SKVC

CENTRE FOR QUALITY ASSESSMENT IN HIGHER EDUCATION

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EVALUATION REPORT

STUDY FIELD of PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION

at Klaipėda University

Expert panel:

1. **Dr. Christine Leitner (panel chairperson),** *academic;*

2. **Dr. Egert Juuse,** *academic;*

3. **Assoc. Prof. Dr. Daniel Klimovský,** *academic;*

4. **Prof. Dr. Benedikt Speer,** *academic;*

5. **Ms. Ieva Lazarevičiūtė,** *representative of social partners;*

6. **Ms. Ugnė Bičkauskaitė,** *students' representative.*

Evaluation coordinator – *Dr. Domantas Markevičius*

Vilnius
2022

Study Field Data

Title of the study programme	*Public administration*	*Regional Governance*
State code	6121LX061	6211LX080
Type of studies	University studies	University studies
Cycle of studies	First cycle	Second cycle
Mode of study and duration (in years)	Full-time (3 years), part-time (4,5 years)	Part-time (2 years)
Credit volume	180	90
Qualification degree and (or) professional qualification	Bachelor of Business and Public Administration	Master of Business and Public Administration
Language of instruction	Lithuanian	Lithuanian
Minimum education required	Secondary education	University Bachelor qualification degree or Professional Bachelor qualification degree
Registration date of the study programme	06/03/2004	13/05/2013

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I. INTRODUCTION

1.1. BACKGROUND OF THE EVALUATION PROCESS

The evaluation of study fields is based on the Methodology of External Evaluation of Study Fields approved by the Director of the Centre for Quality Assessment in Higher Education (hereafter – SKVC) 31 December 2019 Order No. V-149.

The evaluation is intended to help higher education institutions to constantly improve their study process and to inform the public about the quality of studies.

The evaluation process consists of the main following stages: *1) self-evaluation and self-evaluation report (SER) prepared by Higher Education Institution (HEI); 2) site visit of the expert panel to the HEI; 3) production of the external evaluation report (EER) by the expert panel and its publication; 4) follow-up activities.*

On the basis of this external evaluation report of the study field SKVC takes a decision to accredit study field either for 7 years or for 3 years. If the field evaluation is negative then the study field is not accredited.

The study field and cycle are **accredited for 7 years** if all evaluation areas are evaluated as exceptional (5 points), very good (4 points) or good (3 points).

The study field and cycle are **accredited for 3 years** if one of the evaluation areas is evaluated as satisfactory (2 points).

The study field and cycle are **not accredited** if at least one of evaluation areas is evaluated as unsatisfactory (1 point).

1.2. EXPERT PANEL

The expert panel was assigned according to the Experts Selection Procedure as approved by the Director of Centre for Quality Assessment in Higher Education on 31 December 2019 Order No. V-149. The site visit to the HEI was conducted by the panel online on *13 May, 2022.*

Dr. Christine Leitner (panel chairperson), Senior Advisor, Centre for Economics and Public Administration (London, UK), and Senior Policy Advisor, Federal Ministry for Digital and Economic Affairs, Austria;

Dr. Egert Juuse, Research Fellow, Ragnar Nurkse Department of Innovation and Governance, School of Business and Governance, Tallinn University of Technology, Estonia;

Assoc. Prof. Dr. Daniel Klimovský, Department of Political Science, Faculty of Philosophy, Comenius University in Bratislava, Slovakia;

Prof. Dr. Benedikt Speer, Berlin School of Economics and Law, Germany;

Dr. Ieva Lazarevičiūtė (social partner), independent expert, Lithuania;

Ms. Ugnė Bičkauskaitė (student representative), 3rd year student of Political Science at Vilnius University, Lithuania.

1.3. GENERAL INFORMATION

The documentation submitted by the HEI follows the outline recommended by SKVC. Along with the self-evaluation report and annexes, the following additional documents have been provided by the HEI before, during and/or after the site visit:

No.	Name of the document
1.	Klaipėda University Development Strategy 2021-2030
2.	Action Plan for Optimization of Klaipėda University Activity for 2018-2019
3.	Klaipėda University Study Regulations (2018)
4.	Klaipėda University Code of Academic Ethics (2019)
5.	Klaipėda University Communication Plan 2021-2022
6.	Klaipėda University Brand Name Strategy
7.	Public Administration field teachers' publications list 2020
8.	List of Public Administration and Regional Governance study programme defence committees 2019-2021
9.	Numbers of students enrolled to Public Administration and Regional Governance study programmes and drop-outs 2018-2021
10.	Public Administration field international research net plan

1.4. BACKGROUND OF PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION FIELD STUDIES AT KLAIPĖDA UNIVERSITY

Klaipėda University (hereafter – KU) was founded in 1991 as a public higher education institution. The University is managed by the Rector, three Vice-Rectors (for Studies, Science and Innovation, and Infrastructure and Development), the Council (nine members), and the Senate (35 members, including seven students).

Currently KU has three faculties: (1) the Faculty of Social Sciences and Humanities, (2) the Faculty of Marine Technology and Natural Sciences, and (3) the Faculty of Health Sciences, and two research institutes: (1) the Institute of Baltic Region History and Archaeology, and (2) the Marine Research Institute. The Faculties include 17 departments, eight centres for research and studies, two museums, and over 60 laboratories. KU administration consists of the following divisions: Office of Studies, Office of Science and Innovation, Internal Audit Service, Organisation Service Office, Department of Communication and Marketing, Department of Legal Affairs and Procurement, Coordinator of Disabled People Affairs, Department of Strategic Development and Economics, and Department of Finance and Accounting. In 2021, 10 Bachelor's and 14 Master's degree study programmes and a professional pedagogy study programme were implemented (25 study programmes in total). Studies take place full-time (based on full-time and distance session-based education timetables) and part-time. In addition, the Faculty offers six Bachelor's degree short-cycle study programmes, offered to the graduates of colleges of higher education or to the graduates of higher education institutions of the study programmes of other areas or fields of study.

The Department of Public Administration and Political Sciences was established in 2018 through the merger of the Departments of Public Administration and Social Geography and Political Sciences and Communication (KU Senate Resolution No. 11-72 of 7 June 2018). Currently, the Department offers two undergraduate study programmes (Public Administration, Political Sciences) and three postgraduate study programmes (Regional Administration, National Security, and European Studies). In addition, there are third cycles of studies for social sciences (Political Sciences).

The study field Public Administration and related programmes are following trends and developments in public administration which provide the basis for new areas for problem-based research (comparative public administration research, performance measurement, e-government, networked administration, the European Union institutions and structures, co-production of citizens in the provision of public services, personalization of public services, evaluation of public services, business regulation, sustainable development of organisations, risk management, etc.).

The Faculty cooperates with a number of national, European and international research and HEIs. There are cooperation agreements with over 60 educational and research institutions (Erasmus+ academic, administrative exchange opportunities; cooperation within the framework of COST programme, etc.). Faculty members also actively cooperate with social partners in carrying out research and teaching activities.

The last external evaluation of the Public Administration field programmes took place in 2014 (Public Administration, first cycle) and 2016 (Regional Governance, second cycle). Both study programmes were evaluated positively and were accredited for a maximum period of 6 years.

II. GENERAL ASSESSMENT

Public Administration study field and *first cycle* at Klaipėda University is given **positive** evaluation.

Study field and cycle assessment in points by evaluation areas

No.	Evaluation Area	Evaluation of an Area in points*
1.	Intended and achieved learning outcomes and curriculum	3
2.	Links between science (art) and studies	3
3.	Student admission and support	3
4.	Teaching and learning, student performance and graduate employment	3
5.	Teaching staff	3
6.	Learning facilities and resources	3
7.	Study quality management and public information	3
	Total:	**21**

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

Public Administration study field and *second cycle* at Klaipėda University is given **positive** evaluation.

