



**ŠIAULIŲ VALSTYBINĖS KOLEGIJOS  
VEIKLOS VERTINIMO IŠVADOS**

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**INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW REPORT OF  
ŠIAULIAI STATE COLLEGE**

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2022

*Report language – English*

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I hereby certify that this is the final text of the institutional review report of Šiauliai State College.



*Michal Karpišek*

## I. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

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

2. This review report is based on the evidence given in the self-evaluation report, additional evidence requested by the Panel, information provided by the Centre for Quality Assessment in Higher Education (hereinafter – Centre, SKVC) and a site visit to the institution on 2 – 4 May 2022 where meetings with a wide range of audiences were held.

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

- Mr. Michal Karpíšek, Panel chair, senior policy expert at the E<sup>3</sup>UDRES<sup>2</sup> European university alliance, St. Pölten UAS, Austria
- Mr. Eltjo Bazen, Panel secretary, senior advisor Quality assurance at HU UAS Utrecht, member of the EQAR Register Committee, the Netherlands
- Dr. Marisa Roriz Ferreira, academic member of the Panel, Vice-director of the Centre for Innovation and Research in Business Sciences and Information Systems and lecturer at School of Technology and Management, Porto Polytechnic Institute, Portugal
- Dr. Haldor Jochim, academic member of the Panel, Professor of Railway and Transport Planning, Dean of the Faculty of Civil Engineering, FH Aachen UAS, Germany
- Mr. Vaidas Repecka, business member of the Panel, independent project management, innovation and ICT consultant, UAB Astrolight, Lithuania
- Ms. Aurėja Šarkauskaitė, student member of the Panel, student of preschool and primary education at Kaunas College.

4. As a result of the external review **Šiauliai State College** is given a **positive evaluation**.

5. Judgment by the area:

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

\*5 points - **excellent** – the area is rated exceptionally well in the national context and internationally;

4 points – **very good** – the area is rated very well in the national context and internationally, without any drawbacks;

3 points – **good** – the area is being developed systematically, without any major drawbacks;

2 points – **satisfactory** – the area meets the minimum requirements, and there are drawbacks that must be addressed;

1 point - **unsatisfactory** – the area does not meet the minimum requirements, there are fundamental drawbacks.

6. **8** examples of good practices were found; **5** key and **25** detailed recommendations are made.

## II. INTRODUCTION

### 2.1. Background of the review process

7. The external review of Šiauliai State College/Šiaulių valstybinė kolegija (hereafter referred to as ŠVK or the College) was organised by the Centre for Quality Assessment in Higher Education and carried out in May 2022 by an Expert Panel of international experts (hereinafter – the Panel). It was conducted in accordance with the Procedure for the External Evaluation and Accreditation of Higher Education Institutions and Branches of Foreign Higher Education Institutions, Evaluation Areas and Indicators approved by the Minister of Education, Science and Sport of the Republic of Lithuania (hereinafter – the Procedure) on 19 of December 2019 [Order No. V-1529](#) and the Methodology for Conducting an Institutional Review in Higher Education approved by the Director of SKVC on 9 of March 2020 [Order No V-32](#) (hereinafter – the Methodology).

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

9. At the preparatory stage of the external review, the Panel received the Self-Evaluation Report (hereinafter – SER) with annexes. SKVC provided to the Panel additional information about the College, as set in the Methodology (Chapter 26), including statistical data on students and staff; financial data; findings from the ex-ante programme and ex-post study field reviews, institutional reviews and evaluations of research and development activities; State-budget allocations for research activities; information on violations of academic ethics from the Office of the Ombudsperson for Academic Ethics and Procedures of the Republic of Lithuania. The Panel requested additional information, such as financial data (balance sheets, profit and loss sheet), overview of study programmes and their organisation by various departments and a related list of staff with Ph.D. qualification, staff policy related to the qualifications, as well as gender balance, policies for distance learning delivery and an overview of collaboration agreements with partner universities. The Panel also asked for access to examples of thesis, and more information on some collaborating companies and a form of cooperation.

10. The site visit was undertaken after a training session organized by SKVC staff and preparatory Panel meetings. The Panel visited the College between May 2 and May 4, 2022. The Panel had meetings with 103 internal and external stakeholders including students, alumni, academic and non-academic staff, members of various governance structures and external partners from the region. Subsequently, the Panel met both in-person and virtually to review and agree conclusions and recommendations. The review report was finalised by correspondence and submitted to the SKVC.

11. In line with the Procedure the external review focused on four areas covered by the evaluation indicators (and related criteria): **Management, Quality Assurance, Studies and Research (Art)** and **Impact on Regional and National Development**. In analysing the evidence collected, the Panel also gave due consideration to the recommendations of the previous review carried out in 2013.
12. The review of a higher education institution assesses each of the evaluation areas with one of five ratings: **excellent** – 5 points – the area is rated exceptionally well in the national context and internationally; **very good** – 4 points – the area is rated very well in the national context and internationally, without any drawbacks; **good** – 3 points – the area is being developed systematically, without any major drawbacks; **satisfactory** – 2 points – the area meets the minimum requirements, and there are drawbacks that must be addressed; **unsatisfactory** – 1 point – the area does not meet the minimum requirements, there are fundamental drawbacks.
13. The decision on **positive** evaluation is made when none of the evaluation areas is evaluated unsatisfactorily (1 point). The decision on **negative** evaluation is made when at least one of the evaluation areas is evaluated unsatisfactory (1 point).
14. In line with the Methodology the review report, prepared by the Panel is reviewed by SKVC and sent to the higher education institution to submit comments on factual errors and the evaluations based thereon. The Panel revises the report in response to the comments from the higher education institution (if applicable) and submits it to SKVC.
15. The Panel has not received any comments from Šiauliai State College regarding the report.
16. After the Panel considers comments from the higher education institution (if applicable) and finalizes it, the report is considered by the external Commission of the Higher Education Institutions' Review (hereinafter – the Commission), set up by SKVC. On the basis of the proposal, made by the Commission, provisioned in the Commission's regulations, approved by the order of the Director of SKVC on 8 of January, 2020 order [No. V-5](#), SKVC takes one of the decisions:
  - to evaluate the performance of the higher education institution positively;
  - to evaluate the performance of the higher education institution negatively.The higher education institution shall be entitled to lodge a reasoned complaint to the Commission for Appeals formed by the Centre.  
The decisions of the Centre and the Commission for Appeals may be appealed against in accordance with the procedure established by the Law on Administrative Proceedings of the Republic of Lithuania.
17. On the basis of the external review decision SKVC takes one of the following decisions on the **accreditation** of the higher education institution:
  - to **accredit for a period of seven years** if performance of the higher education institution is evaluated positively;
  - to **accredit for a period of three years** if performance of the higher education institution is evaluated negatively;
  - to **provide no accreditation** if the repeated external review results of the higher education institution are negative.

18. SKVC announces the decision on the external review together with the conclusions of the external review and the decision on the accreditation of the higher education institution on its website. The higher education institution respectively announces the decision on the evaluation of the higher education institution together with the external review report on its website and maintains it until the next external review.

## **2.2. Background information about the institution**

19. Šiauliai State College (hereafter referred to as ŠVK or the College) is a public higher education institution. It operates in accordance with the Statute approved by the Government of the Republic of Lithuania; it is accredited<sup>1</sup> following the adequate procedure. In 2010, the budgetary institution Šiauliai College was reorganised into a public institution ŠVK.

20. ŠVK is the only college established in the Šiauliai region in northern Lithuania. ŠVK creates conditions for acquiring a professional Bachelor degree and professional qualification based on applied scientific research and develops applied research needed for the region. ŠVK was established in 2002, after the reorganization of upper secondary technical and medical schools.

21. In the academic year 2021-2022, according to the national register, ŠVK provided 23 Bachelor study programmes in 5 groups of study fields – business studies and public administration, social sciences, computing, health sciences and engineering sciences. This accommodated in 2021 – 2022 for 1304 students, 678 of which studied full time and 626 in a part-time mode. There were 26 foreign students. The number of students follows the general decline of student population in the college sector / higher education with the decline from 2768 students in 2012-2013. The decline affects mostly the number of full-time students (more than 60% decrease over ten years), whereas a number of part-time students remains more or less at similar level. Still, ŠVK stands high in comparison of applicants' level and profile, when only 6% of applicants haven't followed the requirement for minimum entrance score compared to 23 % share in the entire college sector.

22. ŠVK has 165 employees, of whom 99 are teachers. Of those, 26 hold a doctoral degree, 5 are currently studying for a PhD. Reflecting the development of the student population the number of academic staff has been decreasing, by 5 people within one academic year.

23. The collegial governing bodies are the Council of the ŠVK and the Academic Council. Since August 2021, the position of the director has been held by Dr. L. Tamutienė; of the deputy director by Dr. N. Jurgaitis. ŠVK features two academic divisions: the Faculty of Health Care and the Faculty of Business and Technologies. The Studies and Science Coordination Unit and the Activities Planning and Management Unit administer activities and provide support for studies. Knowledge and Technologies Transfer Centre was established in order to strengthen the links to regional companies and organisations and enhance both user-oriented, as well as academic research of the College. ŠVK is located in four buildings in the city of Šiauliai. Student accommodation is offered in two halls of residence.

