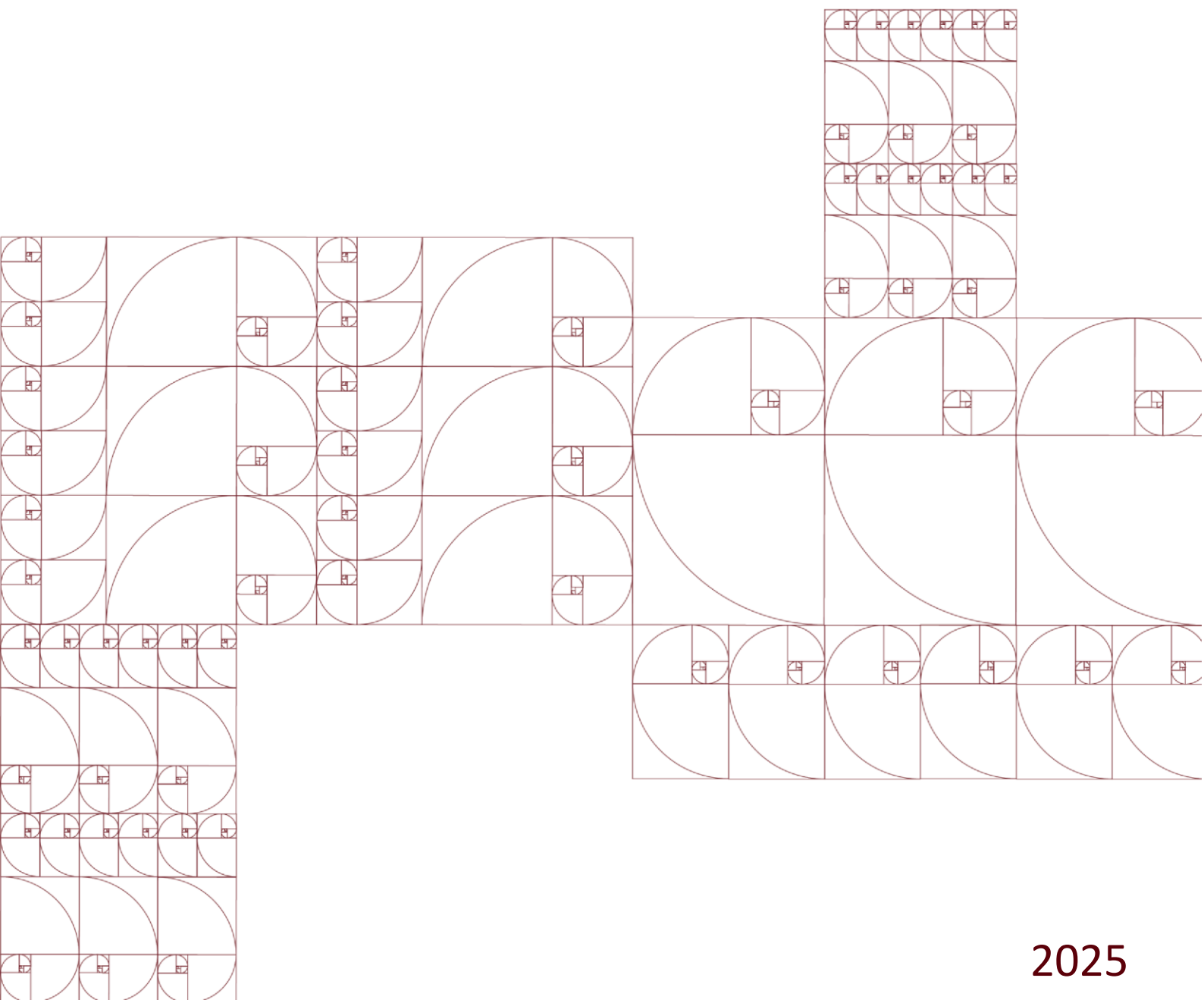


FEEDBACK ON PROGRESS AFTER INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW



The present report is one of the steps in the follow up, which is an integral part of an external review of higher education institutions (HEI) in Lithuania. The follow up starts after the institutional accreditation decision comes into force and is aimed at implementing recommendations received during the external review. It consists of several steps: an action plan, a follow up report, and external feedback on progress.