Study field and cycle assessment in points by evaluation areas

No.	Evaluation Area	Evaluation of an Area in points*
1.	Intended and achieved learning outcomes and curriculum	3
2.	Links between science (art) and studies	3
3.	Student admission and support	3
4.	Teaching and learning, student performance and graduate employment	3
5.	Teaching staff	3
6.	Learning facilities and resources	3
7.	Study quality management and public information	3
	Total:	**21**

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

III. STUDY FIELD ANALYSIS

3.1. INTENDED AND ACHIEVED LEARNING OUTCOMES AND CURRICULUM

Study aims, outcomes and content shall be assessed in accordance with the following indicators:

3.1.1. Evaluation of the conformity of the aims and outcomes of the field and cycle study programmes to the needs of the society and/or the labour market

KU's first cycle *Public Administration* programme focuses on regional governance. Only one other Lithuanian HEI offers a study programme in the same (or similar) field. The University indicates that its programme responds to the demand for well-trained public administration professionals related to the State Progress Strategy "Lithuania 2030" which emphasises the importance of smart governance. Furthermore the University reports that the programme is structured to respond to both short- and medium-term public sector labour demands identified by the Department of Civil Service as well as long-term forecasts reported by the Strata Centre for Strategic Analysis of the Government. The aim of the programme is to prepare professionals of public administration who are able to analyse, think critically, solve problems and make evidence-based management decisions, collaborate with citizens and stakeholders by empowering them to participate in public governance, and who understand and recognise ethical principles and the public interest.

KU's second cycle *Regional Governance* programme strives to provide its graduates with the competences of regional governance researchers, experts and public administration professionals for national, macro-regional and international levels. The programme aims to enable professionals to understand the theory and practice of regional governance, to analyse and evaluate in depth information related to regional governance, and to deal with public policy issues related to the regions in a sustainable, effective and democratic manner. The aims of the study programmes are further detailed by the expected learning outcomes.

Considering the above mentioned facts, the expert panel is convinced that the aims and outcomes of the study field programmes are fully aligned with the needs of society at large and, more specifically, the Lithuanian labour market. The *Regional Governance* second cycle study programme, in particular, sets KU apart from the remaining PA programmes in the country as only one other university offers a similarly focused programme.

3.1.2. Evaluation of the conformity of the field and cycle study programme aims and outcomes with the mission, objectives of activities and strategy of the HEI

While the University Statutes do not refer explicitly to public administration and/or specific educational needs for the public sector in the region, the University Action Plan refers to KU as a 'catalyst' for sustainable social and economic progress in the region (see strategic plan, "Sustainable development of Western Lithuania and the Klaipėda City"), the "creation of public welfare" and the "development of creative personalities". These objectives are reflected in the design of both study programmes and have been echoed by representatives of social partners, graduates and students during the site-visit. In the discussions, KU Management also

emphasised the links to the strategic goals of the plans for the Klaipėda Region 2021-2030, which will require a skilled public administration workforce as a prerequisite for effective implementation. According to the additional information obtained during the site-visit, particular emphasis is placed on the specific needs of the local and regional public administration, including the (local) non-for-profit sector for both research and practice-related courses and assignments.

In this context, however, the high drop-out rates might be an indication for a certain degree of mismatch between the University's high-level strategic objectives and the programme aims and outcomes on the one hand, and, on the other hand, the actual needs of practice and the expectations of/opportunities for students. In the light of recent statistics for the Klaipeda Region (more than 500 job vacancies in the public sector), reinforced communication and marketing of the programmes will be required to attract more students. As discussed during the site visit, KU is aware of this challenge and is planning to reinforce their communication and marketing strategies.

Taking the above into account, overall, the expert panel concludes that the study field and the aims and outcomes of the study programmes for both cycles are aligned with the mission and strategic objectives of KU.

3.1.3. Evaluation of the compliance of the field and cycle study programme with legal requirements

Table No. 1. Study Programme's ***Public Administration*** compliance to general requirements for *first cycle study programmes*

Criteria	Legal requirements	In the Programme
Scope of the programme in ECTS	180, 210 or 240 ECTS	180
ECTS for the study field	No less than 120 ECTS	153
ECTS for studies specified by University or optional studies	No more than 120 ECTS	27
ECTS for internship	No less than 15 ECTS	15
ECTS for final thesis (project)	No less than 15 ECTS	18
Contact hours	No less than 20 % of learning	23.2%
Individual learning	No less than 30 % of learning	73.8%

Table No. 2. Study Programmes' ***Regional Governance*** compliance to general requirements for *second cycle study programmes*

Criteria	Legal requirements	In the Programme

Scope of the programme in ECTS	90 or 120 ECTS	90
ECTS for the study field	No less than 60 ECTS	90 (with thesis)
ECTS for studies specified by University or optional studies	No more than 30 ECTS	6
ECTS for final thesis (project)	No less than 30 ECTS	30
Contact hours	No less than 10 % of learning	20.2%
Individual learning	No less than 50 % of learning	79.8%

The study programmes of both study cycles meet the legal requirements and provisions stipulated in various legal acts of Lithuania. The learning outcomes of the programmes meet the requirements set out in the "Descriptor of the study Field of Public Administration" and the volume of all study subjects (except for the Bachelor's thesis and internship) is either 3 ECTS (for General University Studies) or 6 ECTS (study field courses), which ensures that a student's workload is evenly distributed throughout the programme and between single courses (1 ECTS equals to ca 26 hours of work). Both study programmes *Public Administration* and *Regional Governance* are fully sufficient in scope to achieve the expected degree outcomes. As per descriptor, the only shortcoming identified is the inconsistency in using social partners and academic staff from other higher education institutions in the thesis defence committees.

3.1.4. Evaluation of compatibility of aims, learning outcomes, teaching/learning and assessment methods of the field and cycle study programmes

The aims of the study programme *Public Administration* are ambitious and encompassing given the fact that it is a first cycle study programme. They are translated into five groups of a total of 21 expected learning outcomes (categories: Knowledge and its application; Ability to conduct research; Special abilities; Social abilities; Personal abilities) which are comprehensible and in line with the type of study programme. The links between the expected learning outcomes and the teaching/learning and assessment methods are specified in Table 3 below. Considering the necessarily comprehensive character of learning outcomes and the equally necessary flexibility in choosing corresponding methods of teaching, learning and assessing, they seem reasonably distributed and connected to each other.

Regional Governance as a second cycle study programme aims more specifically at the education and development of specialists in regional administration and affairs. The expected learning outcomes are grouped in the same five categories as for the study programme *Public Administration* (see above), but the number of expected learning outcomes – as should be expected for a second cycle study programme – is slightly higher (27 instead of 21). Apart from the fact that there is a normal amount of overlap between the expected learning outcomes of the two programmes, it is however striking that despite the more focused aims of

the *Regional Governance* study programme the corresponding learning outcomes do not explicitly refer to regionality at all. The links between the expected learning outcomes and the teaching/learning and assessment methods are specified in Table 4. In some cases (e.g. study subject Development of the Regions with 21 learning outcomes) the high number of expected learning outcomes raises doubts how these links can be effectively ensured and verified in practice. For both programmes, the application and constant adaptation of the overall system of teaching, learning and assessment relies very much on the individual lecturers and their interactions, giving the head of the department – as was understood during the online-site visit – a central role in the fine-tuning and balancing.

3.1.5. Evaluation of the totality of the field and cycle study programme subjects/modules, which ensures consistent development of competences of students

In accordance with the respective aims and expected learning outcomes, the modules/subjects of both study programmes as well as their sequencing are comprehensible and follow a logical order. Generally, the necessity of „General university study subjects" (e.g. philosophy) might be discussed for a first cycle study programme such as Public Administration, but this is rather an issue to be considered for KU on the whole. More problematic seems the fact that in both programmes important study subjects have been labelled as „Optional subjects" (for first cycle programme Public Administration, e.g. „Quality Management in Public Administration"; „Comparative Public Administration"; and for second cycle Regional Governance, e.g. „Innovation Leadership in the Organisation" and - especially striking in the programme context - „EU Regional Policy"). The common division between (compulsory) „Subjects of Study Field" and „Optional subjects" is, however, not per se a problem which has to be discussed under this rubric, but it could well become one in practice, when low student numbers result in the de facto non-eligibility of certain subjects.

