focus on management processes, and that the University has maintained its ISO certification since it was first attained, the Panel is cognisant that there are organisational planning processes in place, as well as monitoring and review mechanisms, which at an institutional level, have been evidenced in the first section of this

report. The organisational management model and the strategic planning processes discussed above reflect the ISO management approach. It is noted that the University has an Internal Audit Service which carries out annual monitoring in respect of the ISO standards. The Panel endorses the view of the University, as articulated in its SWOT analysis, that the QMS "facilitates the increase of operational efficiency, effective management of financial and human resources, development of managerial competencies".

76. The University also prepared a document which it has described as a "Quality Manual", the most recent version of which was approved by Senate in February 2021. The Policy statement notes that the "University has developed a policy of quality, environmental protection, occupational safety and health based on the obligations of the relevant standards", i.e. ISO. It continues by stating that the institution's internal quality system is based on national legislation, internal university regulation, and on the provisions of the quality assurance model of the European Higher Education Area, and it then lists some of the areas for which standards are set in the 2015 *Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in European Higher Education Area* (ESG). This document is publicly available on the University's website.

77. In dialogue with the Panel, the University suggested that the ten ESG standards for internal quality are maintained and addressed through the detailed procedures which complement the "Manual", some of which were viewed by the Panel, e.g. the Student Feedback procedure. However the manual itself does not provide procedures which describe specifically and in a procedural manner how the University assures academic quality, nor is there any further reference to or explicit use of the ESG standards in documentation shared with, and viewed by, the Panel. In dialogue with staff of various units, including the quality unit, no reference was made to the ESG or how it might support academic quality, nor was there any reference to any academic policy instruments which may support work of the University, for example *Standards for Quality Assurance of Joint Programmes in the EHEA*, given that an increase in joint programmes has been identified as a goal and challenges are being experienced. The institutional organogram does not include any reference to quality assurance, unless it is represented by the Internal Audit Service, but this is located within the corporate side of the institution, and there is no visible indication that it engages with academic quality assurance. There is no unit with direct responsibility for assuring academic quality.

78. The University's Quality Manual did not appear to be a document of particular utility to staff and there was no indication that it formed a reference point for guidance on academic quality. It does not present a clear picture to the reader on how the University systematically self-regulates itself to ensure that programmes are maintained on an ongoing basis at the standards at which they were first approved, and are subject ongoing continuous improvement. As indicated in paragraphs 78-79, the Panel noted the manual contains information on higher level principles and obligations, particularly as this relates to ISO standards and management processes, but it falls short on describing processes and procedures for the assurance and improvement of the quality of learning and teaching, and the student experience, or procedures for the ongoing monitoring and review of study programmes. A manual should include instructive procedures and it is important that the Quality Manual is reviewed, revised, and updated to provide the procedures for the assurance of academic quality.

Internal Processes for planning, development, implementation, monitoring and periodic evaluation of activities

79. In considering the University's progress in the development of a quality culture since the establishment of the QMS 2014, the Panel considered the arrangements in place for the ongoing, annual, and periodic review of study programmes and study fields. As noted in paragraphs 76-77, there are effective processes in place for planning, monitoring and evaluation at an organisational level. These have been developed in tandem with the strategic planning processes, the associated action plans and Optimisation Plan, and been driven to some extent through the restructuring exercise, and have been supported by the QMS. However there is less visibility or apparent coherency in respect of processes as they pertain to academic matters, and to specific programmes or groups of cognate programmes. There seems to be a dichotomy between planning, implementing and systematically reviewing for organisational level activities vs programme/study fields. Planning and review cycles are not sufficiently focussed on core academic activities. The 2012 Institutional Review recommended "the establishment of a regular cycle of overview reports on individual academic quality assurance processes and [on] the central and local delivery of support services for consideration by Senate". This has been partially completed, but annual programme monitoring has not been fully developed.

80. The Panel noted that the University does not have a model for the systematic, holistic annual review of programmes. While through each academic year a Department will take account of student survey feedback and other information in respect of a programme, there is no requirement or established practice for completing comprehensive annual monitoring and review, and preparing a formal report which will be considered by the relevant oversight bodies. This, however, is considered to be best practice in the wider European context. It is noted that there are Studies Committees and Faculty Committees, and information is provided to the Senate for inclusion in the annual report of the Rector, but there is a somewhat ad hoc approach to what is communicated annually around programmes. The Panel notes that if there is no systematic annual reporting on study fields/programmes to Senate, it is not clear how the responsibility of oversight, and the counter-check for improvements, can be discharged.

81. Considering periodic programme/study field review, the Panel further noted that there is a review of programmes every three years, which includes reviewing actions arising from the most recent external evaluation. However there was no clarity on how the ESG, or other external standards, were used in this process. To some extent there appeared to be a reliance on the SKVC-conducted, external review of study fields to assure quality.

82. During the dialogue at the site visit, and considering the SER, the Panel gained an understanding that the University has adopted a concept of academic quality in which they expect that academic standards will be maintained and improvements achieved through the University focusing on specific actions such as the professional development of teachers and researchers, and the provision of a support system for students: academic quality will de facto be improved. The Panel supports the University in placing importance on measures such as those identified (staff professional development and student support provisions), but advises that a more systematic approach be taken to annual programme/study field review and also to the appropriate oversight of reviews. The approach adopted by the University appears to operate on the basis that academic

quality is 'self-evident' and that a robust system for internal accountability is perceived as a burden rather than a support, or a means of providing public confidence in the quality of provision.

83. The Panel did note that there are well developed procedures in place to collect student feedback through the use of a variety of student surveys, and Departments and Faculties discuss and analyse the findings on an ongoing basis. A good selection of survey tools has been created. To build on this good work the Panel recommends that specific mechanisms should be put in place to inform all student groups of actions taken or planned so that the whole student class group can see what actions have been or will be taken in response to the issues they have raised in the feedback they provide. This would be an important mechanism to formally 'close the feedback loop'.

84. There is a Study Quality Commission in place which is established by the Rector and the Senate. Its purposes include the analysis of the quality of studies at the University leading to appropriate recommendations to the Senate around the standards and criteria of study quality; compliance with international agreements; suggestions for the strategic action plan; propose new procedures for academic quality assurance; and to advise for Rector and other the University governing bodies in terms of study quality assurance. This committee will have a role in considering how more systematic, ESG aligned, academic quality procedures may be established.