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<sup>1</sup> Order No. ISAK-666 of 16 April 2007 of the Minister of Education and Science of the Republic of Lithuania "On the permission to award a professional Bachelor degree"

24. In 2006, the first external evaluation of the quality of the activities of ŠVK was carried out (all activity areas were evaluated positively). In 2013, an international expert evaluation of the quality of the activities of ŠVK took place. ŠVK was accredited for the period of 6 years.

25. The external evaluation in 2013 recommended several issues for further improvement, these regarded mainly more focused strategic approach, reflecting the priorities of development (including applied research) in the structure and leadership, issues of internationalisation. The overview of former recommendations is shown in more detail in chapter 3.2. Quality Assurance. ŠVK has addressed most of the recommendations and were able to show some progress in relevant areas. The overview of previous recommendations and measures taken by the College are publicly accessible on the College website. Some of the issues might still need more attention and further improvement, especially in their systemisation and these are reported in the following chapters.

### III. ANALYSIS BY EVALUATION AREAS

#### 3.1. Management

Management area is analysed in accordance to the following indicators and criteria, set up in the Methodology.

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

*1.1.1. The strategic action plan is consistent with the mission of the higher education institution, legal acts regulating research and study activities and it takes into account the provisions of the national research and study policy, the European Higher Education Area and the European Research Area;*

*1.1.2. The parts of the strategic action plan (analysis of the current situation, priorities and aims, objectives of the activities, implementation means, resources, planned performance indicators) are appropriate and justified;*

*1.1.3. Regular monitoring of the implementation of the strategic action plan is carried out and the results are used to improve performance management.*

26. According to the Self-Evaluation Report (hereinafter – SER), ŠVK has the vision of being “a leading and competitive state higher educational institution in Northern Lithuania that is recognised across Lithuania and Europe as an intellectual organisation changing faster than the changes in its environment, ensuring the provision of ambitious study programmes, high quality of studies and a harmony of knowledge and practical skills, developing social partnerships, creating a motivating academic environment and cultivating shared human values”. Its mission includes creating the conditions for obtaining a professional Bachelor’s degree and other professional qualifications based on applied research and ensuring that the quality of the studies and the study process conforms to the European Union standards. In a wider perspective, it aspires to react flexibly and quickly to changes in the labour market, to train and retrain qualified specialists, and to develop creative, educated, dignified, ethically responsible, civic, independent and entrepreneurial personalities contributing to a society with an important role for education, culture and knowledge.

27. ŠVK has a consistent strategic plan, they specified their strong position, their direction, and a clear focus. ŠVK strategic plan includes a long-term perspective and a three-year action plan. ŠVK actively seeks to improve the embeddedness of the strategic action plan, both internally and externally, which is visible through the active cooperation with the municipality and other stakeholders, like companies or the industrial association.

28. ŠVK takes into account the provisions of the national research and study policy, the European Higher Education Area and the European Research Area. This is visible in, for example, a higher integration of science in the study programs and a growing and continuous collaboration with several stakeholders.

29. The different parts of the strategic action plan are appropriate, the Panel sees a coherent link among objectives, mission and its implementation and evaluation criteria. For example, the pilot implementation of studies based on the concept of self-study is a measure that intends to contribute to the specific objective of improving the organization study programs and its personalization, which is in line with one more general objective of creating a successful learning experience, which is in line with ŠVK mission.

30. The Strategic Action Plan of the College defines eight measures to be pursued: the renewal and restructuring of study programmes, development of short-cycle study programmes, improvement of access including marketing, self-directed learning and individual coaching, digitalisation, intensifying cooperation with local business, lifelong learning, and attracting international students. The marketing plans are particularly progressed, with a number of sub-measures, such as an emphasis on the attractiveness of the local environment, grants and scholarships for freshmen and collaboration with youth organisations and other local social partners.

31. The implementation of the action plan was highly influenced by the COVID-19 pandemic. ŠVK pursued its original aim of improving the situation of students and people with disabilities, it also undertook great effort to prepare places to remote and online work (e.g., in the library) as well as adjust study methods (e.g., distance learning) and analyse dropout causes.

32. The strategy has been developed in a bottom-up process. The bottom level includes five-year goals of the departments, which are discussed in strategy groups, later merged into strategic aims of the faculties and finally enacted and reviewed annually by the Academic Council and the University Council.

33. The strategic plan is monitored twice a year, is available publicly and is discussed with stakeholders, showing a very positive aspect. Although it is clear that the implementation of the strategic plan is monitored, some extra metrics would be relevant, like create a greater alignment between the strategic plan and the state budget; incorporate evaluation results into the policy cycle, in particular in the general budget plan; or show how the strategic plan and the United Nations sustainable development goals (SDGs) are linked.

## *1.2. Effectiveness of process management of the higher education institution:*

*1.2.1. A clear structure for governance, decision making and distribution of responsibilities is defined;*

*1.2.2. Regular process management analysis is performed, preconditions for process improvement and risk management are planned;*



*1.2.3. Stakeholders are involved in the management process at an adequate level.*

34. The basic structure for governance consists of the Council (in charge of strategy and resources) and the Academic Council (quality of study programmes, research, teaching staff). Other important positions are the Director and the Deputy Director: The Director is in charge of day-to-day management processes and decisions as well as propositions to the Councils, while the Deputy Director is responsible for internal affairs, such as the quality process documents. The organisational structure is thus in line with the state regulations, and there is a clear-cut distribution of responsibilities. The number of Deputy Directors has been reduced from three to one, thus improving management efficiency by further concentrating decision powers and simplifying decision processes. The administration has also generally undergone a shrinking process to keep the administrative expenses in line with the development of student numbers. Students are also invited to join the communication processes in an adequate way, as the Panel heard in the interviews with students. The faculties have a degree of autonomy, mainly referring to budget management and specifics of study programmes. These areas are in the hands of Faculty Boards and Deans. The coordination of research is more centralised, due to the implementation of a central Research Coordinator.

35. A strong engagement and commitment of external stakeholders was thoroughly appreciated by the Panel, both in formal structures like the University Council, as well as in various academic activities and informal. Regional embedding and close partnership with regional actors is a key strength of the College and should be a cornerstone of further education and research strategies.

36. The Panel holds that risk management should be considered more broadly. For example, the College presented a scenario for the size of the student population that seems too optimistic, the efforts on attracting students should be elaborated upon in a more systematized way. ŠVK does not have specific strategies to respond to the decreasing student population. A more thorough analysis of profile, training needs and expectations of various possible target groups of learners may help to better structure the learning offer and diverse ways of delivery of learning, as well as reach the potential students. The hopes for the effect of the marketing campaign and promotion might not be met, especially without the mentioned knowledge and understanding.

37. ŠVK does have measures to attract new students (for example they hire an international agency to advertise ŠVK to international students; or ŠVK has special Tik Tok campaigns to attract new students), though these measures seem to be too focused on marketing/communication, the Panel sees a need to define more specific strategies and associate metrics, for example identify how many students are coming from the gymnasium with whom ŠVK is working; or adjust some courses considering the needs of the new students or/and companies.

38. The fact of having prepared the strategic plan together with key stakeholders gives a positive signal about its consistency. Moreover, involvement in the development of the City Development strategy is a great sign of linkage to the region and the role of ŠVK.

39. The Panel observes an intense cooperation with several stakeholders through internships, projects and development activities, showing that the College is clearly aware of the importance of communication and dissemination strategy. The Panel does advise to structuralize some aspects further since the link among the conjoint events and the organization strategy are not

necessarily clearly visible, for instance to develop a way/tool to measure the impact of activities with stakeholders and clearly identify what kind of feedback comes to ŠVK.

40. Another aspect which may inform the strategy substantially is stronger reflection of the NEOLAiA consortium into the strategic plans. NEOLAiA is a consortium of 9 universities and higher education institutions aiming at European university alliance, the alliance expected to strengthen their cooperation, mobility, as well as share expertise, capacity and good practices at strategic level. The possible benefits that NEOLAiA can bring to ŠVK are clear, yet the role that ŠVK can have in the alliance is not clear for all the stakeholders. The partnership will not only offer inspiration and new approaches, but will also require reasonable capacity and probably also innovative changes in the ŠVK priorities and organisation.

41. The College is committed to a great number of responsibilities laid down in the vision and mission cited above. For approaching those missions and vision, they practise an open policy and support for their students and other stakeholders. They lay a particular focus on the support of students and people with disabilities, as well as the inclusion of various groups of learners with social and other handicaps, even during the extraordinary conditions of pandemic restrictions.