3.1.6. Evaluation of opportunities for students to personalise the structure of field study programmes according to their personal learning objectives and intended learning outcomes

The University provides various avenues for the personalisation of studies (e.g. the selection of individual study plans, i.e. a list of compulsory, optional and free-choice course units; the possibility of changing the timing of the examination session/defence of the final thesis, either by postponing it or by extending it; the change of subjects/credits to be studied; the participation in exchange programmes; and/or the completion of an internship or practice that is not provided in the plan of studies). In addition, the topics for course works and final theses can be adapted/chosen by students. That said, the problem is that not all optional courses can be selected by students, as the selection of optional courses is group-determined and hence, only few of them are actually offered. Also, there is low awareness among students about the optional courses offered by other faculties, even though it is possible to select optional courses from other faculties. Other than that, in summary, KU offers opportunities for students to personalise the structure of public administration programmes according to their personal learning objectives and intended learning outcomes.

3.1.7. Evaluation of compliance of final theses with the field and cycle requirements

The principles for the preparation, committee formation and defence of final theses are clearly defined for both programmes. In accordance with the more general character of the first cycle study programme *Public Administration,* the subjects of the respective final theses (as shown in the corresponding annex of the SER) are relatively diverse. They cover a wide range of themes that are relevant for the PA study field, albeit with an almost exclusive focus on Lithuanian and specific regionally-oriented topics. As is to be expected, the regional focus is even more emphasised in the master theses of the second cycle study programme Regional Governance (as shown in the corresponding annex of the SER). From their orientation and scope, the reviewed final theses seem to be compliant with the study field and cycle requirements. KU could also provide proof that the „four-eyes-principle" regarding the supervising and reviewing of bachelor theses is applied. All concerned parties, and notably also students and alumni, expressed their general satisfaction with the system and its application in practice.

Strengths and weaknesses of this evaluation area:

(1) Strengths:

1. The relevant (strategic) 'positioning' of the Regional Governance study programme, i.e. the programme is not very common in Lithuania, and offers a certain competitive advantage.

2. In this context, it is noteworthy that KU strategy and study programmes in both cycles are closely linked to regional strategies and development plans.

3. Moreover, the aims and outcomes of the study programmes are aligned with the needs of the society at large and, more specifically, the Lithuanian labour market.

4. KU offers various opportunities to personalise studies, although the offering of optional courses is not based on individual choice (see Weaknesses below).

(2) Weaknesses:

1. The strategic objectives are not really reflected in concrete outcomes of the study programmes in terms of numbers of graduates. This challenge needs to be addressed more proactively in response to the evident demands of public services in the region (e.g. by reinforcing communication and marketing activities and more formalised agreements with social partners).

2. The high number of expected learning outcomes for some study subjects seems unrealistic if a targeted assessment of the achievement of all corresponding objectives is to be ensured.

3. Optional courses are strongly group-determined, and therefore their offer is limited and, in combination with a lower number of students, there is a risk that it does not correspond to the fragmented demand and to personal preferences of students. Moreover, some of the core study subjects have been grouped under the optional

courses such as Comparative Public Administration in the first cycle studies and Regional EU Policy in the second cycle studies.

4. The inconsistency in the representation of social partners and academics of other HEIs in thesis defence committees does not fully comply with the legal requirements.

5. The overall system in terms of compatibility of aims, learning outcomes, teaching/learning and assessment methods seems to be driven by top-down decision making focused on the central role of the department head.

3.2. LINKS BETWEEN SCIENCE (ART) AND STUDIES

Links between science (art) and study activities shall be assessed in accordance with the following indicators:

3.2.1. Evaluation of the sufficiency of the science (applied science, art) activities implemented by the HEI for the field of research (art) related to the field of study

Research conducted by KU teaching staff is regionally embedded thanks to the focus on the Baltic Sea Region. Some recent publications (a few journal articles and chapters in collective volumes) written or co-written by KU teachers are of very good quality and were published by international publishers like Taylor & Francis and Palgrave Macmillan, but many of them were not published in high-level international journals (e.g., articles with a regional focus were published in journals like Journal of Baltic Studies, Baltic Region, Regional Formation and Development Studies, Baltic Journal of Modern Computing etc.). From this perspective, achieving international visibility of KU research is a challenge. On the other hand, if one looks at the relation/s between research activities and the contents of the study programmes, one can recognise clear linkages. More precisely, during the evaluation period, teachers have focused their research on issues related to the study field, whereby the development of the study programmes has determined the research directions.

One of the strengths identified by the expert panel are the strategic roots of the research and the study programmes: Teachers focus the contents of both study programmes and research on one of KU's overall strategic directions, namely "Society and Cultures on the Baltic Coast". This also ensures the linkages between research and study programmes. As a consequence, and as described in the SER, the demand for research often comes from regional or local partners of KU.

One of the most serious risks related to the links between research and study activities is the fact that, according to the information from the SER, the main research output record consists of publications which were (co-)written just by a few researchers in the field of public administration, namely J. Dvorak, V. Burkšienė, V. Burbulytė-Tsiskarishvili, and M. Dūda. This means that (1) KU significantly depends on the research activities of a fairly low number of teachers which makes it less competitive in comparison with other HEIs in the field of research results; (2) the scope and focus of research at KU in the field of public administration is limited due to capacity limits of those leading persons; (3) these staff work under a certain pressure, which poses a threat to sustainability of research activities from a longer-term

perspective. On this matter, KU should explore the systematic use of more innovative (or even unconventional) incentive mechanisms.

Overall, and compared with the previous evaluation period, the information provided in the SER for the current period as well as the information collected during the site visit confirm that progress has been made in terms of the quality of research and its compliance with the contents of the study programmes. However, there are still a few shortcomings which need to be addressed adequately, for example, the research is not very visible internationally, and the involvement of students in research-related activities is lower than desired.

3.2.2. Evaluation of the link between the content of studies and the latest developments in science, art and technology

KU staff has implemented a number of research and dissemination projects, the results of which have been used in undergraduate and graduate studies. The involvement of the teaching staff in PhD studies contributes to the take up of the latest developments in public administration and political science for dissemination in the study courses. KU has also organised various seminars and conferences with the attendance of both BA and MA students on highly topical subject matters such as participatory budgeting and e-governance. Study materials such as books and databases used in the courses are updated every half a year by ordering books and databases to the library. Also, government strategies and official documents are updated and included in teaching materials.

Overall, the expert panel concluded that the study programmes are closely linked to both practice (local level, though) and theory in the field of public administration. Thus, the content of the studies is linked with the latest developments in public administration discipline and practice.

3.2.3. Evaluation of conditions for students to get involved in scientific (applied science, art) activities consistent with their study cycle

In spite of the declared efforts KU and its teachers in the study field to make research much more attractive for students in both study programmes, it seems that those efforts have not yet led to the desired outcomes and most of the students have not been involved during the evaluation period. At this point, however, it is important to point out that both KU and its teachers have tried to facilitate suitable conditions for students (these conditions can be considered common in the Lithuanian higher education system). Therefore, KU should increase their efforts to analyse the reasons for their students' low interest in participating in research activities. Despite the existence of numerous options which facilitate regular students' contact with research during their study, a decreasing trend in students' motivation to be actively involved in research has been noted. As stated in the SER, concerning the annual student conference organised at KU, whilst in 2017 and 2018 there were at least ten active student participants, there were no participants from the two study programmes in 2019 and 2020.

There is a valuable tradition of partnership between KU and the Klaipėda City Municipality. First of all, this public authority uses its right to propose its own themes for the final theses

each year. Representatives of the authority can act as co-supervisors or members of the defence committees. But the involvement of the authority goes beyond common practice, offering the "Klaipėda City Municipality Prize", which includes prize money, for the best theses. Although the prize money can be seen as a financial motivation for the most engaged students, it is also necessary to highlight the intangible appreciation of students' efforts.