Supports for Students and Staff

85. The Panel noted the commitment of the University to ensuring that a variety of appropriate supports are provided to students and staff. In discussions with students it was evident that they felt supported and that they had access to both academic and non-academic supports, and this was consistent throughout the period of the pandemic. Scholarships – both for academic merit and to support students experiencing socio-economic disadvantage – are available; free access to a counsellor is provided; as is career counselling by phone or email; pastoral support; and student accommodation is available; and there are a variety of social and sporting clubs and societies.

86. In dialogue with staff and students however, and as indicated in the SER, careers support is decentralised to departments and in this context is somewhat variable in quality and approach. It is suggested that student supports be centrally coordinated with a "one stop shop" for all supports and academic services managed centrally.

87. As indicated in paragraph 54, staff receive good access to professional supports in the form of access to funding for training and development; sabbatical leave; support for publications; support for conferences as well as free access to resources such as psychological and pastoral care supports.

Academic integrity, tolerance and non-discrimination, appeal and ethics

88. The University has an equality policy in place, and it is currently being revised as improvements have been identified. The Panel encourages the University in this undertaking and suggests that the opportunity to be taken to develop a comprehensive approach to equality, equity, diversity and inclusion and it should cover all academic and administrative activities and behaviours.

89. The Panel viewed information evidencing the operation of an academic appeals process over an extended period of time and confirms this is in place.

90. A Code of Academic Ethics was first approved by the University in 2015, and it has most recently been updated in 2019. It provides a framework for both general standards of ethics, and also ethical requirements for teaching, learning and for research. This is complemented with tools

to help ensure that plagiarism is detected and managed, e.g. text matching software is deployed through which all student work is screened. The Panel confirmed that adherence to these arrangements to secure academic integrity have been successfully managed during the period of the pandemic.

External Review and Improvement

91. The fifteen recommendations of the 2012 Institutional Review have been substantially addressed as indicated in this report. Some elements may require further development, but this is appropriate as the organisation both evolves and cycles of evaluation and improvement continue.

92. The three yearly internal review of programmes or groups of programmes very consciously considers the findings of the external SKVC review, as has been noted in paragraph 80. However there does not appear to be an extrapolation from the programme/study field evaluation reports to obtain an overall institutional perspective, where thematic strengths or weaknesses or areas for improvement could be identified.

93. As indicated in paragraph 76 the University has been successful in retaining its ISO certification, when it is subject to external reassessment every 3 years.

94. **In summary,** the University has made a good beginning in developing a quality system, and has clearly developed effective whole organisation processes. Nevertheless, there is a distinct lack of visibility on a systematic internal academic quality assurance system which effectively uses the ESG standards and systematically adopts fit for purpose procedures. The Panel encourages the University in its critique of 'system for system sake', but suggests that a reflection on the ESG standards may assist the University in devising procedures which do add value and bring improvements and enhancements to programmes and research.

95. **Judgment:** The area meets the minimum requirements and there are drawbacks that must be addressed, and it is given 2 points.

96. **Recommendations for the area:**

- A Quality Manual typically should include instructions on procedures. Though the manual contains information on higher level principles and obligations, particularly as this relates to ISO standards and management processes, it falls short on describing processes and procedures for the assurance and improvement of the quality of learning and teaching, and the student experience, or procedures for the ongoing monitoring and review of study programmes. Though it lists the main headings from Part 1 of the ESG, it does not describe any processes or procedures on how these guidelines are used and implemented. Therefore, the Quality Manual should be is reviewed, revised, and updated to include the university's procedures for the assurance of academic quality.

- The absence of a formal written and archived annual report for each study programme, and the reliance on a three-yearly self-assessment, is inadequate for the assurance of academic quality. It is recommended that all study programmes (or groups of cognate programmes or study fields) complete such a report. This should take account of the ESG guidance on the internal evaluation of study programmes, where it is expected that an annual evaluation should be undertaken of programme content in the light of recent research; needs of

society; progression and drop-out; student assessment methods; student feedback; the learning environment; and student support services.

- Procedures are in place to collect student feedback through using student surveys and there are mechanisms to discuss and analyse this, but it is recommended that mechanisms should be put in place for systematically informing class groups or all students as appropriate of actions taken or planned to 'close the feedback loop' in response to the issues raised in the feedback provided.

- The University is currently revising its Equality, Diversity and Inclusion policy and this is to be welcomed. The opportunity should be taken to comprehensively address the needs and entitlements of all students (learners) and staff irrespective of gender, disability, ethnicity, age, sexual orientation, family status, religion or nationality. The revised policy should cover all academic and administrative activities and behaviours.

- The Panel recommends that the University undertakes a comprehensive review of the efficiency and effectiveness of centralised student support. This review should consider the benefits of establishing a single 'One Stop Shop' for all student support services, including: careers advice and internships; careers and graduate monitoring and tracking; academic counselling; soft skills training; international mobility and advice for foreign students; psychological counselling and welfare; and scholarships.

97. **Good practice examples:**

- The Quality Management System introduced in 2014 has improved the management of organisational and administrative processes and has facilitated a more effective overview of the functioning and strategic and operational management of the university.

3.3. Studies and research (art)

<table>
<tr><td>The level of research (art), compatibility of studies and research (art) and its compliance with the strategic aims of activities:</td></tr>
<tr><td>

- The study and research (art) activities carried out and their results are consistent with the mission and strategic aims of the higher education institution;
- The level of research (art) activities is sufficient for the ongoing studies of the higher education institution;
- Studies are based on research (art);
- Consistent recognition of foreign qualifications, partial studies and prior non-formal and informal learning is performed.

</td></tr>
</table>

Alignment of Research and Study Programmes with Mission and Strategy

98. As discussed in paragraphs 19 and 21 respectively, the University's mission and vision were renewed in 2020 with the approval of *Klaipėda University Development Strategy 2021 – 2030*. The vision is for *a university creating for the future with recognized international achievements in science and studies; and innovations relevant to the well-being of the Baltic Sea Region*. The restructuring of the University's units, and subsequently its study fields and associated

programmes and areas of research, appears to have been well executed, and the current organisational profile and programme portfolio well represents its fields of expertise and specialisation, and this is all aligned with the institutional Mission and Strategy.

99. The University's portfolio which balances between the physical and social sciences, and adds a focus on the culture and history of the region through the expertise in the humanities, reflects well the strategy articulated and is well mapped to related action plan. Relationships with public, private and governmental bodies at local, regional, national and international levels are well aligned to the fields of study and competences of the University. The collaborations in place support and/or drawing on the expertise of the University.