*Within six months (in case of a positive external evaluation decision) or three months (in case of a negative external evaluation decision), a higher education institution prepares **an action plan** aimed at enhancement of its activities based on the findings and recommendations of the review.*

***The action plan** represents the strategic actions and decisions taken by the institution to address the recommendations and suggestions for improvement provided in the review report. **A follow up report** is prepared to reflect the progress achieved by the higher education institution in implementing the action plan.*

*This **feedback on progress report** is an outcome of a peer discussion process between the higher education institution and external peers to reflect on the enhancement efforts and achievements of the higher education institution and adjust its actions, if necessary. The process has been coordinated by SKVC (the Centre for Quality Assessment in Higher Education, Lithuania).*

*The **feedback on the progress report** aims to answer the following questions:*

- *Are outcomes of the review appropriately addressed by the provisioned actions?*
- *Do the actions have clear links with specific outputs aimed at enhancement?*
- *Is there measurable and sufficient progress already achieved?*
- *Are there any suggestions and/or commendations in terms of actions taken and/or provisioned?*
- *Are there any potential challenges in implementing the recommendations?*

Timeline of the Institutional Review

The institutional review visit took place from 27 – 29 April 2021.

The decision on accreditation granting a 7-year accreditation came into force on 2 September 2021

Timeline of the Follow Up

The action plan has been approved on 15 November 2021

The progress report has been approved on 25 November 2024

The external progress visit took place on 16 December 2024.

The feedback on the progress report has been prepared in January 2025 by:

- Associate Professor Dr Armand Faganel, Vice-dean for Public Relations & Quality Assurance, University of Primorska, Slovenia, *and*
- Dr Tara Ryan, Director of Education Services and Quality, Irish Management Institute, Dublin, Ireland

Introduction

Please provide a short introduction regarding the reviewed documentation and the online meeting. Consider adding a short overview and/or any general remarks regarding the documents (the action plan and the progress report) prepared by the HEI. Provide some introductory information regarding the online meeting and its participants.

It is evident that Klaipėda University (KU) has made progress in developing quality assurance processes. The experts also recognise the openness and commitment to further improvements. Nevertheless the action plan, which was adopted in November 2021, is light touch and identifies few actions for the period 2023-2024, and none thereafter. The action plan for 2025-26 is due for completion in March 2025. Given that it was not evident that all actions identified in the first action plan were completed within the timescales identified (as indicated below), and that the plan does not include indicators that would facilitate the monitoring of actions taken, it was not evident to the reviewers that the action plan is actually a helpful document for the University. The lateness in preparing the 2025-2026 report supports this view – it would be in place were it perceived to be an important tool. These documents serve two main purposes – assisting accountable and responsible University officers in identifying actions required and tracking them, and reporting on same. It is not yet evident that it is assisting in these tasks.

Guiding questions

*Please reflect on the actions planned and implemented for **each evaluation area** in the light of the following:*

- **Are outcomes of the review appropriately addressed by the actions?**
Please consider, whether all of the areas of improvement are covered by specific actions? How effectively do the taken and provisioned actions address the specific outcomes identified in the review?
- **Do the actions have clear links with specific outputs aimed at enhancement?**
Please consider, how clearly are the actions linked to specific outputs and intended enhancements? Are these links well-communicated and aligned?
- **Is there measurable and sufficient progress already achieved?**
Please consider, what measurable progress has been achieved so far, and does it align with the expected timeline? How sufficient is this progress in moving towards the intended outcomes?
- **Are there any suggestions and/or commendations in terms of actions taken and/or provisioned?** *What commendations can be made regarding the actions taken so far? What constructive suggestions can be offered to enhance future implementation?*
- **Are there any potential challenges in implementing the recommendations?**
What challenges have emerged or might arise in implementing the recommendations? How can these challenges be mitigated through collaborative effort?

1. Evaluation Area: Management

The evaluation area Management was rated 3. Each recommendation from the institutional review is listed first, followed by the analysis. An overall conclusion on progress in the area of management is given at the end.

Recommendation 1:

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.