One of the mentioned reasons for students' behaviour is their high professional workload, since many of them are employed, trying to combine their studies with their jobs. This problem has two dimensions at least. The decreasing number of students interested in the study programmes has led KU to create a student-friendly environment to the extent that it is possible. However, if the workload of students due to their jobs is simply too high, they have no free capacities to invest proper time and energy in study tasks. And if this happens, it is against the rationale of any high-level-quality education.

Taking all the above-mentioned aspects into account, KU has to cope with multi-dimensional problems, and the low involvement of students in research activities seems to be just the tip of the iceberg. It will be necessary to deal with the root causes of these problems and/or issues.

Strengths and weaknesses of this evaluation area:

(1) Strengths:

1. The research focus and content of the study programme are aligned with KU's strategic goals.

2. The study programmes are closely linked to regional and national and developments and international trends in the field of Public Administration and hence, there is a reliance on up-to-date documentation (in addition to literature) in the study process.

(2) Weaknesses:

1. Research is very much dependent on the performance of a few teachers. From this perspective it is limited and there is a risk for sustainability in the longer-term.

2. Despite declared efforts of KU and its teachers to create favourable conditions and incentives for student participation in research activities, students are only involved to a limited extent. The problem seems to be multi-dimensional and most likely linked to insufficient motivation rather than to the said conditions and incentives.

3.3. STUDENT ADMISSION AND SUPPORT

Student admission and support shall be evaluated according to the following indicators:

3.3.1. Evaluation of the suitability and publicity of student selection and admission criteria and process

The admission process at KU is like in other Lithuanian universities or colleges. The first cycle studies (Bachelor studies) in Lithuania are organised under a national application system

organised and coordinated by the Association of Lithuanian Higher Education Institutions for the organisation of the General Admission (LAMA BPO). While the second cycle (Master's studies) is organised by the University in its own application system. The applicants for the first cycle studies can get state-funded study places but need to fulfil the concrete requirements that are publicly available on the LAMA BPO internet page. Second cycle programme applicants can also apply for the state-funded study places, the requirements can be found on the KU webpage.

The number of applicants to the Public Administration first cycle full-time studies in the last three years is similar - over 40 students annually. However, in the last two years, a drop in the score to enter this programme has been noted. The number of students enrolled in Public Administration first cycle part-time studies was significantly lower last year (2019 - 21 students, 2020 - 25 students, 2021 - 15 students). However, in recent years, the lowest entry score with which the applicants enter this programme has increased. In the Regional Governance second cycle studies, the number of entrants has decreased every year (from 53 entrants in 2019 to 41 in 2021).

It is worth noting that in the last two years, no foreign students were admitted to the Regional Governance programme, although the interest in the programme last year (2021) was the highest in two years.

Overall, admission to first cycle and second cycle studies is carried out efficiently in accordance with the established procedure. All information about admission can be found on the KU webpage in both languages, Lithuanian and English. However, one of the main problems restricting the entry of international students to Lithuanian higher education institutions is the difficulty of obtaining a visa. Addressing this issue should be a priority if KU wants to attract more international students.

3.3.2. Evaluation of the procedure of recognition of foreign qualifications, partial studies and prior non-formal and informal learning and its application

The recognition of qualifications and partial studies acquired abroad as well as of previous non-formal and informal learning is carried out in accordance with the national legislation and the applicable regulatory documents:

- The results of studies of a person who has studied at another HEI or at a foreign HEI under a partial study agreement, an agreement between HEIs or between a HEI and a foreign HEI are credited by applying the European Credit Transfer System (ECTS).

- Part-time courses are recognised and transferred to the student's study plan in the KU Academic Information System, and to the Diploma Supplement at the end of the studies. The same procedure for crediting credits applies to traineeships abroad.

- The results of studies of a person who has studied or is studying at the same at another higher education institution or at a foreign higher education institution on the basis of an uncoordinated content of studies is credited in accordance with the procedure established by the KU Senate and in line with the above mentioned regulations.

Considering the details presented in the SER and additional information submitted, the expert panel concludes that the application of the procedures for the recognition of partial studies and prior non-formal and informal learning is adequate, which is supported by the increasing number of students using this option. The applicability of the procedures for the recognition of foreign qualifications was not assessed as according to the information provided by KU, in 2020 and 2021 there were no students studying in foreign HEIs under partial study agreements.

3.3.3. Evaluation of conditions for ensuring academic mobility of students

KU has developed an academic mobility pathway for students and teachers through the Erasmus+ and EU Conexus programmes, and bilateral cooperation agreements with foreign Universities and Institutions. The selection for the Erasmus+ mobility programs is carried out twice a year. Part of the information can be found on the KU webpage. Furthermore, students who were selected for the Erasmus+ mobility programme are asked to share their experiences and give advice to candidates. The expert panel noted that students who are not in state-funded study places are more willing to apply for mobility programmes than those who are in state-funded study places. Students are afraid to lose their state-funded study places if they apply for the mobility programmes (cf. SER para. 82). Also, in the SER document, it is shown that for the past three years KU has not received any students from foreign institutions.

Although KU has well-established links with foreign institutions, the numbers show a somewhat different picture. During the last three years, two students of the Public Administration programme went abroad for practice, but none for studies. In the Regional Governance programme in 2019, two students had gone to study abroad, but no one had an internship abroad. During the site-visit it was mentioned that students would rather choose online mobility than a physical one. This idea could be further explored within the University bodies.

More information about mobility programmes on the KU webpage would be useful, since there seems to be a lack of clarity about the requirements for the application. In the site-visit, students in general confirmed to be aware about the Erasmus+ mobility, but concrete application steps remained unclear in their view. The KU webpage information about mobility programmes should be provided in English as well. This way foreign students too could learn more about the University and at the same time be informed about the concrete steps for the necessary paperwork.

3.3.4. Assessment of the suitability, adequacy and effectiveness of the academic, financial, social, psychological and personal support provided to the students of the field

KU provides financial, psychological, and personal support for students. KU has an academic advisor that students can contact for personal questions related to career consultation and academic information. Contacts can be found on the University webpage. Students at the site-visit were aware of this service but none (of those participating in the meeting with the panel) had actually used it.The University also offers free psychological consultations. Currently, one

psychologist is working for the entire university. The contacts for the University psychologist consultation can be found on the University webpage, together with other contacts of institutions (clinics) that provide free consultations for students.

At KU, students are guaranteed access to social scholarships and reduced tuition fees. Students can get scholarships for achievements for research, sports and/or arts. If the student faces serious problems related to illness or other personal reasons, the University allows him/her to set up an individual study plan that would allow for a decrease in the workload per semester.

The expert panel noted that the University community is trying to build a strong inner link. Still, it seems that there is a lack of clarity on who is responsible for concrete consultation topics. This was commented on in the meeting with students during the site-visit. KU might discuss further institutionalisation of student advisory services, i.e. to define and inform more clearly which office is responsible for which type of consultation. This would also allow to balance and stabilise the workload among University employees providing different types of services.

3.3.5 Evaluation of the sufficiency of study information and student counselling

At the beginning of the semester, during the first lecture, teachers present the course unit syllabus, laying down the main topics and their content, independent works tasks, main literature, deadlines for the assessments, and final exam. If the students would like to make changes, the teachers are open to new ideas and changes regarding the tasks and assessment methods. Additionally, the teachers are available for private student consultations. The consultation hours are available on the University webpage.

At the end of each semester, students have the possibility to fill in anonymous surveys regarding the whole semester and their teachers. During the mid-semester, teachers make sure that students provide feedback so that it would be implemented during the second half of the semester.

First-year students are supported during one year by two University mentors, a teacher and a student from higher courses with more experience at the University. The rationale behind this is, one the one hand, to allow new students to find answers to their questions more quickly, and, on the other hand, to prevent dropout due to potential failure to integrate into the University's social environment.

Strengths and weaknesses of this evaluation area:

(1) Strengths:

1. KU has established an impressive number of connections with foreign institutions for the academic mobility of students and teachers.

2. The recognition system for prior non-formal and informal learning, including the development of a convenient registration system for applicants.