100. In discussing the model of teaching and learning deployed by the University, it was clear that there was good understanding of the Bologna tools which among other things aim to enhance student-centred learning, transparency of qualifications, and learner and graduate mobility. Programmes are designed with intended outcomes specified, and examples of outcomes based programme design were cited during meetings. Issues of mobility and internationalisation are discussed in paragraphs 124 - 131.

101. Examples cited to further evidence student-centred learning included flexible learning paths, with elective opportunities; diverse assessment methods; the provision of blended learning opportunities. The latter has been particularly exploited during the Covid period, with many enhancements to teaching being driven by the pandemic. Students spoke with positivity about being able to continue classes online, being able to access resources remotely, and to 'meet' with staff online as needed.

102. A particular feature to which the University demonstrated a consistent approach was the inclusion of students – at all cycles – in research projects or service contracts. In discussions with staff, students and graduates, many examples were given of how students could engage in very practical learning and applied research opportunities through their contribution to University projects being led by researchers or other academic staff. Students spoke of working directly with academic and research staff on live projects that were directly relevant to their studies; they gained exposure to working with clients and the design of projects and research according to client needs. There was significant evidence of staff bringing their research into their teaching and of students having opportunities to both contribute to industry projects as well as disseminating findings at academic conferences.

103. Academic and research staff demonstrated enthusiasm and creativity in describing and discussing their research. It was evident that they had transferred their interest and excitement to both students and members of the local business and civic communities.

104. In considering how *study and research (art) activities carried out and their results are consistent with the mission and strategic aims of the higher education institution* the many applied research projects which are undertaken in a regional context are ample evidence, and many are a good illustration of the bottom-up approach. Academics in their liaison with external stakeholders were able to respond directly to local needs, and they brought students with them through the student involvement in the projects; and importantly the University was supportive of ideas proposed by frontline academics. There was a clear narrative from teacher to researcher to student to graduate to external stakeholder reflecting this strong "bottom-up" approach to research.

105. Between 2015 and 2020 the University identified fourteen research themes for development. Four related to fields represented by Marine Research Institute and those of the Faculty of Marine Technologies and Natural Sciences; two to the Institute of Baltic Region History and Archaeology; two to the Faculty of Health Sciences; four to the Faculty of Social Studies and Humanities; and a further two to the Marine Research Institute with the Faculty of Marine Technologies and the Faculty of Health Sciences. The University presented evidence of over 180 research projects being conducted across these themes, and advised they specifically address regional needs. The process of developing the research thematic areas and aligning research projects to them have been effective in helping achieve the intended outcomes the Optimisation Plan (e.g. see Table 3 of the OP). This a random indication of the nature and region of the research projects being undertaken:

    i. COMPLETE: Completing management options in the Baltic Sea region to reduce risk of invasive species introduction by shipping. Interreg South Baltic Program 2014-2020.

    ii. HELCOM ACTION: Actions to evaluate and identify effective measures to reach GES in the Baltic Sea marine region. European Commission.

    iii. EcoUP: The role of coastal upwelling in the Baltic Sea ecosystem. Research Council of Lithuania. RBR: Reviving Baltic Resilience. Interreg South Baltic Program 2014-2020

    iv. BUSINESS FISHING: Business network for blue and safe innovations. Region Blekinge Municipality, Sweden.

    v. JKSMART: Development of an intelligent wireless security system and method for marine containers, as well as experimental testing. Operational Programme for EU Structural Funds Investments for 2014-2020

    vi. HEALTH INEQUALITIES: Developing a capacity building model for identifying and reducing health inequalities. EEA and Norwegian financial mechanisms.

    vii. MANORS: Valorisation of manors for tourism development in rural areas of the South Baltic area Interreg South Baltic Program 2014-2020.

    viii. CANCER PREVENTION: Promotion of breast and colorectal cancer prevention measures in cross border territories. Lithuania-Russia Cross-border Cooperation Programme 2014-2020. Lund University, Sweden.

    ix. LYDINIAI: Copper Alloys during the First Millennium AD: Investigation of Metallurgy and Technological Processes in the Context of Socio-Economic Development. Research Council of Lithuania.

    x. SAMOGITIANS: Konstantinas Bružas. What must not disappear: the end of the nineteenth century – the 8th decade of the 20th: Ethnographic material of Samogitian vicinities. Lietuvos kultūros taryba.

    xi. TILE MAKING: Late Medieval and Early Modern Tile Making in Klaipėda: between innovation and cultural tradition. Research Council of Lithuania.

    xii. SEMANTICSYS: The Semantic System and Nomination of Northern Samogitian Sub-dialect: Synchrony and Diachrony. Lithuanian State Language Commission.

    xiii. UŽPELKIAI: Užpelkiai Cemetery in the Cultural Context of Lithuanian Coastal and Baltic Sea Regions. Research Council of Lithuania.

xiv. SB BRIDGE: Sustainable development of a skilled workforce in the blue and green growth economy sectors, ensuring a smooth transfer of scientific knowledge. Interreg South Baltic Program 2014-2020.

106. As is evident from the foregoing, and as it discussed later under Evaluation Area 3.4, the Panel formed the view that applied research and knowledge transfer is an area of strength. This is endorsed further under 'Needs Analysis' and 'Impact, Monitoring, and Evaluation', through positive support and testimony from external stakeholders regarding applied research projects. However, the Panel members recommend that there is scope for the University to strengthen how it monitors and measures the impact of this activity.

107. A key exemplar of the approach to research within the regional context is provided by work of Marine Valley. Marine Valley represents a programme of integrated research and studies for the development of the Lithuanian maritime sector located at a business centre at the facility of the Institute of Marine Research. The Institute has a suite of highly specialised laboratories and, as indicated in paragraph 148, over 200 researchers looking at issues of marine science and the blue economy. To date there is a combined total revenue from funded research and service provision amounting to approximately €6.7 million. As indicated in paragraph 145 the University is internationally recognised in the field of oceanographic research, with significant peer reviewed publications and citations. This focus aligns with the objectives of the Marine Research Institute and those of the Faculty of Marine Technologies and Natural Sciences.

108. The Panel recognised that the profile of the Marine Valley with its large concentration of researchers accounts for the associated intensity of project activity and research publication. By contrast research activities in other areas largely reflects the distribution of study fields and student numbers, e.g. academic staff working in the Social Sciences publish more work and engage in more projects than those working in Medical and Health Sciences which has fewer study fields and fewer staff.