*1.3. Publicity of information on the performance of the higher education institution and its management effectiveness:*

*1.3.1. Systematic collection and analysis of the performance data, results (including student employment and graduate career monitoring) is in place, data is used for the improvement of performance of the higher education institution;*

*1.3.2. Information on the performance of the higher education institution is clear, accurate and accessible to the academic community and the public, and is provided regularly to the founders and members of the legal entity.*

42. ŠVK collects several different types of data, for example collect information, through surveys, from new students or graduates. Key performance indicators such as student numbers, employment, project revenues and staff satisfaction have been introduced. The organization analyses performance data and results, e.g. enquiries to new students feed into evaluation of advertising campaigns; graduates feedback monitors their career evolution. Another example is related with the ŠVK support for lecturer's business or academic trips, being that the lecturers then apply their improved subject, didactic or scientific competencies in the study process or other activities. Thus, in general, the data are collected and analysed, used for informed operational decisions, and improves the performance of the organization.

43. During the interviews the students confirmed their participation in evaluation and feedback. They are actively engaged in communication with the College. They have noticed a development towards better communication during recent semesters.

44. The criteria for assessing the progress and implementation of the strategic plan should be more specific and translated into concrete circumstances. For example, unemployed full-time students should be analysed separately from employed full-time students. Information about graduates that are self-employed and have their own activities/businesses might be collected specifically, too.

45. ŠVK publishes its performance results publicly, and the information is available and accessible to the academic community and the public, for example in the organization website or

in public presentations to several stakeholders (e.g., municipality or local media). For example, in the survey for prospective graduates were asked about the help they received during their studies. 78% of the graduates said that the lecturers were willing to cooperate and consult them outside of lectures.

46. Some information is available on a regular basis, like the information related with regular events (e.g., organizational information for new students, at the beginning of the year, existence of an integrated RFID circulation process management system in the library) or regular activities (e.g., reports on the implementation of the Strategic Action Plan are prepared and discussed twice a year).

#### *1.4. Effectiveness of human resource management:*

*1.4.1. Clear and transparent principles and procedures for the formation, management, evaluation of academic and non-academic staff are established and applied;*

*1.4.2. The higher education institution has sufficient academic (in-house academic staff) and non-academic staff to meet its operational objectives;*

*1.4.3. The qualifications of the academic and non-academic staff are appropriate for the purposes of the higher education institution;*

*1.4.4. Conditions are created for the academic staff to improve the knowledge and skills required for teaching and research activities;*

*1.4.5. Conditions are created for non-academic staff to develop competencies.*

47. The Human Resources Management Procedure includes measures for staff selection, assessment and recruitment, adaptation of new staff, performance management, competence development, staff performance evaluations and accounting. Unfortunately, a review of the Quality Manual showed that the details have not been properly documented. The procedure document is called “Educational Process management, Study Process Procedure, Management of Study Process and Managing the Progress of Studies”, in alternating ways. From the interviews with management, teachers and students, the panel are convinced that the processes work adequately if assessed by their results, but still need stronger formalisation.

48. The College is aware of the actual national context and of the competitive international scenario, and puts great effort to work on the qualifications of the academic and non-academic staff. 99 employees are teachers, of whom 26 hold a doctoral degree and 5 are studying for a PhD. The non-academic staff comprises 66 employees. At the moment these numbers are adequate. The number of academic and non-academic staff in ŠVK is deemed to be sufficient. Over all, the Panel saw motivated teachers, and their proximity to students was mentioned by students and alumni. The focus of attracting students will be laid on engineering programmes, and the College is in a process of restructuring its staff and their qualifications accordingly. Improving the foreign-language expertise of staff is also envisaged. Whether or not these efforts are successful cannot be assessed yet.

49. Digital teaching and the digitalisation of the administration is supported by the provision of a variety of up-to-date software products. The Panel got the impression that the software department is very active in providing the necessary equipment. To make those achievements sustainable the Panel recommends a complex digitalisation strategy considering also other aspects of digital transformation (staff competences, change of approaches and processes) integrated into its general Strategic Plan.

50. The Panel noted a positive effort of the College in order to support research activities, introducing a reduction of compulsory teaching hours for research, though this is a small amount of just 50 hours in total per semester. Whereas the Panel would encourage further facilitation for research, it understands that this is limited by a necessity to serve the wide, fragmented number of specialisations which reflects the College wish to offer study programmes requested by regional stakeholders. Another positive aspect is the possibility of obtaining a sabbatical period, although from the interviews with teaching staff the Panel understood that this is not used in practice.

51. ŠVK is very active with HR competences. The College actively seeks to improve the acquisition of knowledge and skills by both academic and non-academic staff, integrating it in the strategic pillars of the strategic action plan. For instance, the Panel observed individual plans for the improvement of qualifications and the existence of specific courses to improve the research ability. Most of these courses are of voluntary participation and reach active participation (e.g., during the evaluation period, 75% of the ŠVK lecturers improved their competencies by participating in various training courses, seminars, conferences, internships, international exchange programmes, project and applied research activities). Other examples mentioned in the interviews include didactics courses for lecturers or occupational safety courses for the non-academic staff. In order to ensure the communication of feedback ŠVK incentivizes the practice of disseminating new experiences to the community. All stakeholders reported a tendency of graduates to re-join the College after spells at other institutions; this is also a positive indicator of the HR competences of the ŠVK.

52. Proficiency of English is also an important competence for academic staff at a College (less so for non-academic staff). The level of proficiency was not described in the self-evaluation report or supporting material. Since during the interviews with staff there clearly was a great need for the services of the interpreter, it appears that the proficiency can still be developed further, especially in the current circumstances of growing international contacts.

53. Hence, a clearer definition and presentation of the HR competences is needed; the Panel identified overlapping among some positions, for example the Coordinator of Scientific Activities, the Science Communication Specialist and the Vice-Dean.

54. Another area for improvement is attracting researchers, measures should be clearly defined. For example, indicating an optimal number of researchers for the next 3 years and mentioning what will be done to attract them, like announcing calls for specific scientific positions mentioning the equipment and labs that some departments have.

55. At the same time, the support of PhD studies (e.g., payment for participation in conferences) for the current staff gives a very positive example of HR policy, in line with the ambition to strengthen research and academic profile.

#### *1.5. Efficiency of financial and learning resource management:*

*1.5.1. Financial resources are planned, allocated and used rationally;*

*1.5.2. Various financial resources for the implementation of higher education activities are attracted;*

*1.5.3. Learning resources for provision of studies and research (art) activities are planned and used rationally;*

*1.5.4. Learning resources for conducting studies and research (art) activities are appropriate, sufficient and available.*

56. The main source of funds is provided by the government, with the chief parameter being the number of students. The annual state budget funds allocated to ŠVK decreased by 4% (from 2017 to 2020), however the annual income of ŠVK increased by 1.5%, which is a considerable achievement and thus represents a positive effort of the College.

57. The state budget appropriations are allocated by taking into account the number of state-funded study places and the participation of ŠVK in experimental development, regional development projects and consulting activities. As the student numbers of the College have been steadily decreasing, this emerges to be one of the key challenges for the College, so the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats - SWOT analysis and the risk factors listed in different parts of the report show the difficulties in recruiting more students.

58. The College adapts by reducing the number of staff (academic and non-academic) and redirecting personnel resources to areas with a high potential of raising funds from stakeholders, such as industry. It also uses the opportunity to obtain funds by the ministry specifically devoted to research projects. Although the SWOT analysis show that there is insufficient diversification of Research and Development (R&D) income sources, which limits the competitiveness of research activities.

59. Some hopes are directed to the international NEOLAiA project, which might be useful as possible source of enhanced attractiveness. Despite these strategies, the College still incurs an annual loss, which is covered by reserves.

60. Learning resources for provision of studies and research activities are planned and used rationally, considering for example the number of computer workstations or the library space; although reconsidering the number of students per class can be a good exercise that can lead to further optimizations. Learning resources for conducting studies and research activities are appropriate, and available, considering for example the system software (e.g., Matlab or Safetica) or the audio and video recording studio. However, the situation calls for strategic solution reflecting the mentioned decrease of student population and clarification of the concept of research provided by the colleges, focus on user-oriented research might require different priorities and resources than emphasis on more traditional academic research, for example the need for very specific equipment for developing more applied research.

61. **In summary**, The Panel observed an institution that is active in strategic planning, and was impressed by the level of stakeholder involvement in these processes. When it comes to the further deployment of strategy, ŠVK has a potential to align policy and monitoring with its strategy more sufficiently. It is clear that ŠVK will benefit greatly from its membership of NEOLAiA, although more reflection might be spent on the reciprocity of this relationship. The staff of the institution is adequate in number, competences and motivation/attitude, though on some aspects room for improvement is clearly visible. From a strategic view HR policy could use more alignment with the strategic goals. More practically two important fields for development are research competences and the use of English and/or other foreign language. Financially ŠVK should, in the view of the Panel, deploy scenario thinking, taking the potential serious decreasing number of students; and should create awareness among staff of the need to

know another language in addition to their native one; moreover, should support the creation of training courses, particularly in English.

62. **Judgment:** the area is being developed systematically, without any major drawbacks and is given three (3) points.