3. The two-mentor system for first-year students facilitates the integration and helps to prevent student dropout.

(2) Weaknesses:

1. Student mobility is very low, students are afraid/unwilling to go abroad for an exchange. The University has also not had any foreign full-time students for the past three years.

2. There is a lack of information about requirements and processes for application for mobility on the University website.

3. Further institutionalisation of student advisory services might be needed, i.e. to define and inform more clearly which office is responsible for which type of consultation. This would also allow to balance the workload among University employees providing different types of services.

3.4. TEACHING AND LEARNING, STUDENT PERFORMANCE AND GRADUATE EMPLOYMENT

Studying, student performance and graduate employment shall be evaluated according to the following indicators:

3.4.1. Evaluation of the teaching and learning process that enables to take into account the needs of the students and enable them to achieve the intended learning outcomes

Both at the systemic (Academic Information System/ AIS) as well as the individual course level the relevant information about the teaching and learning process and its requirements is provided for the students. In addition, information on various aspects related to studies is disseminated via social media platforms (e.g. on Facebook about the ongoing research) and e-mails (e.g. about available internship placements).The teaching methods according to the SER are diverse and encompass *inter alia* traditional/interactive lectures, practical exercises and projects, case studies, discussions and simulations etc. Face-to-face teaching has been complemented by elements of virtual/ distance teaching. In both formats, frequent contacts, feedback, grading and evaluation offer students as well as lecturers a variety of indicators with regard to the achievement/non-achievement of the intended learning outcomes. At the department level, there are also meetings organised with students of all courses, in order to discuss, among other things, aspects of the teaching and learning process. While the pertinent systems and mechanisms are therefore in place, all relevant groups – especially the lecturers and the students/alumni, but also employers – confirmed their satisfaction with the corresponding results. That said, for both programmes, site-visit respondents mentioned that more efforts could be put into aligning theoretical teaching with up-to-date practices and into introducing more practical studies for the purpose of developing specific competencies and skills such as analytical, leadership, and IT skills. These skills were highlighted especially by alumni during the site-visit as missing from the programmes.

3.4.2. Evaluation of conditions ensuring access to study for socially vulnerable groups and students with special needs

KU offers a wide range of financial, social and psychological support for students from socially vulnerable groups and/or students with special needs. These encompass e.g. the possibility of accommodation in dormitories, psychological counselling in various languages as well as psychological help, or the right to change to an individual learning plan for serious reasons (i.e. illness, marital status, reconciliation of studies and work. etc.). Studies can also be temporarily interrupted due to illness, pregnancy or childcare. While parts of KU buildings and the FSSH library are equipped with infrastructure and programmes for students with special needs, there is still a need to adapt older/historic buildings. However, students with special needs can address the Disability Coordinator of KU and also apply for support from the KU Study Office in case they need help. Concrete numbers of students concerned or a general definition of socially vulnerable groups were not systematically available for the evaluated programmes, though.

3.4.3. Evaluation of the systematic nature of the monitoring of student study progress and feedback to students to promote self-assessment and subsequent planning of study progress

The monitoring of student study progress and feedback is regulated by the procedure for organising the KU study feedback, approved by the Rector of KU in 2019. There are various systems (AIS, Moodle, etc.) and channels (e-mails, telephone, personal and virtual contacts) for providing students with the necessary information, with much importance attached to the interaction of lecturers and students within the course framework. Also assessment methods and criteria are clearly regulated (based on Article 43 of the KU Statute, the Regulations of Studies and the Procedure for the Assessment of Results) and the evaluation of course and semester study achievements is conducted by a plan published beforehand in the AIS. Cumulative assessments and regular feedback on the results and quality of the course assignments are complemented by discussions of achievements and peer- as well as self-assessments. According to the SER, much emphasis is put on transparency as examinations are normally held and defended in the presence of all students, sometimes with participation of representatives of the Student's Union and even recorded in the case of public thesis defences. Therefore, pertinent systems and mechanisms for the systematic monitoring of study progress are in place and allow for the self-assessment and planning of the study progress of the students. As was highlighted during the online site-visit, teaching staff demonstrate proactiveness in feedback and advice provision. The general satisfaction with the given situation has been confirmed by the relevant groups, notably the lecturers, the students and the alumni.

3.4.4. Evaluation of employability of graduates and graduate career tracking in the study field

The Department of Student Affairs, the Career Department of the KU, the Department of Studies inform, train and advise students on issues related to employment and preparation for the labour market during their studies. The Department also monitors graduates' employment and career indicators. According to the data presented, the first cycle PA students' employment rate reduced to 71.4% which is below the national average of 92% (based on the Government Centre for Strategic Analysis data) but in the upper bracket of employment compared to the STRATA report "Human Capital in Lithuania 2019", which

indicates that between 29% and 79% of university graduates are employed in highly-skilled positions within six months of graduation. There were 23 instances of unemployment registration between 2018 and 2020 among the PA graduates and four in 2021. Regional governance graduates had higher employment rates initially, but the rate fell from 100% to 66.7% in 2020.

In KU's view, the fall in employment statistics is related to the COVID-19 impacts. Furthermore, KU has difficulty in assessing the performance of second cycle graduates, as part-time students are mostly already employed and/or have not registered with the employment service. The University also speculates that second cycle graduates are likely to move up the career ladder after graduation. However, neither of the statements was backed up by any survey data, whether qualitative or quantitative.

The SER and the site-visit discussions indicated that, while the employability and career of KU graduates may depend on external factors, it is crucial for KU to have a clear understanding of the tendencies and the factors behind them. Therefore, the expert panel is of the opinion that career services and career tracking at KU need improvement in order to ensure that the students receive practical career orientation and advice. Furthermore, a systematic analysis of graduates' careers and factors that most influence them would be extremely useful to ensure that study programmes actually deliver what they intend to deliver. As it is, KU has not demonstrated adequate implementation of career tracking mechanisms and needs to invest in their improvement.

3.4.5. Evaluation of the implementation of policies to ensure academic integrity, tolerance and non-discrimination

KU has established policies and procedures to ensure academic integrity which have been implemented effectively (cf. KU Codes of Ethics, Ethics Committee). As described in the SER, the General Requirements for Independent Written Works of KU Students (2020) stipulates that students must apply the principle of academic honesty for written work. Appropriate information on rules and requirements and the collaborative approach between teachers and students have contributed to a culture of mutual trust. Also, the initial challenges posed to academic integrity during the pandemic (i.e. adaptation to online work, including assessments) have been solved in a cooperative manner. Software tools (the authenticity of written work is verified by the Oxico software integrated in the VLE system) and appropriate measures are in place to identify and mitigate potential cases in their early stages. Regarding written exams/assignments as well as bachelor and master theses, cases of plagiarism are very rare.

Regarding tolerance and non-discrimination, KU has established policies with a clear set of rules and procedures, however, with a somewhat limited focus on the implementation of the concept of diversity related to students and teaching staff (i.e. gender, race, nationality, socio-economic background, etc.). The KU Code of Ethics contains provisions on the prevention of discrimination, tolerance, individual freedom, fair evaluation, scientific and academic ethics and other fundamental human rights and values. Additional information requested by the panel revealed that in practice, at the programme level, the PA bachelor programme offers a

course on diversity management and at University level a dedicated group deals with equality and diversity policies (<u>Klaipėdos universitetas (ku.lt)</u>). Gender and age balance are considered in teacher recruitment. Site visit respondents were not aware of any cases of discrimination in the evaluation period.

3.4.6. Evaluation of the effectiveness of the application of procedures for the submission and examination of appeals and complaints regarding the study process within the field studies

KU has established effective policies and procedures for the submission and examination of appeals and complaints. The rules and procedures for appeals (theses and other exams) are stipulated in KU's Study Regulations (chapter on appeals). Appeals related to theses are only possible on formal grounds but not related to the content. According to the SER, in total four appeals were received in the field of study during the evaluation period, all of which were solved in a timely manner. According to respondents at the site visit (students, graduates), teachers are very approachable and responsive to students' complaints and most issues/complaints are solved in an informal manner.