109. Government funding for research is allocated by the Research Council of Lithuania following a two stage evaluation process. A quantitative assessment is conducted by the Council followed by a qualitative assessment organised by the Government Strategic Analysis Centre (STRATA) since 2019 in accordance with the Regulation on the Comparative Expert Assessment of Research and Development Activities. Scores for the University's research areas varied between fields with the lowest score of 1 being given to the quality of two fields and the highest score of 4 being given to R&D quality of the field of Ecology and the Environment. With most scores between 2 and 3, though more 3s than 2s, there is scope to improve here and gain access to additional funding. (STRATA replaced the previous body MOSTA which was responsible for the earlier version of this evaluation model). The Panel noted the findings of STRATA between 2013–2017 that the strengths of the University were in the fields with the largest numbers of researchers and that the higher rated areas were History and Archaeology, Ecology and Environmental Sciences, Biology.

Study Programmes

110. The number of study fields and associated programmes, as listed earlier in paragraph 17, reflects the size and nature of the institution. As discussed in depth in section 3.4. *Impact on regional and national development*, they reflect the needs of the region and related strategies for regional development. The recent rationalisation of departments and study fields was appropriate, and in

line with the Optimisation Plan, and it addressed the recommendation of the 2012 Institutional Review. Should the student numbers stabilise through greater local demographic steadiness and through internationalisation, there may be opportunity for further refinement of the portfolio. The shift to a larger applied research portfolio is noted and acknowledged as a potentially effective strategy to grow institutional strengths.

111. The Panel recognised the positive feature that all programmes provide learners with a choice of electives at both first and second cycle. It was also noted that placement is provided, as per national guidelines, on all programmes.

112. The Panel noted the statistics and qualitative analysis provided by the University in respect of student drop out. Between both the documentation considered and dialogue at meetings, the Panel came to the view that the University may wish to reconsider its approach to supporting learners to complete their studies. In discussions it was noted that incoming students may not have achieved a deep level of pre-requisite learning for their respective programmes of study, leading them to struggle. It was further noted on a number of occasions that the University wished to maintain high academic standards. These are objective considerations in the context of persistence in academic studies. However, a more proactive approach to responding to student needs, in the form of reading, writing, numeracy skills provision, research skill provision either as separate workshops or integrated as generic skills across programmes may address the level of drop out. This contributes to the recommendation in paragraph 138. This is also referred to in paragraphs 44, 100 and 154.

113. Annexes 9 and 10 of the SER provided detailed information on the publications of staff and graduate theses, again reflecting the scale of the University and its areas of expertise.

114. In considering the Smart Campus initiative, the Panel noted that it could be examined under a number of the Institutional Review criteria as it brings together innovative and effective study programmes, internationalisation, lifelong learning, along with elements of industry liaison and local collaboration. It is noted that the Smart Campus concept has been prompted through the University's involvement in the EU CONEXUS consortium discussed in paragraphs 124-129, and it is intended to enable the provision of virtual educational resources to support participation on joint study programmes, student and staff mobility, as well as the enhancement of teaching and learning. It is very ambitious and worthwhile initiative. Following establishment of a Smart Campus Unit the University will task the unit with delivering key outputs to include

   i.   providing a distinct virtual learning environment to enable staff and students share information and work in an international context;

   ii. a virtual library which will include interactive online courses, open archives and databases – available to external stakeholders as well as University community members;

   iii. digital supports to enable access to documentation for persons with disabilities;

   iv. automatic translation of documents to and from different languages; and in the long term

   v.   an artificial intelligence platform that supports the orientation of students coming from different backgrounds and the design of a personalised curriculum.

It will also include a digital platform for university-industry collaboration, which host collaboration projects between students and private stakeholders, e.g. project-based work, work-

placement, mentoring, etc. It is also intended that the virtual library will provide information about cultural events, mobility opportunities as well as employment possibilities.

Recognition of Prior Learning

115. As part of the review process, SKVC provided the Panel with a variety of supplementary information, including evidence of foreign qualifications being recognised for the purposes of both entry to programmes and also partial exemption from programmes. The University also advised that students who have transferred credit or gained exemptions based on student at other higher education institutions make about 2% of all students. As the University grows its international student numbers it is to be expected that this proportion may grow. Students who completed other study programmes, either in part or in full, in any other higher education institutions, in Lithuania or abroad can apply for credit/exemption for the programme to which they are applying at Klaipėda University. In order to ensure that the recognition is merited, transcripts are considered and the applicants must submit the description of the assessed study content.

116. International qualifications are also fully recognised for entry to programmes, e.g. a Bachelor obtained in one country may offer entry to a Masters programme in a cognate area; or high school results from another country may offer entry to a Bachelor programme.

117. Examples of the implementation of RPL procedures were also given by noting that individual learning plans are designed for students who have been credited with learning outcomes from other higher education institutions. The procedures have been in place at the University since 2005, and the recognition process is managed directly by academic departments who adjudicate if previous learning was in a cognate or non-cognate area to the programme to which the student is entering. Specific examples were not provided of the recognition of informal or experiential learning although a procedure for this exists. This is also referred to in paragraph 150.

Internationality of studies, research (art):
• *The higher education institution has a strategy for internationalisation of research (art) and study activities (including indicators of internationalisation), means for its implementation, and measurements of the effectiveness of these activities are performed (not applicable to colleges unless provided for in its strategic documents);*   • *The higher education institution integrates aspects of internationalisation into the content of studies and research (art) activities.*

Internationalisation Strategy

118. Internationalisation of the University and of its curriculum has not been expressed through the articulation of a separate strategy, but it is fully embedded within the *Action plan for optimization of Klaipėda University activity for 2018-2019* (Optimisation Plan) and the *Development Strategy 2021-2030*. Clear ambitious institutional priorities and goals are set, on matters such as mobility, partnerships, and contributions to EU projects and initiatives, and their importance to the University community was clearly communicated in the diverse meetings held. The EU-CONEXUS project, i.e. the European University for Smart Urban Coastal Sustainability, has

clearly added a focus and energy to the University's plans in this area. The 2021-2022 Action Plan has set targets and indicators for international project and study programme development.

119. While the EU-CONEXUS project is a recent initiative, it was evident in discussions with staff, students and graduates that international exchange programmes, particularly under Erasmus, were well known and utilised. Staff targets for outgoing mobility, set in the 2013 plans were exceeded and each year there is a study week to which international staff are invited. The student target for outgoing mobility of 3% of the population was marginally achieved, but the incoming target of 1% was not. Future plans are focused on the strengthening of these activities. There were also many examples presented in which staff and students participated in international research conferences, and more particularly international projects, many of them being EU funded.