In the progress report it is stated that a procedure for the implementation of an internal control policy, with an associated plan for “identifying and mitigating risk factors was approved” in 2021 and in January 2022 a Risk Register was prepared. A number of new posts were created, from a Corruption Prevention Officer to a new Head of the Botanical Garden. Annual reports were prepared in 2023 and 2024. While it was explained during the meeting with staff that there were quarterly reviews by management and annual reviews by the Senate the reviewers did not have a sense of confidence the risk register was actually guiding actions or a useful tool to help the university manage risk. It appeared to be generic at a very high level and not something used regularly by management teams to monitor risk or drive remediating actions. It was not clear for example, how the consideration of risks to the university and the need for mitigating actions led to the new staff appointments. The actual reason for the appointments was opaque, and as a result it is not very evident that the risk register is operating effectively: how can the university evidence that this was the best response to the precise risk. It is important that items are very specific and easily understood, for example the university has identified AI as a risk, but it was not on the register. It is important that the risk register is easy to understand and interpret what the problems are and measures to address them are clear and practical. The register should be easy to share with other people, be easily understood and be very practical.

Recommendation 2:

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.

The University reported that it has introduced a number of procedures and systems to address this recommendation, such as centralized monitoring of graduate careers since 2021. Reports on the KU graduate career monitoring have been prepared for 20220, 2021 and 2022. Additionally it advised that obtaining graduate feedback on the quality of their learning experience was challenging. This is a well-documented challenge for many universities, but it is an additional or different challenge to that of tracking where graduates go for employment. The reviewers suggest that work on this area could be complemented with work on an Alumni organisation and with the involvement of alumni. As will be

observed in respect of the work on addressing other recommendations there is an over reliance on process or its description rather than the objective of the process itself.

Conclusion:

In summary, it can be said that there the University has taken clear steps to address the recommendations received. Measurable progress has been made, but it is not evident that there a deep understanding of the reasons for the recommendations made or how their implementation can assist the University in its growth. The new action list would benefit from additional training or study visits to see how risk management can be important and helpful and how to populate and use a risk register. The involvement of alumni in establishing how best to interact with graduates may be helpful. It is essential that the University leadership focus on the substance of issues and the core challenges and that the responses are managed systematically, and that procedures are meaningful and not an end in themselves.

2. Evaluation Area: Quality Assurance

The evaluation area Quality Assurance was rated 2 and therefore each recommendation is addressed individually. Each recommendation from the institutional review is listed first, followed by the analysis. An overall conclusion on progress in the area of Quality Assurance is given at the end.

Recommendation 1:

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 reviewed, revised, and updated to include the university's procedures for the assurance of academic quality.

The Progress report refers to updates to processes and process performance indicators. It was also stated that “Through the joint work of the mentioned committee, Office of Studies and University departments, the Study regulations were updated in the autumn of 2024 and specified the Internal Study Quality Assurance System”, and separately, “in autumn 2024, when updating the Study Regulations, there was an opportunity to discuss and define the kind of the Internal Study Quality Assurance System we wanted”. It would be helpful if the university could finalise the discussion and move forward from the point of discussing the type of system desired three years after the Institutional Review, when the area of quality assurance was the area identified in 2021 as needing most work. The *European Standards and Guidelines* are the foundation on which quality assurance processes have to be built and should be at the heart of all efforts to improve the current situation, but their use is not even mentioned once in the entire report. While the 2021 review panel did not advise the University not to use ISO as a quality assurance system, the need to focus on the European Standards and Guidelines (ESG) was clearly indicated. It is very important that the University engage deeply with the concept and model of the ESG and find a way to use it to their benefit. Typically in higher education the appropriateness and applicability of ISO standards to support quality assurance and enhancement

is not perceived and the ESG is believed to be a more useful model. If KU wishes to continue with ISO or an bespoke model, the University should be minded that this will inevitably require clear explanation at a future review, and a failure at that time to effectively incorporate an approach which explicitly aligns with the ESG will be damaging to the institution.

Work to date is very slow and it is not clear that the University understands the value or importance of the work required. While there is strong merit in learning from and building on the Study Programme reviews in 2023, the remaining lack of clear vision on a quality assurance approach is a cause of concern.

Additionally, the University provides some courses in English, and as a consequence it is imperative that the procedures be in clear, understandable English and be published on the website. These are student facing documents – not ‘merely’ ‘internal procedures’, and as such should be accessible.

Recommendation 2:

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.