63. **Recommendations for the area:**

- The College should improve alignment of strategy, policy, implementation and monitoring, i.e., strategic and operational performance indicators should be coherently defined and aligned.
- The College should consider risk management more broadly and more structurally with scenario thinking (e.g. as in regards to the possible development of the future number of students, different target groups) and include relatively extreme scenarios and its consequences, as for instance, physical infrastructure of ŠVK.
- The College may expand the analysis and potential measures related to decrease of the student population. Take into account different types of students, their backgrounds, circumstances, needs, wishes, etc.
- The College should try to look for further optimizations, such as reconsidering the number of students per class.
- The College should reflect the role of NEOLAiA consortium and its priorities in the strategic plans, reflect on the ŠVK expected role and include the necessary reciprocity.
- The College should measure (or at least assess) the impact of activities with stakeholders and structurally analyse the feedback coming back to ŠVK.
- The College should give specific attention to attracting researchers in the HR policy.

64. **Good practice examples:**

- The College has an active role in developing the strategic plans of the municipality, which is a great signal of its linkage to the region.
- The strategic plan is monitored twice a year, is available publicly and is discussed with several stakeholders, including external ones. While this in itself should be standard practice, the fact that this is not done as a formal exercise but as an ongoing, lasting dialogue with the external partners on institutional strategy, embeddedness of the institution and its plans into regional ecosystem, makes it into a good practice. The dialogue was clearly visible from the involvement, openness and commitment of external partners throughout various governing and advisory structures, and observed during the panel visit.

### 3.2. Quality Assurance

*Quality Assurance* area is analysed in accordance to the following indicators and criteria, set up in the Methodology.

## *2.1. Implementation and effectiveness of the internal quality assurance system:*

*2.1.1. The higher education institution has approved and made publicly available internal quality assurance documents that are consistent with the Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area;*

*2.1.2. Internal quality assurance measures of planning, implementation and improvement are appropriate, applied periodically and ensure the involvement of the whole institution and stakeholders;*

*2.1.3. Processes for planning, implementation, monitoring, periodic evaluation and development of activities are specified;*

*2.1.4. Students and academic and non-academic staff of the institution receive effective support;*

*2.1.5. Provisions and procedures for academic integrity, tolerance and non-discrimination, appeal and ethics are specified and applied;*

*2.1.6. The results of the external review are used to improve the performance of the higher education institution.*

65. The College has developed a robust system of quality management, this has been certified by ISO 9000:2015 standards. The model as shown within the extensive Quality Manual covers map of all key processes, includes detailed developed procedures, it accommodates various stakeholders' views. The model provides reasonable space for students' engagement and information, the various committees, as well as other arrangements involve stakeholders from the external environment, especially within the study programme design, delivery and review. The system is very much consistent with the Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher education Area. The documentation is shared within the College system.

66. The quality management system includes plans for regular planning, deployment, monitoring and review of processes and the interviews with the various groups including management, staff and students confirm a strong commitment to quality and improvement, responding to students and stakeholders is clearly given a high priority. There is a regular formal evaluation process, where students are invited to evaluate their satisfaction with teaching, though recently not individual staff, there has been an open atmosphere for students' activity, proposing suitable changes and improvements. Stakeholders' view plays important role in assessing quality of the portfolio of study programmes offered, its innovation, feedback related to practical learning experiences (placements, internships), representatives of the world of work are regularly involved in the study programme committees.

67. The study programmes and study processes are continuously updated but many other processes are conducted in informal ways, for example, by direct contact between students and the head of department. The interviews with students and staff reflected very lively, informal improvement and corrective activities, sometimes build around the principles within the system or around used practices. The communication of students' problems and feedback through the group student leaders and informal communication with contact among staff works reasonably well due to the open atmosphere. This is successful because of the connectedness of staff and students, and the attitude and willingness to improve.

68. The Panel has some concerns and reservations regarding the role and use of the documented system. The quality management system has been developed and implemented since 2002, for substantial part of this period with the support of European projects, some at the national level,

therefore probably at rather general level, not adjusted for concrete institutions. There is an evidenced gap between the formalised, documented system and the institutional practice. There were non-compliances in various staff description of study programmes review and development, the process ownership may differ in understanding of staff, leadership and the quality procedures. However, the system works in a satisfactory way on less formalised basis adapting key improvement cycle principles and is integrated with the institutional management.

69. The institution's quality policy is widely promoted, even by its exposure on the corridors across the building. However, it does not include any clear quality objectives, what the College wants to achieve, what the key profiling values and features are, what will be its position within the region, its ecosystem, Lithuanian Higher Education and at international level. The strategic priorities in the Quality manual do not correspond with those shown in the institution's new strategy. Until the detailed description of processes and procedures gives the manual an impression of rather theoretical guideline, which might prevent its use as a "living document" supporting and building a culture of quality. The Panel noticed that the clarity on the objectives could be improved. The meetings with various groups of staff have not led to clear coherent view on quality-related objectives and priorities. However, they have shown willingness and commitment to serving the students' and partners' needs and expectations.

70. The Panel would strongly recommend reviewing the quality management documentation, aligning the quality policy and its clear objectives with the strategic priorities, focus on several key performance indicators and create a dashboard for their regular monitoring and review. These could be target figures in satisfaction (student, employee, graduate, world of work), more objective ones (including those related to finance, applicants, students, e.g. percentage of inflow of applicants, students, collaborations with regional business in research activities, etc.). The College, its systemic approach to quality and system implementation may benefit from a substantial reduction of the quality management documentation for practical use and reflecting the used or revised practices and procedures, engaging the key process "owners" and "clients".

71. The support received by students, academic staff and non-academic staff is deemed adequate by the Panel. This support is offered on several fields, amongst others facilities for studying and HR. Support that is provided to students range from computer workstations and the library to specialized software and the well-equipped audio & video studio. The support given as part of the HR processes consists of, amongst others, possibilities to enhance competences as for instance didactics courses, reduced teaching hours for researchers, and the existence of online seminars and scientific journals which are open to less experienced students and researchers to publish.

72. The policy and execution of various ethical subjects such as academic integrity, tolerance and non-discrimination seem satisfactory to the Panel. The College has introduced a Code of Academic Ethics, thus referring to the educational policies of Lithuania. There is a formal complaints procedure, which was used five times in the past five years; issues were such as violence, plagiarism and unfair behaviour. There is also an Ethics Committee independent of the decision management of the College. Additionally, students are offered lectures on ethical issues and a mutual ethics declaration is signed by students and the College. According to official sources (ombudsperson office) there were no infringements related to either academic freedom and values or ethical issues reported from the College over the past years. Neither there were any public complaints submitted to Lithuanian authorities.



73. The minor ethical issues described above that came to light, have been dealt with within the College community. The informality that is mentioned above, could however be a hindrance when it comes to reporting ethical issues. The Panel recommends the college to create more anonymous procedures, and to actively make them known.

74. The results of the previous external review have been addressed over the past years. These regarded mainly:

- Strengthening the decision making and governance structure in order to enhance the impact of applied research and skills-oriented learning;
- Systemic enhancement of internationalisation including quality and access to relevant information;
- Reflecting analysis of risk in the strategic planning, especially in support of new strategic goals;
- Enhancing external element and benchmarking in order to strengthen feedback and College positioning;
- Review the approach to flexible learning and recognition of prior learning;
- Developing coherent, well-balanced strategy for applied research;
- Institutional changes reflecting the increasing role of applied research within institution's strategy and profile, enhance the research leadership;
- Developing tools and approach to measuring regional impact.

75. ŠVK has addressed most of the recommendations and were able to show some progress in most relevant areas. The overview of previous recommendations and measures taken by the College are publicly accessible on the College website and have led to the review of institutional strategy, structural changes within the institution and introduction methodological units supporting enhancement of learning, teaching, research and especially its application with regional partners. Some of the issues might need still more attention and further improvement, especially in their systemisation and are reported in the following chapters.

76. One of the recommendations related to benchmarking has been addressed by the ŠVK appearance within the U-Multirank, a tool supported by the European Commission for reflecting diverse excellence of higher education institutions according to their mission. For various reasons – including a need for data collection – not all colleges appear in this tool. This platform provides opportunity for comparison with other similar institutions, learning from the data. ŠVK achieve some respectable results in some specific areas of learning, teaching, regional focus and knowledge transfer.

77. The envisaged engagement in the mentioned NEOLAiA European university alliance will also most likely bring new impulses and inspiration for quality assurance, its systemisation and focus on learners needs.

78. **In summary**, there is a solid basis for further systemic development of quality assurance. Focus on quality, improvement, reflecting needs and expectations of students, external partners, wider community, as well as staff is high among the ŠVK priorities. This is supported by informal, open atmosphere and high commitment of most of the actors. There is a regular mechanism of planning, reviewing and improving the College services, there are various data and evidence available. However, there seems to be a gap between the practice and documented

formalised system of quality management and therefore activities and improvements might be seen done rather on more informal, sometimes ad hoc basis. The College and its community would benefit from clear, simple quality policy with a set of quality objectives, from reflecting the practices or systemising some (including optional complaint or appeal procedure) within the quality management system, systemic monitoring and reflection on key performance indicators and shared notion of priorities relevant for quality. To conclude, quality processes in the College work, but do so in an informal manner. The Panel sees substantial improvements that can be made by arranging quality assurance in a systemic way.