120. The Panel also met with a number of international postgraduate students who spoke with positivity about not only their learning experience, but also the specific supports provided to them by the University in respect of visas, accommodation, and credit transfer. While it was noted that English was the medium of communication in their respective research communities and the language used in presenting internationally or in writing articles for publication, it was also noted that the University does provide Lithuanian language classes, which are appreciated by students. It is noteworthy that currently 50% of the University's PhD students are international. Since 2019, there is also a new University requirement that all doctoral students engage with a minimum of two foreign universities and researchers during their period of study.

121. The strategic focus of the University around growing the blue economy and focussing on the geographical region and its social and environmental needs lends itself to a commitment to transnational cooperation and the development of international relationships. This focus of the University within its new strategy was well evidenced in the examples of projects given and relationships being established. Paragraphs 111 and 146 provide many examples of this. This is in keeping with the objectives of the Optimisation Plan.

122. The European University for Smart Urban Coastal Sustainability EU CONEXUS involves a number of partners with the University, namely La Rochelle Universite, France; Agricultural University of Athens, Greece; Technical University of Civil Engineering Bucharest, Romania; La Universidad Catolica de Valencia, Spain; and the University of Zadar, Croatia: it provides the University with exciting collaboration opportunities. It is also an important initiative in that the concept of the "European University" is itself unique and has only recently been created by the Commission under Erasmus +. There are only a limited number of consortia with this designation to date. Membership of this consortium offers the University a unique opportunity to consider how the concept may be developed and contribute to the growth of the University.

123. The University is committed to developing joint programmes, particularly in the context of EU CONEXUS, and a number of specific programmes have been identified for development in the Optimisation Plan and in the Development Strategy 2021 – 2030 which will be monitored as part of the overall strategy monitoring process. The Panel understands that the evaluation and approval of the EU CONEXUS consortium is arguably a proxy for internally owned due diligence processes for the development of these sorts of relationships, nevertheless there is merit in adopting clear and specific due diligence processes to screen both potential partners and also in respect of particular initiatives with partners. During meetings at the site visit and in additional information provided, the University demonstrated a mature understanding of some of the distinct challenges

of joint programmes, noting for example that multiple external approvals may be required from the different accrediting, or quality assurance agencies in different countries; and also how national rules around higher education differ, leading to potential legal impediments in collaborations, e.g. the proposed interdisciplinary joint programme in smart coastal sustainability would not align to any Lithuanian approved field classification and therefore as things currently stand the University could not participate in this programme. It was noted that both the national and international regulation around joint programmes and joint awards, together with Covid, has delayed the development of a number of proposed programmes, for example,

- a Masters in Hybrid Renewable & Sustainable Energy Systems, with Hanze University of Applied Sciences (Groningen, the Netherlands), Technical University of Eindhoven (Netherlands), National LNG platform (Netherlands), University of Trieste (Italy), Strathclyde University (UK), Klaipėda Science and Technology Park, LNG Cluster (Lithuania), LNG Platform (Lithuania) and the LNG Competence Centre (Lithuania);

- a joint Bachelor programme in European history with Taras Shevchenko University in Kiev;

- a joint Masters in Smart Environment Climate Change Management with institutions in Italy and in Slovenia;

- and a joint doctoral programme is being developed with the Universities of Florence, Parma and Ferrara.

Internationalisation of the content of studies and research (art) activities.

124. As discussed in paragraph 108 there are many examples of the teaching being research informed, and drawing on learning drawing from diverse internationally funded projects. A significant portion of research and project work involves elements of transnational cooperation. Contemporary studies in any field, while cognisant of a local context, inevitably embrace international research and themes discussed in international literature. So even an institute of the University, which may by nature have a more local focus in its curricula, the Institute of Baltic Region History and Archaeology, has become one of the founders of the Baltic Geopolitics Network initiated by the University of Cambridge.

125. Many examples from both students and staff evidenced how degree programmes and research have been influenced by participation in mobility opportunities whether of a study or work nature; and through participation in international projects. While the examples discussed here, paragraphs 111,129, and 146, illustrate a positive approach to internationalisation, the Panel is of the view that the University does not have a clear and agreed understanding of internationalisation of curriculum.

126. **In summary,** the University portfolio of degree programmes and research initiatives are appropriate to the size, location and context of the region. They are provided within the Bologna framework, and there is evidence of student-centred learning and richly informed research led teaching. There is a very significant commitment to internationalisation and the implementation of targets around key elements such as research project involvement and the development of joint programmes.

127. **Judgment:** The area is being developed systematically, without any major drawbacks and is given 3 points.

128. **Recommendations for the area:**

- While noting that some arrangements are in place to mitigate and to react to the problem of student retention and drop-out, which is highest amongst first cycle and first year student cohorts, it is recommended that a comprehensive review should be undertaken of arrangements to monitor and mitigate retention, completion, and drop-out across all three Bologna cycles. This should include a more refined and robust approach to the collection and analysis of data and information across all categories of student, including both Lithuanian and foreign students. Additional proactive and preventative mechanisms are also needed to strengthen coordination between study programmes and central student support services. This should include targeted support for first cycle students through a comprehensive first semester programme of induction, study skills, tracking, academic counselling, and focus group discussions.

- There is good evidence of the University working with regional partners through conducting a variety of research projects. This can be strengthened in the area of applied research and knowledge transfer where a set of key performance indicators should be identified to ensure that the University formally measures and monitors the impact of research, particularly in the context of meeting the needs of regional stakeholders.

129. **Good practice examples:**

- There is extensive evidence that scientific research informs teaching and the curriculum, and that students value learning about staff research activities and the opportunities they have to become involved in externally funded research projects.

- The enthusiasm and creativity of academics and researchers around their fields of study has a positive influence on both students and members of the local business and civic communities.

- The staff of the Marine Institute have a very strong profile of participation in international research groups and collaboration, and this has contributed to a growth in doctoral student numbers including a significant proportion of around 50% from outside Lithuania.

- There is significant openness to international partnership opportunities.