The University provided detail on the actions taken around the development of the procedures to collate data for the implementation of an annual report. This evidences progress in addressing the recommendation. Nevertheless, the description suggests an over-emphasis on the process itself, without due regard to the actual purpose of the exercise, which is about the improvement of the programmes for learners and society in general. The describe approach does not provide any indication of what the outcomes of the implementation of the process are or might be for the University. There does not appear to be an understanding of the potential impact of effective annual monitoring and reporting for decision-making and enhancing learner experience. While a variety of actions are described and they are appropriate actions, there are no examples of tangible improvements or insights attained. It is suggested that all reporting on process improvement include a focus on the impact of the improvement and the substantive purpose of the process itself.

Additionally, as indicated in respect of recommendation 1, there is no explicit use of, or reference to, the ESG. Not only is it a requirement of European universities to use the ESG, but it is also recognised by most universities as a helpful framework to assist in the strengthening and enhancement of a university. The absence of KU’s engagement with the ESG may undermine the University’s position and capacity for stability and growth.

Recommendation 3:

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 reviewers commend the University on the work undertaken to date on the closing the feedback loop. It is evident that significant work and thought has been completed. The reviewers also support the University in the plan to revise the number and style of survey used. It may be helpful also to collect feedback through the use of focus groups so that there are diverse instruments to learn how students experience their study programmes and the University, thus making the feedback stronger and more reliable. With regard to communicating actions taken in response to feedback from students, additional channels could be established, rather than solely relying on data repositories of various sorts. For example, the Vice Rector for Students may call biannual town halls where information is shared orally and there are opportunities for question-and-answer sessions. This may be a more effective channel than through the Student Council, or at a minimum a complementary approach. Such sessions may also be conducted in a hybrid format (online and in person) thus maximising attendance and engagements.

There is also an opportunity to engage with alumni through the creation or use of a Graduate Advisory Board.

Recommendation 4:

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 reviewers noted the positive engagement of the University with this recommendation, and the various policy steps undertaken and the commitment to provide training to the University community. It is important that this training be for all members of the community - teachers, administrators, researchers, students. The reflection by the University staff on varied challenges in this context, for example how best to support neurodivergent learners, as discussed during the follow-up meeting, is a positive indicator of the openness and approach of the University. The reviewers encourage the University to continue with their learning and engagement with these topics and how best to make the University a safe, welcoming and accessible learning environment.

Recommendation 5:

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.

The University reported a variety of completed actions in response to this recommendation, for example: the 'One Stop Shop' principle has been implemented, the English version of the University's website has been reviewed and optimized, Student Collaboration Space, open 24/7, was introduced on the University campus. The reviewers are delighted to hear that the University has found this to be a

positive measure and that it has improved not only the student experience, but also staff communications.

The reviewers commend the University on their work to date and encourage the respective teams to share their good practices with peer in other institutions or take the opportunity to publish their case story if this is possible, locally or in relevant institutional research journals.

Conclusion:

Reflecting on the actions taken by the university to date, actions have been taken in respect of all recommendations, though with different levels of attention and impact to date.

A theme apparent to the reviewers is that in general there is an over-emphasis on describing procedural documentation, without the complementary examples of the positive impact of the implementation of those procedures, or where they have not yet been implemented clear statements that indicate the University is clear on why the procedures are important. The focus on documentation, which is important, but not when divorced from the impact of its implementation, can perhaps be explained by the fact that the institution has had an ISO-based approach. However, the institution should consider opening up to a quality culture that is more ESG-oriented. Perhaps positive learnings from the implementation of the 'one-stop-shop' could be used to map backwards to a policy principle. For example, could the positive impact of the "one-stop-shop" be considered by looking at the ESG 1.6 Learning Resources and Student Support – what is the relationship between the action and the 'standard'; what are the positive impacts of the action; what procedure 'tools' complement or are part of the 'one-stop-shop' initiative? How might the other nine standards be operationalised and what procedural elements are required? The work on diversity and inclusion may also be a good way to see how ESG standards can be made real and impactful for an organisation. It is evident that the University needs to accelerate its understanding and approach to quality assurance. The institution is already half-way to its next review and too little work has been completed on the quality assurance framework, and the way it is discussed in the update report suggests that it is not yet well understood across the institution as a whole.

3. Evaluation Area: Studies and Research (Artistic Activity)

The evaluation area Studies and Research was rated 3. Each recommendation from the institutional review is listed first, followed by the analysis. An overall conclusion on progress in the area Studies and Research is given at the end.

Recommendation 1:

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.

The actions reported by the University are commendable. Good work is being undertaken.