79. **Judgment:** the area meets the minimum requirements, and there are drawbacks that must be addressed. This area is given two (2) points.

80. **Recommendations for the area:**

- Determine clear quality policy and measurable quality objectives derived from the strategy, and use them in monitoring and communication.
- Review and simplify the Quality Manual and reflect the used practices or agree on necessary modification of processes with the relevant process owners, actors and beneficiaries. Fully functional system of quality management used across the institution should prevent failures, clarify its principles and elements, yet also allow to monitor its effectiveness.
- Develop, introduce and promote alternative procedure for complaint or appeal reporting pedagogical and/or personal problem anonymously. Though often quick and effective, the current informal ways might as well be a serious hurdle for students.

### 3.3. Studies and Research (Art)

*Studies and Research (Art)* area is analysed in accordance to the following indicators and criteria, set up in the Methodology.

*3.1. The level of research (art), compatibility of studies and research (art) and its compliance with the strategic aims of activities:*

*3.1.1. The study and research (art) activities carried out and their results are consistent with the mission and strategic aims of the higher education institution;*

*3.1.2. The level of research (art) activities is sufficient for the ongoing studies of the higher education institution;*

*3.1.3. Studies are based on research (art);*

*3.1.4. Consistent recognition of foreign qualifications, partial studies and prior non-formal and informal learning is performed.*

81. Teaching and research in general comply with the strategic aims of ŠVK: creating future competence-oriented studies accessible to current and future professional activities leaders. Students, teachers, staff, graduates and partners contribute to the creation and transfer of knowledge by empowering the perspectives of lifelong learning and innovation development. Teaching is focused on academic subjects that are needed in the local community, and so is research. The departments plan and carry out their activities in teaching and research in accordance to plans devised annually.

82. The College continuously reviews its study programmes with the aim of filtering out those programmes which have enough potential of attracting students (and of delivering contributions in research). In the past, programmes were closed if they were identified not to fulfil the expectations in these terms: Dental Care and Oral Hygiene, Business Economics, Hotel and Restaurant Management, Tourism and Hotels and Music Pedagogy.

83. As the strategic aim of the institution emphasises its collaboration with the region and municipality, research projects are focused on such partners. One example for this is the project INOSTART with strong collaboration between local authorities and ŠVK.

84. At the moment, though, the involvement in projects is uneven; there are more projects in social sciences and business than in engineering and health care, due to the staff available for research. The College reports that it is trying to progress to a more even distribution of projects among the disciplines, for example, by taking part in international projects.

85. Distance learning is a part of the strategic concept of the College, but processes are still in development after the special pandemic phase. A concept for integration into teaching and for quality monitoring is being developed and pending for introduction soon, according to the Academic Council.

86. The digital transformation has been addressed partially, not only due to necessary – and relatively successful – adoption of provisional arrangements within the pandemic restrictions. There have been some plans, the discussion indicated a strong focus on various technical aspects and tools whereas the complex view reflecting the desired goals and scope of digitalisation, necessary competence and capacity building as well as potential principal changes in academic, as well as administrative processes may still need some consideration and discussion.

87. Educating students in scientific research is also a part of the strategy of ŠVK. To this end, a Science Centre is being implemented. According to the information available, the details of its use are not fully worked out at the moment. The experts found out that the students are aware of scientific projects being carried out, reporting abundant opportunities of taking part in them, but they seem to be less aware of the structure lying behind the College's activities in this respect. The interviews with the lecturers also showed that the move into more research activities has to be disseminated further within the College.

88. One major issue with teaching is the attraction of students. To this end, many activities have been launched, such as meeting with parents of prospective students (together with other education institutions and local companies), and more advertising. In the advertising, the advantages of studying in a small-town environment are also emphasised, and additional focus is laid on attracting foreign students. For the benefit of the students already at the institution, individualised study plans and counselling is offered. Scholarships of students are offered by local companies.

89. As to research, the intensifying of contacts to local business is mentioned by the College management as a core effort. The college offers a small reduction of teaching hours for lecturers who take part in research projects. The encouragement of lecturers to publish research results and to attend conferences etc. is confirmed in the interviews.

90. Online seminars on relevant competences and the existence of two scientific journals in applied sciences provide opportunities to publish and enhance the research capacity of the staff in line with the strategic priorities in research.

91. The income from research amounts to about 4% (155,339 EUR of 4,015,768.09 EUR) of total income. That is a low figure, though not unusual for colleges and comparable institutions.

92. It is not clear yet what the political requirements in terms of the concept of research provided by State Colleges in the future will be. Should the focus be shifted towards the fundamental research, as the Panel was told by the management of the College, it will be more difficult for the College to disseminate its results into practical applications. The Panel would strongly regret such development, considering the strong applied character of its research work, its appreciation by stakeholders and correlation with the College mission. The College is recommended to monitor the political development closely, in order to be able to comply with it. If a move into more fundamental research is required it has to be disseminated further within the College, among (academic and non-academic) staff as well as students.

93. According to the SER, the provision of teaching rooms is adequate. For verification, the panel asked the students about how rooms are allocated and received the information that usually rooms are always available for any kind of group work, even spontaneously. The Panel also took a short tour in the central building in the afternoon and found several unoccupied rooms. The library was also sparsely filled with students. In part, the abundance of space appears to be a result of the declining student numbers.

94. The Panel had the opportunity to meet with several graduates, confirming the fields where they work, the specific knowledge they have about their own areas, and the positions they occupy in their jobs. The graduates report good job prospects after their graduation. They work in several fields that are related to their discipline, mainly in attractive jobs in the vicinity, thus reflecting the teaching aims of the College.

95. It is to be expected that the teaching in College is based not only on research but also on good practice. Taking into account the examples of final theses, the qualification of the lecturers, the experience of the graduates, the statements of senior students and the comments by social partners, the College appears to fulfil this requirement in a more-than-adequate way.

96. The experienced decrease of the overall number of students is likely to affect flexibility and professional specialisation at least in some study programmes with low numbers of students. The College tries to address this problem by using synergies of core subjects, combining lessons for students of several programmes.

97. ŠVK takes in a high number of students with previous experience, both academic and non-academic. They were represented in the interviews and did not report any difficulties with the recognition of their prior qualifications. On the contrary, they praised the College for their uncomplicated approach. This is in line with the statements in the report, which refers to the procedure of the admission process at length. The necessary procedures are in place and in line with European policies.

98. Generally, ŠVK and its lecturers conveyed their commitment to apply their research findings into teaching. The project mentioned above (teaching aids for disabled students) is a strong candidate for being implemented into practical application at the College.

99. Social partners also confirmed that the combination of the research done by the College and the practical application pursued by them is mutually useful.

100. As to consistent recognition of foreign qualifications, the Panel interviewed students and staff about the College's concepts and their practical implementation. Since the absolute number of applications for recognition is low, a systematic analysis of their consistency cannot be carried out. As all cases that were mentioned in the interviews had been solved unanimously, the Panel can confirm that this item is fulfilled.

### *3.2. Internationality of studies, research (art):*

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

*3.2.2. The higher education institution integrates aspects of internationalisation into the content of studies and research (art) activities.*

101. ŠVK actively seeks to improve its international contacts. One instrument of this effort is its participation in the NEOLAiA network, a part of the European University Initiative. It expects to find support for its research efforts and in return offers the partner universities support by its competent IT department. It is important to understand what the role of the College in NEOLAiA is and how ŠVK contributes. The Panel met only one person who knew that ŠVK will have a working package for dissemination, which is highly related to marketing communication. Because of the good relation the College has with the region and the industry, and being a small region may strengthen the College in this role, the College has the conditions of successfully having a stronger role in this dimension, increasing its added value in the consortium. This enterprise has a good chance of facilitating the efforts of internationalization in research and also teaching.

102. The students themselves report that the support by the College for studies abroad is very good and helpful, while they admit that fellow students tend to be hesitant of going abroad. The students present in the interviews who had been abroad told the Panel that it had been very useful for them. They can use their competences gained abroad to the benefit of their domestic studies, because, as they and the teachers unanimously confirm, those competences are taken up and put to use in the context of their programmes. This is also the case in research. On average, more than 22 students per year went abroad for studies over the last 5 years, including the pandemic years where a clear drop in mobility was visible. Considering the college size, in terms of number of students, this figure is sufficient and represents a good effort in the area of internationalisation, while the NEOLAiA alliance might provide opportunities for further enhancement.

103. A set of measures, such as online seminars to improve research competences and the existence of two scientific journals in applied sciences provide opportunities to publish, both to students and to the teachers that are not quite familiar with publication processes. There is a policy of supporting staff attendance at international conferences and events with the aim to enhance their competences, as well qualification in particular field.