3.4. Impact on regional and national development

Effectiveness of the impact on regional and national development:
• *The higher education institution carries out an analysis of national and (or) regional demands, identifies the needs to be met and foresees the potential impact on national and (or) regional development;*   • *The monitoring, analysis and evaluation of the effectiveness of the measures on national and (or) regional development are performed.*

Needs Analysis

130. The University defines its sphere of influence by dividing it into local (Klaipėda and Klaipėda region, or Western Lithuania); national (Lithuania); and the Baltic Sea region, which may also include parts of Northern Europe. The SER and its appendices provided detailed information on a variety of projects and partnerships in which the University's awareness and interpretation of national and regional strategies was evidenced. Furthermore during meetings conducted as part of the 'site visit' it was evident that regional and local social partners were not just aware of the University's mission and strategy, but were very involved in a shared approach to regional development, cognisant of both the national and European contexts. It was clear that the objective of the University Performance Optimization Plan for 2018–2019 around regional cooperation and development is receiving focus and is being incrementally achieved.

131. The Panel endorses the accuracy of the environmental scan provided in the SER and the manner in which the University has identified synergies with its fields of expertise and competencies. The citation of the goals of Klaipėda Economic Development Strategy 2030 which aim to transform the city into a world-class port prioritising the blue economy and smart solutions, is as indicated by the University a significant opportunity for the University to grow in breadth and depth its contribution to regional development.

132. The University's demographic, social and political analysis of the region (SER 204) is noteworthy in its identification of all the challenges experienced by the location, and is realistic in the possibilities identified for the provision of education around lifelong learning, leadership development in business as well as the opportunities to commercialise the results of research.

133. The content of the suite of national, regional and European documents cited in the SER (at the end of paragraph 209) were clearly known and understood by the University community, as they were frequently referenced during the meetings with the Panel, and it was evident that they had significant influence on the strategic plan. The Mayor of Klaipėda serves on the University Council, and members of the University serve on municipal and regional forums, and there is significant integration and alignment of strategy to focus on key aspects of regional development, with the idea of growing the blue economy at the core. The objective of the recommendation from the 2012 Institutional Review, to engage and consult with local partners has been fully addressed, albeit through a different mechanism.

Impact, Monitoring and Evaluation

134. Regional needs and European strategies, e.g. EU Strategy for the Baltic Sea, have influenced University activities in a variety of ways, not least in the focus of the restructuring of the University with the establishment of the Faculty of Marine Engineering and Natural Sciences and in 2017 the Marine Research Institute, and the identification of ecology and environment science as key focus areas in the University strategy. This aligns to locally identified education and employment needs. Taking doctoral theses as an indicator of the provision of educated personnel to the region, one can observe that between the period 2016 and 2020 the number of persons focusing on Ecology and Environmental science has increased (1 in 2016 and 7 in 2019), and the University indicated that a significant proportion of these graduates have gained employment with local environmental bodies.

135. The development of the Blue Economy is a key objective of the regional development plan and is very much to the forefront of evidence provided in the SER and was a topic of discuss during meetings with University staff, students, graduates and external stakeholders. Projects involving aquaculture and aquaponics were shared as well as research projects pertaining to the Baltic Sea. The Panel acknowledged that the University has a unique profile in its ownership of a three ship fleet, consisting of a research vessel "Mintis", a training vessel "Brabander" and a sea yacht "Odyssey". It is noted that the fleet is fully contracted by various public and private entities to conduct various research or commercial projects for the coming 12 month and in this context the fleet also generates income for the University. When in dock, the ships are open to tourists. The ships also act as training vessels for the Klaipėda Sea Cadet School and the Lithuanian Maritime School. Projects with which the University has been involved include Marine Spatial Planning, National Climate Change initiatives, Baltic Sea monitoring, Coastal Zone management. While noting the limitations of University ranking models, the Panel acknowledges that in the Academic Ranking of World Universities (ARWU), also known as the Shanghai Ranking, the University has been included in the top 200 universities in the world in the field of oceanographic research and among the top 10 universities in the Baltic Sea region in terms of high quality publications and citations.

136. Revisions of cycle I and cycle II programmes to address the needs of the Blue Economy have also been undertaken with changes being made to the study fields of *Biology and Marine Biotechnology* and *Ecology and Environmental Science* respectively; changes have also been made to cycle II programmes in National Security, and in Informatics, and in Engineering Informatics. The SER presents very comprehensive and detailed information on the range of projects and initiatives undertaken by the University through the deployment of its expertise and competencies in the physical and social sciences, and in the humanities. Many of the examples given were also positively cited by the external stakeholders. The following are merely an indicative sample (their inclusion in this report is to share a flavour of projects, not to indicate that these are better or more effective than projects not included):

    i.   A study commissioned by the City to examine the well-being and needs of older persons resulted in the reorganization of the system providing social services.

    ii.   Cooperation with the Lithuanian Sea Museum on a project to support families with children with autism; and with other educationalists in the region to develop psychological assessment tools and supports to assist in creating a dyslexia-friendly education system.

    iii.   As one of the founders of the Klaipėda Social and Psychological Assistance Centre contributes to the reduction of exclusion through the provision of three educational programmes to develop citizenship through volunteering, provides assistance to victims of human trafficking and domestic violence.

    iv.   Contributions to regional appreciation of cultural heritage through conferences and exhibitions, including a multilingual traveling exhibition dedicated to disseminating awareness and understanding of the archaeology of Klaipėda region, were undertaken by Institute of Baltic Region History and Archaeology.

    v.   The establishment of a Liquid Natural Gas (LNG) cluster with the Klaipėda Science and Technology Park and LNG terminal operator AB Klaipėdos Nafta, AB Vakarų laivų

gamykla, responding to the needs of the LNG terminal and LNG business development, leading to the design of a programme which ultimately became a specialization in the field Maritime Transport Engineering.

vi. Smart industry research projects such as BIOGAS, BALMAN, JKSMART, GREEN PORT, ELMAR, AUTOFERRY.

vii. In 2018 the University founded the first Naval Innovative Military Technology Centre in the Baltic States, which led to the military history being introduced into the Baltic History Programme which in turn resulted in several employees of the Lithuanian Armed Forces and Internal Institutions chosing to study this programme. Currently there are seven doctoral students are working on their dissertations on military history, and the University contributed to the preparation of one of the key documents in the field of national security - the Lithuanian Doctrine of War (approved by the Commander of the Lithuanian Armed Forces in 2016).

viii. At the request of the Ministry of Energy, University researchers have analysed offshore wind development in the Baltic Sea.

ix. FOCUS: An Interreg South Baltic Program 2014-2020 funded project on Facilitating blue growth with open courses by utilizing R&D products and virtual mobility.

x. Participating in a variety of projects - YOUTH-STENETY; CATCH; VIPA; MANORS; 65+; FOCUS; VANGUARD which focusing on the use of marine and coastal resources in the development of smart health and tourism solutions for the region.