Strengths and weaknesses of this evaluation area:

(1) Strengths:

1. Diversity of teaching methods for face-to-face teaching as well as virtual/ distance teaching and a wide range of communication channels available and used in teacher student interaction.

2. Policies to ensure academic integrity and the rules and procedures for appeals are well established and implemented, and most conflicts are solved early on in a cooperative manner.

(2) Weaknesses:

1. The linkage between theoretical teaching and up-to-date practices/ practical studies is not systematically developed; specific competencies and skills such as analytical, leadership, and IT skills seem to be missing.

2. The career tracking system needs to be enhanced in order to collect and analyse data on key factors that determine graduate employability and career advancement or the lack of it.

3.5. TEACHING STAFF

Study field teaching staff shall be evaluated in accordance with the following indicators:

3.5.1. Evaluation of the adequacy of the number, qualification and competence (scientific, didactic, professional) of teaching staff within a field study programme(s) at the HEI in order to achieve the learning outcomes

17 teachers taught in the *Public Administration* study programme, and 11 teachers taught in the *Regional Governance* study programme during the evaluation period. It should be

highlighted that the majority of the teaching staff is employed on a full-time basis. This means that they can fully concentrate on their teaching and research tasks. In addition, thanks to the relatively stable enrollment rate, the student/teacher ratio has also remained stable at a level higher than four students per teacher.

The collaboration with a number of social partners brings additional value to teaching. Courses are enriched by lectures of practitioners, i.e. policy makers and/or decision makers. In addition, practitioners are invited to participate in the thesis defence committees, and some of them have acted as supervisors of final theses in both first and second cycle study programmes.

Although KU would like to become much more attractive for international teachers and has offered dedicated teaching positions, the SER stressed that - due to various objective reasons which go beyond the capacity and responsibility of the University - it was challenging to invite teachers from abroad and to offer them working conditions which might be considered sufficiently competitive at the international level.

KU has introduced a regular five-year certification for both pedagogical and research staff. This mechanism ensures that the staff are performing in line with their responsibilities. KU also employs a financial incentive programme for teachers. More precisely, in 2020 it adopted a new system for calculating payments according to the annual results of teachers.

Overall, KU teaching staff of the Public Administration study field is of very good quality in terms of their qualification structure as well as teaching experience. In addition, as mentioned above, practitioners with different perspectives from practice enrich the contents of relevant courses. However, KU is strongly focused on complying with the legal requirements for the qualification of teaching staff and less on strategic and targeted continuous competence and skills development (including soft skills) which would benefit the University over all.

3.5.2. Evaluation of conditions for ensuring teaching staff academic mobility

The participation of teaching staff in academic mobility is rather imbalanced according to the information provided in the SER and during the site-visit discussions. Only a few teachers have been active and have taken part in several teaching mobilities abroad. While KU supports outgoing and incoming teaching mobility programmes (e.g. Erasmus+), the actual results are not sufficient in the evaluation period. This is partly due to the COVID-19 pandemic, but a closer look at the intensity of teachers' academic mobility before the pandemic shows that KU has been struggling with low interest in teacher mobility for a longer period.

The conditions for ensuring teaching staff mobility are appropriate. KU tries to motivate teachers to take part in a broad range of mobility programs, for instance, it includes participation in such programmes as an option to improve teachers' qualifications. Since the measures have not had the intended effect, KU might consider to adopt additional/alternative measures (for instance, active participation in international teaching mobility might become a compulsory precondition for further qualification and/or individual professional development).

3.5.3. Evaluation of the conditions to improve the competences of the teaching staff

KU teachers are certified every five years, but if there is somebody with excellent achievements, s/he can apply for extraordinary certification and apply for a higher position even before the end of the regular five-year term. Within this context, it should be stressed - as mentioned above - that incentives are primarily focused on the legal requirements for the qualification of teaching staff, and the improvement of competences and skills seems to be of secondary importance for KU.

KU facilitates continuous qualification development of individual teachers by means of various measures (e.g., through funding their dissertations, textbooks, monographs, training internships). The University regulation (KU Statute, 2010) allows exemptions of teachers from pedagogical tasks (once in a five-year period) to increase their pedagogical qualifications during the given time period.

Specific attention is paid to the participation of teachers in international scientific events (e.g., conferences). If there is an internationally important event, teachers can apply for financial support from the KU Foundation for the Promotion of Science and Studies.

The SER does not contain adequate information about in-house courses or training for teachers which should lead to an improvement of their competences. During the site-visit it was mentioned that such options for teaching staff exist. According to the additional information provided, these internally organised trainings are often project-oriented. For example, KU has held a specific set of training activities, such as English for teaching, research methodology, mindfulness, etc. Moreover, there are some trainings that organisations offer for all Lithuanian universities, e.g., on how to design surveys. After the data lab was created at KU, it began to offer training focused on the use of SPSS. Finally, there are also courses and training offered for teaching staff on dealing with and providing help to students with special needs. On this matter, there is an inter-faculty support system (tutoring and guidance provision) for teaching staff to work with students with special needs.

Strengths and weaknesses of this evaluation area:

(1) Strengths:

1. KU teaching staff is adequately experienced and meets all qualification requirements.

2. KU has adopted a certification system (based on five-year terms/periods) and is trying to motivate teaching staff to increase their pedagogical qualifications during individual terms.

(2) Weaknesses:

1. KU focuses in particular on the qualification structure of its teaching staff. Teachers should be motivated, for instance, by means of specific incentive programmes, to continuously improve their competences and/or skills.

2. The involvement of teachers in the Erasmus+ teaching mobility programme was limited during the evaluation period. In addition, the total numbers of incoming teachers also remained fairly low.

3.6. LEARNING FACILITIES AND RESOURCES

Study field learning facilities and resources should be evaluated according to the following criteria:

3.6.1. Evaluation of the suitability and adequacy of the physical, informational and financial resources of the field studies to ensure an effective learning process

There is a sufficient number of class-rooms equipped with up-to-date technologies for both face-to-face and online studies. For instance, during the evaluation period, there were improvements made such as multimedia devices and personal working stations have been installed, faster computers procured, etc. KU uses two electronic platforms – Moodle for studies and AIS as information management system. Various software licences have been obtained for studies and research, and a Participatory Budgeting Lab and Media Lab has been established to add value to the studies. Likewise, systems of plagiarism check have been adopted. Study processes have been adapted to the special needs of students. There is an inter-faculty support system in place for teachers in the form of guidance provision and tutoring to work with students with special needs, including disabled students. However, disabled people are disadvantaged in accessing study buildings, i.e. they face restricted mobility, even though students with special needs have access to special applications and devices in the library. For this and other reasons, reconstruction works at KU started in 2022, which indicates the availability of sufficient funding to improve the study environment. The main finance sources of study programmes are state appropriations for studies and student tuition fees. Noteworthy, the 'the Future Fund' was launched by alumni and social partners to support the students with scholarships. However, the scarcity of funds has had a negative impact on the availability of study materials in the library, where the number of accessible resources has decreased year-by-year. That said, KU library services are of good quality – there is a sufficient number of relevant and up-to-date literature both in English and Lithuanian (the latter being a bit problematic across the country) and access to various databases/electronic sources of materials.

Arrangements for internships are clear and well-communicated to students, as there is a dedicated coordinator, who provides information on what assignments need to be done and helps students with finding internship organisations. For internships, KU has a broad range of internship agreements with various public institutions. From a social partner's perspective, when they prepare an internship for students, partners also indicate what is most relevant for them and communicate this to the KU. Therefore, in general, physical, informational and financial resources are sufficient for carrying out studies effectively.