104. **In summary**, the studies that ŠVK provides are in line with its strategic aims, and with local and regional needs. The quality of the programmes and graduates fulfils the expectations of the Panel, and it is obvious that improvement measures are carried out in a structural way. Student support is on an adequate level, though attracting enough students in a decreasing demographic context is a threat to the institution that might require a deeper analysis and more than measures focused on the field of PR.

Distance learning or, more in general, flexibility of studies is an aspect that, from the point of view of the Panel, has come into the focus of the College stimulated by the Covid-19 crisis. It should now be transferred into regular procedures and formal processes. Connecting these variants of studying to the strategy, drafting a fitting policy and implementing accordingly would be important steps ahead for ŠVK.

As with other aspects of the institution, in research the connection with external stakeholders is clearly present, as for instance can be seen in the INOSTART projects. Involving students in the research activities is more challenging, and although steps have been taken further dissemination should be widened. It is visible that research in this institution for professional higher education is relatively new, and ŠVK could make the choice to give research in the fields of engineering and health care a running start by attracting outside research staff. Another potential way of external support in research activities might come from the NEOLAiA consortium.

105. **Judgment**: the area is being developed systematically, without any major drawbacks and is given three (3) points.

106. **Recommendations for the area**:

- The connection between the strategic aims of ŠVK and its teaching and research might be monitored more systematically in the future.
- The concept of distance learning should be developed further in a complex manner, potentially including blended possibilities, and introduced systematically. The same could be applied to the complex and coherent strategy for possible digitalisation.
- The efforts on attracting students from abroad should not be expected to solve the problems of the institution as the numbers of incoming students will probably always be moderate. Because of this, the focus on domestic students, mainly from the region, is pursued rightly and recommended by the Panel. For this purpose, a more in-depth mapping and analysis of profile, needs and expectations different target groups of potential learners may be helpful. The strategy might consider the potential synergies of standard higher education programmes with the planned flexible provisions like short-cycle programmes, as well as life-long learning provisions.
- The College should monitor and reflect upon the student numbers in all courses. Using synergies is recommended but may cease to be sufficient if the student numbers in the 'small' courses decline further.
- The efforts of internationalisation are real and noticeable, but the integration into a structured quality management plan should be intensified.
- The College is recommended to monitor the political development on what is required in the field of research closely, in order to be able to comply with it. If a move into more

fundamental research is required it has to be disseminated further within the College, among (academic and non-academic) staff as well as students.

- The link between the Knowledge Technology Transfer Centre and the scientific activities should be clarified; it is currently not clear if there is a combined or joint strategy.
- A coherent strategy for research is to be developed. Using the example of NEOLAiA, the College should have 3 or 4 main concepts (corresponding to the internal know-how) and try to have research objectives that are linked with these areas. Since there already is accumulated knowledge, that strategy would make core areas more robust. If each teacher proposes their own research, it might confer risks. Businesspeople and municipality should be involved in the process of developing these strategic research areas.
- The role of ŠVK in NEOLAiA alliance should be further clarified, reflected in the strategy and communicated throughout the College. The partnership may bring new opportunities and inspiration, yet will require also some capacity and maybe transformational changes, beyond the focus on technologies and dissemination. ŠVK has also a lot to offer, including the example of strong links in the region. However, the College will benefit from the partnership more when prepared and knowing what to look for.
- Prepare both staff and students better for international cooperation by enhancing their proficiency of English.

#### 107. **Good practice examples:**

- For development of individual staff competences and qualifications a commendable policy is in place. The support of PhD studies for the current staff is a positive development, and clearly in line with the ambition to strengthen research and the academic profile. Teachers are motivated and motivating, and their proximity to students were mentioned by both students and alumni.
- Online seminars on relevant competences and the existence of two scientific journals in applied sciences provide opportunities to publish and enhance the research capacity of the staff in line with the strategic priorities in research.
- The efforts in the context of the NEOLAiA consortium are highly commended by the Panel. This enterprise has a good chance of facilitating the efforts of internationalization in research and also teaching.

### **3.4. Impact on Regional and National Development**

*Impact on Regional and National Development* area is being analysed in accordance to the following indicators and criteria, set up in the Methodology.

#### *4.1. Effectiveness of the impact on regional and national development:*

*4.1.1. The higher education institution carries out an analysis of national and (or) regional demands, identifies the needs to be met and foresees the potential impact on national and (or) regional development;*

*4.1.2. The monitoring, analysis and evaluation of the effectiveness of the measures on national and (or) regional development are performed.*

108. The interaction within the local educational field is commendable. The Panel was impressed by unique open partnership between the local VET institution, ŠVK and Vilnius University Šiauliai Academy aimed at a joint promotion of the region, its opportunities and capture of various talents based on a profound integration into local cluster and a knowledge chain that seems natural to involved parties. This structure further benefits from the involvement of the city municipality as well and the world of work, showing a robust ecosystem with a core focus on future development and impact.

109. Another aspect of regional collaboration with Vilnius University Šiauliai Academy can be shown in transfer of the College Bachelor programme graduates to study at Master programme at the university, some of who return to the College as academic staff. As well academic staff is benefitting from the University for enhancement of qualification, i.e. doing a PhD.

110. Even though the previous cases show a strong regional role and a sense of pride is almost tangible, a lot of regional high school graduates leave to bigger cities in the country. ŠVK and partners have yet to find a way of convincing these prospective students to stay. Especially in the light of the foreseen general demographic developments this might be one of the most important challenges to keep both the College and the whole region viable.

111. The communication between businesses, local authorities and the College seems to function very well. The regular contact of ŠVK with stakeholders, their motivation and engagement are a great asset for planning the educational offer portfolio, as well as for some research and development activities. The Šiauliai chamber of commerce initiated surveys to map future skills and profile of expertise within the region. The active involvement of companies is visible within the College activities, students' placement and practice-based learning provisions, as well as in the offer of scholarships for students. Companies perceive that ŠVK reaches out and connects and is actively looking for what is needed in the future.

112. Students coming from the College to practice are seen mostly to be well motivated and active. The required skill level of graduates is adequate to start working immediately in companies and alumni are valued by their employers. Many students find work in the fields related to their studies at ŠVK and most of them seem to have successful careers, still the employment rate among the graduates in 2017 – 2020 is reported to be 43 %, yet this may be affected by external circumstances at the labour market. Still, there are substantial differences among the various professions with the highest rate in nursing. The eight resident companies in the local business incubator which have been recently started by ŠVK alumni are the examples of the fruitful relation between the higher education and the entrepreneurial world of work. However, there is no systemic approach to involve graduates, for instance through an Alumni club.

113. A lasting challenge is a bias between the demands of the local industry who call for more technical and engineering graduates, the lasting interest of applicants in technical, especially engineering and the flexibility of profiling within relatively low number of students. The Panel appreciates the efforts of the College to address the skills gap with the regional partners within such circumstances, to align its study offer to regional needs. However, in a long run there needs to be a more substantial solution whether it lays in programme reviews, development of new programmes or possible flexibility of learning provisions. The plan of introduction of short-cycle



programmes may be the first step, the focus on life-long learning and even smaller units of learning than two year short-cycle programmes might be next.

114. The future economic development may open further opportunities. The College mentioned in its SER the aspect of foreign companies' investment and impact on interest in Nordic languages, skills have not been mentioned. While the attracting modern or foreign businesses with higher added value is a task far beyond the College mission and capacity, the local knowledge, innovation and entrepreneurial capacity is often one of the important aspects. Therefore, the College leadership and experts have to pay ongoing attention to the regional specialisation, support the capacity. The invitation to formulation of the Šiauliai City Economic Development and Investment Attraction Strategy is a very good sign of such possible role. Identification of priority areas for regional development may inform the learning, research and innovation strategy may contribute to the College capacity development, but at the same time enhancing attractiveness of the region.

115. The College works with various available sets of data and input including feedback from its partners from the world of work, there is a regular approach to overview of research and development activities in partnership with the companies or public institutions. There are conclusions derived from such exercises, yet these may benefit from linkage to the ŠVK strategy, goals. A more thorough, complex, yet regular reflection of the role, integration and especially impact of the College within the regional community, based on exchange and input from regional partners, but also public may help to inform the priorities and position the College on even stronger regional foundation. The national "map" perspective may help to identify possible challenges affiliated to various troubles of regional economics and their misperception with study quality at ŠVK – something that was renounced by alumni.

116. Like in several other areas, the strategic partnership and capacity building based on shared expertise within the NEOLAiA alliance is seen as a very positive strategic step-in above-mentioned issues, from modern flexible learning through enhanced research expertise to the innovation capacity and be of even greater value in the medium term.

117. The strong regional profile and focus on ŠVK has been recognised in the formerly mentioned U-Multirank, a tool for reflection of diverse excellence in higher education where ŠVK achieved in regional engagement, in particular in student placements in region and income from regional sources very good score (87%, resp. 100%).