137. The dissemination of research results may also contribute to regional impact and the University gave detail on articles published and presentations given, e.g. paragraph 220 of the SER states that in 2019, 7 scientific articles were published only on the topic of balneology and on average 25 events are organized annually to disseminate the associated research outcomes. Annex 9 of the SER provided full detail on all projects and publications between 2016 and 2020.

138. As indicated in the introduction to this report, and in paragraph 111, one of the University's successes has been the establishment of Marine Valley which is located at a business centre at the facility of the Institute of Marine Research. Marine Valley's programme of integrated research and studies aims to support the development of the Lithuanian maritime sector. The Institute has a suite of highly specialised laboratories and as also referred to in paragraph 113, over 200 researchers looking at issues of marine science and the blue economy. These facilities were government funded with the intention that they would be "open access" infrastructure, and to date this has been very successful with external stakeholders praising the facility and their access to services. From the University's perspective the provision of these facilities also aligned to its objective to provide an integrated approach to regional development and to work collaboratively with local and regional government bodies. The Panel endorses the positive presentation of the project by the University, and notes its very significant potential to have enduring impact on regional development. The dialogue with social partners and external stakeholders verified how these contributions were viewed as important. Achieving this level of regional engagement was an objective of the Optimisation Plan.

139. The changes to the University's structure, the focus of the University strategy, the securing of funding for many research projects and the presentation of very many worthwhile projects and initiatives are used to illustrate the University's response to the needs of the region and to some

extent, are being used as a proxy for regional impact. The Panel is of no doubt that the University is exercising significant impact through the examples provided, and that the focus of the strategy and the associated Action Plans will enable this impact to be deepened and broadened. The work undertaken to date is very significant progress in addressing the recommendations of the 2012 Institutional Review around impact measures. It is noted that external stakeholders proactively seek assistance from the University, which is a positive indicator of the appropriateness of the University offering. Nevertheless, as is noted paragraph 112, the Panel suggests that this is an opportunity for the University to explore innovative and more effective ways to measure its impact on Western Lithuania and the Baltic region, which it is acknowledged can be a complex task with the challenges of multifactorial influences to consider.

Assurance of conditions for lifelong learning:
• *The higher education institution monitors and analyses the need for lifelong learning;*   • *The higher education institution anticipates the diversity of forms and conditions of lifelong learning and ensures their implementation;*   • *The higher education institution performs the evaluation of assurance of conditions for lifelong learning.*

Lifelong Learning (LLL)

140. Lifelong learning is facilitated by the recognition of prior certified and prior uncertified experiential learning as discussed in paragraphs 121-123. It is also encouraged and made accessible through the provision of short courses which do not have barriers to entry. The Panel noted that University has a unit, recently renamed the Centre for Continuing Studies, which provides a variety of training programmes primarily in collaboration with the employment services of Western Lithuania, typically service four to five thousand persons annually. Another focus is that from the field of pedagogy, where continuing professional development courses are being provided to teachers. Additionally, the languages departments arrange Lithuanian language courses for temporary or permanent migrants to the region. These are good initiatives, and the presence of the Continuing Education Centre as part of the University for over 20 years indicates commitment to lifelong learning. The Panel acknowledges the findings of the SWOT analysis of the University that identifies this area as a "strength", notwithstanding the opportunities for growth and enhancement in LLL. The Strategy 2021-2030 identifies the provision of Lifelong Learning as a significant area for the University and the Panel urges the University to consider fully all opportunities in this context.

141. In considering the current activities of the University, the Panel observed that there are a variety of initiatives across the University's academic units where LLL opportunities are provided, and a culture of continuing education is promoted. There is a particular focus on the training and employment needs of the region.

142. The project FOCUS mentioned in paragraph 146 above pertains to the development of "blue growth competencies" through the provision of open adult education programmes. This has been a conscious focus of the University as part of its new strategic priorities. The University has

established a programme, marketed under the label of the Blue Growth Leaders Academy, which is provided at Marine Valley, using the resources of Marine Valley. It is a focussed executive development programme which is very selective and targeted at local and regional middle and senior managers. This is a good example of providing the local business population with opportunities for lifelong learning and also tailored professional development opportunities. In discussions with the senior management of the University the success of this particular programme was noted, along with its potential as an income generator for the institution. The Panel notes that there are many opportunities in this area of providing professional development programmes, including short programmes which may be credit-bearing, as was suggested by some of the external stakeholders. While the University is making progress in the provision of diverse lifelong learning opportunities, it is an area which would merit from further development.

143. The Faculty of Health Sciences has established the University of the Third Age providing courses focusing on the social integration of older citizens. This is an area which could be further explored by the University.

144. The issue of "drop out" was discussed in paragraph 118. Consideration of what programmes or services may be provided to the persons who have not completed their initial course may be worthwhile. Credit may be provided towards the completion of some short programme, or alternative learning opportunities may be possible for this cohort.

145. Initiatives such as the Social Workers' Discussion Club (SDDK) which brings together students, lecturers, graduates, employers, local communities, NGOs, as well as the Klaipėda Region Social Workers' Association to discuss and develop ways to respond to regional social challenges is also a forum which facilitates a diverse approach to lifelong learning and caters for different interests and approaches to learning and its service to society.

146. The recent European Commission publication, *European Pillar of Social Rights Action Plan* has as one of its key objectives to ensure at least 60% of adults in the EU participate in training every year by 2030. Responding to the text, the Lifelong Learning Platform, an umbrella body for 50,000 European education institutions argues that if lifelong learning is proclaimed as a right for all, diverse learning opportunities should be provided to all citizens irrespective of their place or role in society. The University may find consideration of these policy instruments and dialogue around them helpful in deepening and broadening their approach to Lifelong Learning, as well as in accessing further Erasmus+ funding to support lifelong learning initiatives.

147. The Panel noted that the Rector's annual report captures and disseminates information on lifelong learning programmes and services provided by the University.

148. **In summary,** Klaipėda University has demonstrated a very focused and strategic approach to engaging with the local and regional populations and providing specific opportunities for personal, community and business development through a range of projects drawing from the institution's fields of expertise. There are many positive examples of integration of the University's strategy with the regional and local strategies, drawing on European and national funding to progress development across areas such as the blue economy, ecology and regional cultural awareness.

149. **Judgment:** The area is rated very well in the national context and internationally without any drawbacks and is given 4 points.