3.6.2. Evaluation of the planning and upgrading of resources needed to carry out the field studies

The planning and updating of resources required for the implementation of the public administration studies is conducted annually by the Study Committee. The library's information base is systematically built up in cooperation with the teachers and researchers, taking into account the needs of the academic community and changes in study programmes. The list of new publications is compiled in the department according to the requests of the teachers and the topics of course units and final theses prepared by students. As a warning

sign, there has been a drop in the number of accessible periodicals and databases due to limited funding. Hence, sufficient financial resources should be found at the University level to have access to a critical mass of electronic resources (e-journals, e-books, databases). Overall, it can be concluded that learning facilities and resources available at KU are planned, updated and enable the current number of students to achieve their learning outcomes both by face-to-face studies and by distance studies.

Strengths and weaknesses of this evaluation area:

(1) Strengths:

1. The University's strong commitment to investing into and upgrading study premises.

2. The establishment of and access to various study- and research-related laboratories that add value to the study processes.

(2) Weaknesses:

1. There is room for improvement in adapting learning facilities and premises for students with special needs, in particular, those with mobility disability.

2. There is a decrease in the number of subscriptions to electronic sources of study materials such as e-journals and databases on a yearly basis due to financial restraints, which is a warning sign.

3.7. STUDY QUALITY MANAGEMENT AND PUBLIC INFORMATION

Study quality management and publicity shall be evaluated according to the following indicators:

3.7.1. Evaluation of the effectiveness of the internal quality assurance system of the studies

The SER (pp. 61-62) indicates that KU's internal quality assurance is regulated in Chapter IV of the KU Study Regulations and the EU standards and guidelines for quality assurance in the European Higher Education Area (ESG). Furthermore the quality management system standard ISO 9001: 2015 has been implemented. KU has formalised its quality policy which covers science, studies, cooperation, administration, social responsibility in the internal and external environment. The scope and documentation of the management system has been updated to reflect the changes in the standards.

The quality assurance of the study programme is ensured by the Study Area Committee. The Public Administration and Regional Governance study programmes fall under the Committee of Management and Public Management. All decisions on the management and quality assurance of the study programmes are taken on a collegial basis.

Internal quality evaluation is carried out annually for each study programme to ensure the continuous maintenance of the quality of studies, the updating of the study content, the methodology and the information environment, the monitoring of the competences and qualifications of the teaching staff, and the objective assessment of the students' knowledge and skills. Self-assessments of the study programmes are carried out by a self-assessment

team formed by the Head of the Department to which the study programme belongs and approved by the Dean of the Faculty/Director of the Institute.

The PA department and faculty implement additional quality assessment and programme improvement measures. For example, as already mentioned in section 3.4.3., each semester the results of studies and the progress of the session are discussed at the Department and Faculty, and the reasons for students' negative results and dropping out of studies are analysed. Student feedback received (although the response rate is limited) is also discussed both at the department and the Study Area Committee meetings.

Besides that, KU takes part in international initiatives such as the Public Administration Education Quality Enhancement (PAQUALITY) project. In May 2021 experts from the NISPAcee network carried out an external evaluation of the Master's degree study programme Regional Governance and the compliance of the study programme with the European Association for Public Administration Accreditation (EAPAA) criteria. While the programme did not receive EAPAA certification at the time, it led to the revision of the objectives and expected outputs, i.e. served to improve the quality of the programme.

During the site-visit the expert panel was informed that as a result of a programme review in 2019, implemented based on previous quality assessments, the number of students increased allegedly indicating the effectiveness of the quality assurance system. Furthermore, while the SER states that an increasing demand for civil servants is expected in the coming years, the number of students is not increasing significantly. When asked for additional information linking quality improvement measures to enrollment, the KU team did not provide clear information referring back to the SER (p. 29), which in fact shows decreasing applicant numbers and fluctuating first priority choices for both programmes in all modalities. Additionally, both the SER report and the site-visit indicated significant dropout rates.

Based on the information provided in the SER and the discussions with the SER team during the site-visit, the expert panel is of the opinion that the mechanisms for internal quality assessment are adequate (periodic assessments, surveys, international initiatives). However, information on its effectiveness is insufficient at this time. While such a conclusion does not indicate shortcomings in the system itself, additional measures to ensure that the impact of changes made is verified need to be implemented in order to ensure that study programmes are evolving in the right direction.

3.7.2. Evaluation of the effectiveness of the involvement of stakeholders (students and other stakeholders) in internal quality assurance

According to information given in the SER (p. 61), the University has established numerous mechanisms for stakeholder participation in quality assurance activities as follows:

- The self-assessment team formed by the Head of the Department for the annual assessment exercise includes at least one student and one representative of the social partners (employers).

- The Study Quality Commission, which discusses relevant issues of study quality improvement and makes recommendations to study organisers and participants, is

composed of representatives of the academic community of all KU faculties and two students.

- An electronic system combining (1) the QMS portal module, (2) the intranet, and (3) the document management system. The QMS portal allows to inform and mobilise students and to solve problems of relevance to students:

  - The new system makes it easier and faster for students to find out their grade, view relevant information, make requests, view the timetable, leave feedback, etc.

  - The system has a survey module that helps to get the opinion of staff and students on issues important to the University, facilitating problem solving.

  - The KU Students Union organises student surveys at the end of each semester to assess all parameters of the courses: content, teaching and assessment methods, and academic and communicative competences of teachers. The results of the surveys are analysed by the Department, the Dean of the Faculty and the Council, and they influence the certification and competition of teachers.

  - Internal surveys are carried out as follows: (1) evaluation of the content of the course units and the quality of teaching (assessed by students); (2) evaluation of the performance of KU by alumni (assessed by alumni); (3) evaluation of the internship (assessed by students); (4) effectiveness of the study process (assessed by alumni); (5) delivery of the study programmes (assessed by administrative staff and teachers); (6) other quantitative and qualitative surveys to gather information relevant for activities in KU.

  - Students can provide feedback through student representatives who are group elders, members of the faculty council, the Senate, the KU Council, and other KU committees and working groups.

Stakeholders provide and receive feedback on quality assurance in the following ways:

- Lecturers and administration are directly involved in the preparation of study programmes, are members of study field committees or other committees and working groups; proposals for changes in study programmes are discussed at the meetings of the department.

- Once a year, the administration convenes a general meeting of the University community to discuss the latest developments and intentions related to all KU activities (including studies).

- Employers are informed during annual meetings and discussions, they submit proposals for the improvement of study programmes, discussed by signing cooperation agreements, implementing joint projects.

- Employers are invited to participate in the activities of the thesis defence committees where students' achievements and various issues related to the improvement of study programmes are discussed.

- Graduates are invited to participate in the work of KU committees and working groups, thesi defence commissions; they also contribute to the improvement of the study programmes by evaluating the entire study period and submitting proposals for improvements.

Evidence provided shows that KU has developed a multitude of tools for student and social partner engagement in quality assessment mechanisms, however, both the SER and the online site-visit showed that the response/participation rates are not sufficient. Additionally, as discussed above, career tracking efforts do not provide sufficient analysis on graduate employability. Furthermore, the panel observed that social partner participation in quality assurance processes is individual/voluntary rather than institutional, which further limits useful feedback. This means that current stakeholder participation tools do not ensure sufficient inputs to verify the adequacy of study contents/methods for preparing KU students for public sector jobs, which is one of the key indicators for the relevance of the PA programmes.

Finally, during the site-visit it was indicated that students participate in quality assessment surveys when questions are posed to them as part of the test/exam. The expert panel recommends to delink quality assessments from student performance assessment and ensure options for anonymous assessment in order to increase the likelihood of objective feedback by the students.

3.7.3. Evaluation of the collection, use and publication of information on studies, their evaluation and improvement processes and outcomes

In accordance with the existing Quality Management System the annual indicators set out in the relevant descriptions of the processes are collected and analysed. They are available to all members of the academic community. However, data on additional studies are not necessarily made public (https://www.ku.lt/blog/apklausa-ku-destytojams-ir-studentams-apie-aukstojo-mokslo-destymo-kokybe/). KU regulations also define that the results of the quality surveys conducted with the participation of stakeholders must be discussed with the social stakeholders and reflected in the departmental reports.