#### *4.2. Assurance of conditions for lifelong learning:*

*4.2.1. The higher education institution monitors and analyses the need for lifelong learning;*

*4.2.2. The higher education institution anticipates the diversity of forms and conditions of lifelong learning and ensures their implementation;*

*4.2.3. The higher education institution performs the evaluation of assurance of conditions for lifelong learning.*

118. ŠVK has been providing a reasonably wide offer of various life-long learning programmes, courses and other events. A strong bulk of these lays within Faculty of Health Care offering upskilling for nurses, social workers and relevant professions. The Centre for Entrepreneurship and Leadership within the Faculty of Business and Technology offers a variety of profession-oriented courses at various level of advancement.

119. However, the main peak of these activities was in 2018 and 2019, linked to necessary update of qualifications of social workers with 1243 participants in 2018, 1094 in 2019, whereas the number dropped in 2021 to 195. This is an unfortunate development, although reflecting various external circumstances (temporary specific profession related demand, impact of pandemics) as integration of life-long learning into ŠVK portfolio may be a partial reaction to decreasing number of students.

120. Strong engagement between ŠVK and regional partners allows necessary cooperation and capacity sharing. There are also various regular region-oriented learning activities, e.g. within the Adult Learning Week. However, the forecasting, systemic training needs analysis and life-long learning strategy are not systematically developed, most likely not being among the top priorities.

121. The Panel holds that there is still a lot to be done in the field of flexibility of studies and learning provisions. While the existing plan of providing more flexible studies builds upon introduction of short-cycle higher education programmes (usually 120 ECTS, 2 years of standard duration), the current European trends pay attention to even more flexible arrangements brought by micro-credentials (coherent blocks of 5 – 10 ECTS addressing specific set of competences), their stackability into partial qualifications. The College leadership is well aware of these trends and reflected on the opportunities during the exchange with the Panel. Related is an agenda of digitalisation and diverse forms of delivery of learning.

122. ŠVK shows a rich past experience with various life-long learning provisions, it faces a challenge of students dropping from studies due to their attractiveness at the labour market. A systemic link between standard study programmes, life-long learning and capacity building for regional companies and institutions might even strengthen the College role and position. The Panel recommends to consider various aspects, benefits and challenges in a systemic way, if feasible within a separate Life-long learning strategy or specific part of the overall strategy. Like digital transformation the life-long learning is not only on technology of delivery, but especially about needs and expectations of potential target groups of learner and institutional capacity, mainly the staff skills and capacity to meet them.

123. The ties with alumni can be strengthened, since at the moment a platform for alumni involvement is lacking. In keeping alumni close, they can function both as ambassadors to ŠVK (and the region) and as potential new lifelong learners.

124. **In summary**, ŠVK is deeply integrated in its region, it has an exceptionally strong structural relationship with a variety of local and regional stakeholders and uses this to their common benefit. This regards the engagement of regional actors in the governing structures, cooperation in academic matters, especially in educational provisions, but also the support in strategic discussions. Unique experience was a close, balanced partnership with other educational providers in the city, Šiauliai VET Centre and Vilnius University Šiauliai Academy. The Panel sees this as an example of true ecosystem many institutions can learn from. The joint focus on region and its development is a unifying driver and ŠVK have a wonderful basis to build upon and come up with own or joint strategic creative solutions including increasing attractiveness of the region – and the College – for prospective students many of who tend to leave the region. The strategy reflecting possible regional specialisation and key development areas, yet also views of the community, national circumstances and international experience

should also define priorities for building knowledge, research and innovative capacity of the College.

While there have been solid records in life-long learning provisions at the ŠVK the topic is addressed in the current strategy only partially. There may be reasons and other priorities, yet the Panel sees the links between standard studies and potential flexibility of learning provisions and delivery including digital and technological instruments as an opportunity to seriously consider. Such consideration has to build on mapping the opportunities and various target groups, consider existing capacity and define necessary technological, but especially staff training and capacity building needs. The NEOLAiA consortium might provide inspiration and even some expertise to support such plans.

125. **Judgment:** the area is being developed systematically, without any major drawbacks and is given three (3) points.

126. **Recommendations for the area:**

- Follow on the open cooperation and strong partnership both with educational and other regional partners in further strategic development, engage the College expertise even further in regional development planning and reflect on regional priorities in ŠVK own strategy and prioritising learning, research and development capacities. Hold regular systemic reflection of the role, position and especially impact of the College within the regional community, based on exchange and input from regional partners, but also public in order to inform the priorities and position the College on even stronger regional foundation
- Analyse ŠVK not only as a regional institution, but look for its position in national “needs map”. Branding could help to uncouple people’s perception of various troubles of regional economics and the idea that studying in larger cities means a better study quality.
- Be a key player in the discussions on business with higher added value, also creating and expanding research capabilities.
- Consider appropriate approach to addressing life-long learning agenda within the context of flexible learning provision and offer of standard study programmes, be it a separate life-long learning policy and strategy or an integral part of the overall strategy. Such strategy needs to analyse various potential target groups training needs for upskilling and reskilling, consider various forms of provision including micro-credentials and ways of their delivery, recognition and links to standard qualifications, as well as needs for College capacity building, both in staff competences, technologies and changes of used procedures.
- Enhance ties with alumni, for instance through an alumni association, to have them function both as ambassadors to ŠVK (and the region) and as potential new lifelong learners.

127. **Good practice examples:**

- An exceptionally strong integration of ŠVK in regional ecosystem, structural relationship with a variety of local and regional stakeholders in the governing structures, co-creation in academic matters, especially in educational provisions, but also the support in strategic discussions. This aspect is visible in all evaluation areas.
- Unique experience is represented by a close, balanced partnership with other educational providers in the city, Šiauliai VET Centre and Vilnius University Šiauliai Academy with the

goal to develop local talents, as well as enhance attractiveness of the city and region for students. The level of cooperation between the different institutions in the knowledge chain in the region is impressive.

- The collaboration with Vilnius University Šiauliai Academy offers the opportunity for graduates from the college to study a Master's programme at the university and return to the college as teachers, thus staying in the region rather than seeking careers somewhere else. This works because the study programmes of the College and the University Academy usually do not overlap; rather they complement each other.

#### **IV. EXAMPLES OF GOOD PRACTICE**

128. The Panel appreciates various elements of great team work and engagement of a wider community of staff, students and stakeholders into ŠVK plans, developments and activities. The connection with the region, the embeddedness within the regional community and open partnership provides a great and reliable foundation for further work, aligning the activities with the needs of the region and its inhabitants. The other positive aspect is a team spirit, open and informal atmosphere which allows for open exchange, this is complemented by a shared notion of quality of service and steady improvement. The concrete effect of these is a study offer developed and reviewed closely with the regional partners. The research agenda still goes through various concepts, there was positive experience with various applied science activities supporting innovation and development within the local businesses and public institutions, the introduction of the Knowledge Transfer Centre gives good prospects for further period, the similar supporting role may play the Activities Planning and management unit in methodological support. The innovative elements both in learning, teaching, research and innovation, as well as enhanced internationalisation might be supported by engagement in the NEOLAiA alliance which ŠVK joined. These may show the results over some time, however the Panel identifies the following examples of good practice in following areas.

##### **Management:**

- The College has an active role in developing the strategic plans of the municipality, which is a great signal of its linkage to the region.
- The strategic plan is monitored twice a year, the fact that it is available publicly and is discussed with several stakeholders, including externally, indicates its respect and importance both internally and externally.

##### **Studies and Research (Art):**

- For development of individual staff competences and qualifications a commendable policy is in place. The support of PhD studies for the current staff is a positive development, and clearly in line with the ambition to strengthen research and the academic profile. Teachers are motivated and motivating, and their proximity to students were mentioned by both students and alumni.
- Online seminars on relevant competences and the existence of two scientific journals in applied sciences provide opportunities to publish and enhance the research capacity of the staff in line with the strategic priorities in research.

- The efforts in the context of the NEOLAiA consortium are highly commended by the Panel. This enterprise has a good chance of facilitating the efforts of internationalization in research and also teaching.

### **Impact on Regional and National Development:**

- An exceptionally strong integration of ŠVK in regional ecosystem, structural relationship with a variety of local and regional stakeholders in the governing structures, co-creation in academic matters, especially in educational provisions, but also the support in strategic discussions. This aspect is visible in all evaluation areas.
- Unique experience is represented by a close, balanced partnership with other educational providers in the city, Šiauliai VET Centre and Vilnius University Šiauliai Academy with the goal to develop local talents, as well as enhance attractiveness of the city and region for students. The level of cooperation between the different institutions in the knowledge chain in the region is impressive.
- The collaboration with Vilnius University Šiauliai Academy offers the opportunity for graduates from the college to study a Master's programme at the university and return to the college as teachers, thus staying in the region rather than seeking careers somewhere else. This works because the study programmes of the College and the University Academy usually do not overlap; rather they complement each other.