150. **Recommendations for the area:**

The University has made progress since the previous institutional review in the area of lifelong learning, nevertheless the Panel concurs with the view expressed by external stakeholders that opportunities should be explored to make improvements in this area. It is recommended that external stakeholders be consulted on their needs for credit-bearing short courses and training programmes in specialist areas required by business.

151. **Good practice examples:**

- There are extensive links and good relationships with regional business and social partners, who regard Klaipėda University as important to the region. The University's contribution to regional development and sustainability are much valued in the municipality and beyond.
- The development of the Marine Valley Open Access Centre has been exemplary. The accessible facilities, the local synergies, and the functioning of the Centre as a knowledge hub are a clear example of good practice.
- The Blue Growth Academy is a highly successful initiative which has great potential for contributing to strategic growth in regional capacity and capability in the development of the bio-economy.
- The voluntary community service activities of university staff and students, not least during the recent pandemic, are a positive illustration of the University's service to society.

IV. EXAMPLES OF GOOD PRACTICE

The Panel identified the following examples of good practice in Management:

i. With regard to the new Strategic Development Plan 2021/2030 and completion of the outgoing 2012/2020 Plan, the review team confirmed that the university's processes for consultation development of strategic goals and objectives, and for monitoring progress are embedded transparent. Faculty and Institute planning is well aligned to this.

ii. The organisational and structural changes introduced since the last institutional review have improved organisational efficiency and are well understood by staff of the university.

iii. There are good relationships between the Students' Union and the wider student body and the University's senior management, and extensive opportunities for student representation and involvement in academic governance bodies at all levels of the organisation.

The Panel identified the following example of good practice in Quality Assurance:

iv. The Quality Management System introduced in 2014 has improved the management of organisational and administrative processes and has facilitated a more effective overview of the functioning and strategic and operational management of the university.

The Panel identified the following examples of good practice in Research and Studies:

v. There is extensive evidence that scientific research informs teaching and the curriculum, and that students value learning about staff research activities and the opportunities they have to become involved in externally funded research projects.

vi. The enthusiasm and creativity of academics and researchers around their fields of study has a positive influence on both students and members of the local business and civic communities.

vii. The staff of the Marine Institute have a very strong profile of participation in international research groups and collaboration, and this has contributed to a growth in doctoral student numbers including a significant proportion of around 50% from outside Lithuania.

viii. There is significant openness to international partnership opportunities.

The Panel identified the following examples of good practice in respect of Regional Impact:

ix. There are extensive links and good relationships with regional business and social partners, who regard Klaipėda University as important to the region. The university's contribution to regional development and sustainability are much valued in the municipality and beyond.

x. The development of the Marine Valley Open Access Centre has been exemplary. The accessible facilities, the local synergies, and the functioning of the Centre as a knowledge hub are a clear example of good practice.

xi. The Blue Growth Academy is a highly successful initiative which has great potential for contributing to strategic growth in regional capacity and capability in the development of the bio-economy.

xii. The voluntary community service activities of university staff and students, not least during the recent pandemic, are a positive illustration of the University's service to society.

V. RECOMMENDATIONS FOR ENHANCEMENT

The Panel's recommendations for further enhancement are:

i. The University should complete the task recommended in the 2012 institutional review to design and implement a comprehensive Risk Register and Risk Assessment Plan to cover all strategic activities and operations; further, each Faculty and Institute should undertake the same activity at their level.

ii. The University acknowledges that there are deficiencies in data collection and monitoring of graduate careers and employment destinations and that responsibility is currently decentralised. The Panel recommends that responsibility and oversight of these matters should be centralised under the authority of a Vice Rector, with qualitative and quantitative data collected and analysed for the purpose of annual reporting to Senate. This must result in an annual action plan to secure more effective monitoring and oversight of graduate employment destinations.

iii. A Quality Manual typically should include instructions on procedures. Though the manual contains information on higher level principles and obligations, particularly as this relates to ISO standards and management processes, it falls short on describing processes and procedures for the assurance and improvement of the quality of learning and teaching, and the student experience, or procedures for the ongoing monitoring and review of study programmes. Though it lists the main headings from Part 1 of the ESG, it does not describe any processes or procedures on how these guidelines are used and implemented. Therefore,

the Quality Manual should be is reviewed, revised, and updated to include the university's procedures for the assurance of academic quality.

iv. The absence of a formal written and archived annual report for each study programme, and the reliance on a three-yearly self-assessment, is inadequate for the assurance of academic quality. It is recommended that all study programmes (or groups of cognate programmes or study fields) complete such a report. This should take account of the ESG guidance on the internal evaluation of study programmes, where it is expected that an annual evaluation should be undertaken of programme content in the light of recent research; needs of society; progression and drop-out; student assessment methods; student feedback; the learning environment; and student support services.

v. Procedures are in place to collect student feedback through using student surveys and there are mechanisms to discuss and analyse this, but it is recommended that mechanisms should be put in place for systematically informing class groups or all students as appropriate of actions taken or planned to 'close the feedback loop' in response to the issues raised in the feedback provided.

vi. The University is currently revising its Equality, Diversity and Inclusion policy and this is to be welcomed. The opportunity should be taken to comprehensively address the needs and entitlements of all students (learners) and staff irrespective of gender, disability, ethnicity, age, sexual orientation, family status, religion or nationality. The revised policy should cover all academic and administrative activities and behaviours.

vii. The Panel recommends that the university undertakes a comprehensive review of the efficiency and effectiveness of centralised student support. This review should consider the benefits of establishing a single 'One Stop Shop' for all student support services, including: careers advice and internships; careers and graduate monitoring and tracking; academic counselling; soft skills training; international mobility and advice for foreign students; psychological counselling and welfare; and scholarships.

viii. While noting that some arrangements are in place to mitigate and to react to the problem of student retention and drop-out, which is highest amongst first cycle and first year student cohorts, it is recommended that additional proactive and preventative mechanisms are needed to strengthen coordination between study programmes and central student support services. This should include targeted support for first cycle students through a comprehensive first semester programme of induction, study skills, tracking, academic counselling, and focus group discussions.

ix. There is good evidence of the University working with regional partners through conducting a variety of research projects. This can be strengthened in the area of applied research and knowledge transfer where a set of key performance indicators should be identified to ensure that the University formally measures and monitors the impact of research, particularly in the context of meeting the needs of regional stakeholders.

x. The University has made progress since the previous institutional review in the area of lifelong learning, nevertheless the Panel concurs with the view expressed by external stakeholders that opportunities should be explored to make improvements in this area. It is

recommended that external stakeholders be consulted on their needs for credit-bearing short courses and training programmes in specialist areas required by business.