The following information is published on the KU website: admission requirements for study programmes, study programme results, descriptions of study subjects, qualifications to be acquired, career opportunities and other information related to the organisation of studies: legal acts and documents regulating to the study process at KU. The results of the evaluation of the study programmes, feedback from social stakeholders (if any), etc. are also made public.

In addition to a central KU website, information on studies is provided via social media platforms (Facebook), TV and radio channels for promotional purposes and to increase the study programmes' visibility. For that, the KU Communication plan and KU brand name strategy were adopted in 2021.

While the information on quality assessments is provided on the website, the expert panel was unable to locate student, alumni and social partner evaluation reports. The expert panel is of the opinion that the publication of the quality management evaluations and improvement processes could be improved by designing and implementing transparent feedback

mechanisms on quality assessments/feedback by the KU stakeholders as well as actions taken based on the feedback received.

3.7.4. Evaluation of the opinion of the field students (collected in the ways and by the means chosen by the SKVC or the HEI) about the quality of the studies at the HEI

As mentioned in section 3.7.2, the Students Union of KU organises anonymous student surveys at the end of each semester. In the surveys students are asked to provide feedback regarding the semester course related to content and teaching methods. The data received is analysed by the departments, Deans of the faculties, and the Council. The discussion covers negative feedback and reasons for existing drop-out rates. During the mid-semester teachers make sure that students provide feedback and suggestions for changes for the second half of the semester.

KU provides feedback back to the students based on data received from the anonymous surveys. This feedback is presented through the elder student representatives at the faculty Council, the Senate, or other committees.

During the discussions with the students at the site-visit, it was mentioned that the University provides the possibility for the students (starting from the second course) to choose optional modules, even from other faculties. The availability of choosing a wide range of optional modules allows students to feel more responsible for building their study programme plans. Students also highlighted the wide range of possibilities of formal and informal interaction with the teachers through various platforms/channels on all issues. As a good example, students highlighted the internship coordinator who initiates the search for internships in private enterprises.

During the meeting with the graduates most of them mentioned that the studies at KU helped them in different ways for their career pathways. Graduates were especially thankful for the group work and public speaking methods that were applied during the module courses.

In general, the expert panel is left with a good impression of the situation of the system for feedback collection from the students. The biggest advantage is that the collected data is not just stored, but used in action: in discussions, and based on the results actions are taken to reduce drop-out rates. It is also crucial to show that the data is used in action to maintain a valid number of survey participants throughout the years.

Strengths and weaknesses of this evaluation area:

(1) Strengths:

1. The Quality Management System which was re-certified in 2020.

2. KU has developed and made available multiple quality assessment tools (surveys, commissions and committees) to engage students and social partners.

(2) Weaknesses:

1. Feedback/survey response rates are not sufficient; even though coupled with career tracking efforts, the available data is not sufficient for the analysis of graduate

employability and the adequacy of study contents/methods to prepare students for public sector jobs.

2. The expert panel was unable to locate evaluation reports on the University website. Transparency should be improved through adequate publication of feedback results and actions taken.

IV. RECOMMENDATIONS

Evaluation Area	Recommendations for the Evaluation Area (study cycle)
Intended and achieved learning outcomes and curriculum	• The challenge to increase student numbers and reduce dropout rates needs to be addressed more proactively in response to the evident demands of public services in the region (e.g. by reinforcing communication and marketing activities and more formalised agreements with social partners). • A review of the grouping of core study subjects and optional courses based on their relevance is recommended (e.g. Comparative Public Administration in the first cycle studies and Regional EU Policy in the second cycle studies). • Regarding personalisation of studies, students should be able to select optional courses according to their individual preferences. • Representatives of both social partners and other HEIs should participate regularly in thesis defence committees. • It would be advisable to rebalance responsibilities for the overall system in terms of compatibility of aims, learning outcomes, teaching/learning and assessment methods.
Links between science (art) and studies	• The involvement of teachers in research should not remain fragmented. All teachers should contribute to creating links between science and study programmes. Although financial incentives to award the most active teachers are common practice, the implementation of additional, more innovative approaches and incentives should be explored. • The low motivation of students to get involved in research conducted by their teachers requires a deeper analysis of the root-causes and needs to be addressed in a more systematic way. A common practice are incentive programmes which offer tangible benefits, e.g., extra ECTS for active involvement in research and/or active participation in scientific events, research-competitions, opportunities to apply for Bachelor/Master theses linked to ongoing research projects.
Student admission and support	• Further institutionalisation of student advisory services might be needed, i.e. to define and inform more clearly which office is responsible for which type of consultation. This would also allow to balance and stabilise the workload among University employees providing different types of services.

	● There is a lack of information about requirements and processes for application for mobility on the University website. Virtual mobility options should be further explored.
Teaching and learning, student performance and graduate employment	● More efforts could be put into aligning theoretical teaching with up-to-date practices and into introducing more practical studies for the purpose of developing specific competencies and skills such as analytical, leadership, and IT skills. ● The career tracking system needs to be enhanced in order to collect and analyse data on key factors that determine graduate employability and career advancement or the lack of it.
Teaching staff	● International mobility of teachers, both outgoing and incoming, should be increased. As for the outgoing teachers, adopted incentives might make participation in international teaching mobility more attractive. ● KU focuses in particular on the qualification structure of its teaching staff. Teachers should be motivated, for instance, by means of specific incentive programmes, to continuously improve their competences and/or skills.
Learning facilities and resources	● Premises and facilities should be adapted to the needs of students with disabilities as soon as possible. ● Electronic subscriptions to databases and journals should be revised and funds found to halt the drop in the number of these subscriptions.
Study quality management and public information	● Measures should be taken to increase feedback/survey response rates. Even though coupled with career tracking efforts, the available data is not sufficient for the analysis of graduate employability and the adequacy of study contents/methods to prepare students for public sector jobs. ● Transparency should be improved through adequate publication of feedback results and actions taken.

V. SUMMARY

Overall, the expert panel found that in the evaluation period Klaipėda University has systematically developed all seven evaluation areas of the two (first and second cycle) programmes in the Public Administration study field in line with the legal requirements, the needs of the labour market and the specific needs of the Klaipėda Region. No fundamental shortcomings have been identified by the expert panel in the evaluation period. The panel noted that all recommendations of the previous evaluation have been taken into account and KU has taken appropriate action to mitigate shortcomings identified at the time.

Apart from the focus of the study programmes on the specificities and needs of the Klaipėda Region (which is anchored in KU's strategic development plans), one of the key strengths of the study programmes is based on the continuous efforts of the teaching staff to engage with public administration practice and research communities through maintaining close relationships with (regional and local) social partners and participation in international research networks. Good examples of the value added to the programmes are the "Klaipėda City Municipality Prize" for best theses (which includes prize money but also highlights the intangible appreciation of students' efforts) and 'The Future Fund' established by alumni and social partners to support students with scholarships (which contributes to the financial sustainability of the programmes).

That said, there is still room for improvement in the majority of the seven evaluation areas, notably related to the sustainability of the study programmes which are faced with decreasing student numbers and high drop-out rates and the research activities which heavily rely on the commitment of individual staff. Other areas concern the (full) compliance with legal requirements for thesis defence (committee composition, supervision), the individual choice of courses for the personalisation of studies while ensuring that core courses are maintained, and last but not least increased transparency and further communication efforts in relation to stakeholder feedback and student support services.

Considering the above, the expert panel has made a few suggestions for improvements which are summarised in Section IV. In the panel's view, a common theme is the lack of institutionalisation of certain relationships and processes. Achievements are often based on individual initiative, i.e. the relationships of teaching staff with social partners and/or participation in research communities. This is aggravated by a still predominant hierarchical managerial approach. Adequate and timely measures to approach these shortcomings will be required to ensure the sustainability of the study programmes which have the potential to add even more value to the region in the future.

In conclusion, the expert panel would like to express their thanks to the team at KU for compiling the self-evaluation report, for organising the site-visit and for providing additional

information in response to our requests for clarification. The panel also wishes to thank all site-visit participants for sharing their valuable insights.

Expert panel chairperson signature:

Dr. Christine Leitner