The introduction of a system of ‘curators’ – more typically known as mentors in English-medium institutions – is a very positive step. The use of both peer curators and staff-teacher curators is a good model. It is important that there is effective training in place for these groups and that the respective roles and scope of responsibility is well understood. Additionally, the University may wish to consider training for on campus security/cleaning/ancillary support staff. Some institutions have identified these staff groupings as the cohort which may inadvertently experience students with challenges or particular needs or situations, or be a cohort to whom a student may randomly disclose a challenge or request for help. They can be the silent/invisible campus guardians.

It is noted that there is an overall target of a reduced drop-out rate. It would be helpful if the University had specific targets by programme or study field as typically there are different patterns in different disciplines and this indicates that in addition to general supports, targeted supports are also needed. The meetings with students and the use of curator feedback should assist in understanding this.

Recommendation 2:

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.

The University has stated that it uses the ePovas project for the monitoring of agreements with partners, but it is not clear what data is collected or what exactly is done with it. Key performance indicators (KPIs) from the 2023 plan are referred to. One appears to be to increase the volume of commercialisation of knowledge and technology transfer and it has led to the establishment of a particular entrepreneurial model to achieve this. It is not clear if there is a numerical target for this increased commercialisation, nor what data is being collected to monitor and evidence its achievement. It is important that the strengths of the institution in this area are continued and supported through the assignment of clear, straightforward key performance indicators and that a model to simply and transparently monitor and report on them be established. Precision and simplicity are approaches that should be prioritised. It is important that the University works to implement clear, practical actions to achieve practical KPIs.

Conclusion

The University is clearly committed to its students and its local environment which is commendable. There remains however a degree of vagueness, and a lack of both comprehensiveness and precision in the approach to addressing the recommendations from the Institutional review. The approach to drop out is a good example of the challenge facing the institution. Good measures are being undertaken to address dropout, but at the same time there is an absence of clarity about how they may be targeted appropriately for different cohorts. At all times the institution should ask itself how to use the recommendations made to make the University better for its students and its local community.

4. Evaluation Area: Impact on Regional and National Development

The evaluation area Impact on Regional and National Development was rated 4 and therefore some recommendations are addressed more generally. Each recommendation from the institutional review is listed first, followed by the analysis. An overall conclusion on progress in the area of management is given at the end.

Recommendation 1:

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.

The reviewers support the University's work on research into and the establishment of microcredentials. Considerable work is being undertaken at a pan European level on this type of learning and the University may be able to leverage both models of short programme design and accreditation as well as potential industry funding. The challenges of securing public or private funding is acknowledged.

It is suggested that work with alumni and the development of a Graduate Advisory Board as mentioned earlier may complement the work done with employers and regional bodies and may be a useful way of engaging with all of the stakeholder groups. Micro credentials are a very significant focus currently at the EU level, and the university might prepare an offering of short workshops, seminars, lectures (1-3 ECTS), which could make a certain number of ECTS available to the participants which could be used in further formal education. These micro credentials could be offered to individuals, companies and also to various professional, craft and trade chambers, associations, etc.

Given the strengths that the University has in this area the University should continue to strengthen its stakeholder engagement and use multi-channel communications, but do so systematically and thoughtfully to illustrate its strategic and intentional approach to regional development.

Conclusions

Overall the reviewers support the work being undertaken, but urge the University to not be complacent about any strengths in this area and maintains its strong links with regional stakeholders.

General Commentary and Reflections

Klaipeda University has made considerable strides in addressing the recommendations from its institutional review, though several areas require further development. Its management efforts show progress, yet lack a deeper understanding of the recommendations' underlying rationale and their potential to drive growth. This could be improved with targeted training, more effective risk management, and alumni involvement to strengthen graduate engagement. Quality assurance actions are underway, but there is an over-reliance on documenting procedures without demonstrating their impact. The institution would benefit from adopting a quality culture rooted in ESG principles, drawing on successful initiatives like the "one-stop-shop" as models for aligning policy and practice. It is imperative that the approach to quality assurance be accelerated and the ESG be used. While measures

to address dropout rates are commendable, a more precise and tailored approach to different student cohorts is needed. Regionally, the University continues to maintain strong stakeholder relationships, but it must remain vigilant, continuously reinforcing and expanding these connections. Overall, while progress is evident, a more integrated and impact-focused approach is necessary to ensure sustained improvement and long-term success.