## **V. RECOMMENDATIONS FOR ENHANCEMENT**

129. The Panel have proposed a number of recommendations at various level of detail and importance. All of these 25 recommendations are listed below, however their main conclusions might be summarised in the following key recommendations:

- I. The College has developed and revised its strategy for the further development. However, it is not always clear what are the key strategic directions, how are they translated into actions and deployed throughout the institution. There is a monitoring system, but a set of key performance indicators related to impact, results and resources might help to monitor the progress and implementation. While the governance and management work adequately at the operational level, the strategic focus might be given more attention. This may include considering various scenarios and risks. Special attention may be paid to:
  - a. Response to steadily decreasing number of students including mapping profile, needs and characteristics of various potential target groups and translating these into learning offer, as well as communication
  - b. Possible role of life-long learning and its synergy with the efforts to make standard higher education provisions more flexible; consider benefits and challenges of various trends and approaches including the already adopted short-cycle higher education programmes, but also micro-credentials and other forms of life-long learning and their recognition
  - c. Address the digital transformation in a complex, coherent way focusing on expected objectives, scope, approaches of digitalisation, yet balance it also with existing capacity and resources and capacity building needs including necessary training

- d. Develop a coherent research strategy reflecting the regional and national priorities, existing capacities and experience, as well as emerging national policies which may determine the concept of research activities within the College sector. The Panel would strongly advocate for user-oriented, applied research in a close partnership with and for benefit of partners, stakeholders and society.
- II. The College benefits from a strong embeddedness in the region and its structures, link with regional stakeholders and partners who share the shared commitment and pride of the region. This gives the opportunity to contribute better with the College expertise to discussions on various regional development priorities, keep the openness to public, but also benefit from the regular reflection of the role, position and impact of the College within the regional community and learn from this for further review of own priorities.
- III. The partnership within the developing NEOLAiA alliance seems to open a great opportunity not only for internationalisation and strengthening the European elements in ŠVK work and development, but widen a pool of expertise, inspiration and shared practices both in education and research. The alliance progress in ŠVK is strongly recommended to reflect the NEOLAiA much more visibly and specifically in its strategy and start developing the staff and institutional capacity including the language skills for true engagement, sharing and learning.
- IV. Review the existing system of quality management and assurance. Important parts that need improvement are 1) the harmonising of the quality policy and its objectives with the strategy, with the goal of supporting improvement, reaching the quality objectives and developing a culture of quality, 2) engagement of stakeholders in the quality assurance processes and mutual open cooperation and 3) revising and simplify the existing documentation in the view of used practices or desired review together their owners, actors and beneficiaries. The existing commitment to quality and informal provisions give a good basis for finding a good solution. However, some procedures which might take into account intimate and discrete issues, complaints and appeals may offer an alternative approach to the existing informal practices and might serve prevention or correction in specific cases.
- V. Enhance and systemise contact with the alumni through measures and approaches suitable the College and the relevant target group, invite alumni to act both as ŠVK ambassadors, source of feedback and innovation, as well as potential beneficiaries of life-long learning offer.

Panel's more detailed recommendations within these for further enhancement are:

### **Management:**

- The College should improve alignment of strategy, policy, implementation and monitoring, i.e., strategic and operational performance indicators should be coherently defined and aligned.
- The College should consider risk management more broadly and more structurally with scenario thinking (e.g. as in regards to the possible development of the future number of students, different target groups) and include relatively extreme scenarios and its consequences, as for instance, physical infrastructure of ŠVK.

- The College may expand the analysis and potential measures related to decrease of the student population. Take into account different types of students, their backgrounds, circumstances, needs, wishes, etc.
- The College should try to look for further optimizations, such as reconsidering the number of students per class.
- The College should reflect the role of NEOLAiA consortium and its priorities in the strategic plans, reflect on the ŠVK expected role and include the necessary reciprocity.
- The College should measure (or at least assess) the impact of activities with stakeholders and structurally analyse the feedback coming back to ŠVK.
- The College should give specific attention to attracting researchers in the HR policy.

### **Quality Assurance:**

- Determine clear quality policy and measurable quality objectives derived from the strategy, and use them in monitoring and communication.
- Review and simplify the Quality Manual and reflect the used practices or agree on necessary modification of processes with the relevant process owners, actors and beneficiaries. Fully functional system of quality management used across the institution should prevent failures, clarify its principles and elements, yet also allow to monitor its effectiveness.
- Develop, introduce and promote alternative procedure for complaint or appeal reporting pedagogical and/or personal problem anonymously. Though often quick and effective, the current informal ways might as well be a serious hurdle for students.

### **Studies and Research (Art):**

- The connection between the strategic aims of ŠVK and its teaching and research might be monitored more systematically in the future.
- The concept of distance learning should be developed further in a complex manner, potentially including blended possibilities, and introduced systematically. The same could be applied to the complex and coherent strategy for possible digitalisation.
- The efforts on attracting students from abroad should not be expected to solve the problems of the institution as the numbers of incoming students will probably always be moderate. Because of this, the focus on domestic students, mainly from the region, is pursued rightly and recommended by the Panel. For this purpose, a more in-depth mapping and analysis of profile, needs and expectations different target groups of potential learners may be helpful. The strategy might consider the potential synergies of standard higher education programmes with the planned flexible provisions like short-cycle programmes, as well as life-long learning provisions.
- The College should monitor and reflect upon the student numbers in all courses. Using synergies is recommended but may cease to be sufficient if the student numbers in the 'small' courses decline further.
- The efforts of internationalisation are real and noticeable, but the integration into a structured quality management plan should be intensified.

- The College is recommended to monitor the political development on what is required in the field of research closely, in order to be able to comply with it. If a move into more fundamental research is required it has to be disseminated further within the College, among (academic and non-academic) staff as well as students.
- The link between the Knowledge Technology Transfer Centre and the scientific activities should be clarified; it is currently not clear if there is a combined or joint strategy.
- A coherent strategy for research is to be developed. Using the example of NEOLAiA, the College should have 3 or 4 main concepts (corresponding to the internal know-how) and try to have research objectives that are linked with these areas. Since there already is accumulated knowledge, that strategy would make core areas more robust. If each teacher proposes their own research, it might confer risks. Businesspeople and municipality should be involved in the process of developing these strategic research areas.
- The role of ŠVK in NEOLAiA alliance should be further clarified, reflected in the strategy and communicated throughout the College. The partnership may bring new opportunities and inspiration, yet will require also some capacity and maybe transformational changes, beyond the focus on technologies and dissemination. ŠVK has also a lot to offer, including the example of strong links in the region. However, the College will benefit from the partnership more when prepared and knowing what to look for.
- Prepare both staff and students better for international cooperation by enhancing their proficiency of English.

### **Impact on Regional and National Development:**

- Follow on the open cooperation and strong partnership both with educational and other regional partners in further strategic development, engage the College expertise even further in regional development planning and reflect on regional priorities in ŠVK own strategy and prioritising learning, research and development capacities. Hold regular systemic reflection of the role, position and especially impact of the College within the regional community, based on exchange and input from regional partners, but also public in order to inform the priorities and position the College on even stronger regional foundation
- Analyse ŠVK not only as a regional institution, but look for its position in national “needs map”. Branding could help to uncouple people’s perception of various troubles of regional economics and the idea that studying in larger cities means a better study quality.
- Be a key player in the discussions on business with higher added value, also creating and expanding research capabilities.
- Consider appropriate approach to addressing life-long learning agenda within the context of flexible learning provision and offer of standard study programmes, be it a separate life-long learning policy and strategy or an integral part of the overall strategy. Such strategy needs to analyse various potential target groups training needs for upskilling and reskilling, consider various forms of provision including micro-credentials and ways of their delivery, recognition and links to standard qualifications, as well as needs for College capacity building, both in staff competences, technologies and changes of used procedures.



- Enhance ties with alumni, for instance through an alumni association, to have them function both as ambassadors to ŠVK (and the region) and as potential new lifelong learners.

## VI. SYSTEM RECOMMENDATIONS

130. During the preparatory stage the Panel members were briefly introduced to the institutional review methodology, as well as to the context of Lithuanian higher education and its development. This brief insight hasn't allowed to get really a full and thorough understanding to the circumstances, political agenda and higher education policies. During the study of the document and especially during the Panel visit to Šiauliai there were several times references to possible reform of the system of colleges in direction towards Universities of Applied Sciences which might, however, be accompanied by a revised concept of the research work.

The Panel would like to express its shared hope that this reform will respect the specific mission and contribution of colleges to their regional communities, to partners from the business, industry and public services who have always appreciated the applied, user-oriented character of research activities of universities of applied sciences. While respecting academic aspects of the research work, necessity of peer exchange and contribution to research progress, should the reform require too substantial move towards traditional notion of academic fundamental research, the opportunity of releasing the specific value and character of universities of applied sciences might be missed. Moreover, such shift might have also a substantial impact on profile and character of academic work and their qualifications and indirectly to strategic priorities of relevant institutions. The Panel members would like to appreciate the work experienced at the Šiauliai State College, the close linked with the partners from the world of work and express the hope that future development will allow to build and enhance the research and innovation capacity of Lithuanian universities of applied sciences on this basis.

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