



**VILNIAUS KOLEGIJOS
VEIKLOS VERTINIMO IŠVADOS**

**INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW REPORT OF
VILNIAUS KOLEGIJA**

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I hereby certify that this is the final text of the institutional review report of Vilniaus Kolegija.



Prof J C P Raban

I. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

1. The purpose of external review is to determine the quality of a higher education institution's performance, to create prerequisites for improving its performance, promote a culture of quality, and to inform founders, the academic community and the wider society about the quality of higher education institutions.

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

3. The Panel was appointed in accordance with the Experts Selection Procedure, approved by [Order No. V-149](#) of the Director of SKVC of 31 December 2019, and included the following members:

- Prof. Colin Raban (UK) (Chair): Emeritus Professor of the University of Derby and independent consultant (UK, Europe, South-East Asia and Middle East);
- Ms. Ewa Kolanowska (Poland) (Secretary): independent higher education consultant;
- Prof. Dr. Wes Wierda (Netherlands) (Academic): Director and co-owner at Hofstee Medical Business School, Professor at Glion / Les Roches-Gruyère University of Applied Sciences, Switzerland;
- Ms. Kersti Viitkar (Estonia) (Academic), Vice-Rector for Academic Affairs at Tartu Health Care College; member of the Estonian Nurses Association;
- Mr. Simonas Razminas (Lithuania) (Social Partner): Vice-President of the Engineering Platform at the *Flo Health Inc.* company;
- Mr. Edvinas Levišauskas (Lithuania) (Student): Kaunas College graduate (Sport Management); MA student (Strategic Management of Organisations), Vytautas Magnus University.

4. As a result of the external review, **Vilnius College (*Vilniaus kolegija*)** is given a **positive evaluation**.

5. Evaluation areas:

Area	Assessment with points*
MANAGEMENT	4
QUALITY ASSURANCE	3
STUDIES AND RESEARCH (ART)	4
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. **Eight** examples of good practices were found; **twelve** recommendations are made.

II. INTRODUCTION

2.1. Background of the review process

7. The external review of Vilnius College (*Vilniaus Kolegija*) (hereafter referred to as the College or VIKO) was organised by the Centre for Quality Assessment in Higher Education and carried out in 2022 by an international Panel of experts (hereafter – 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 [Order No. V-1529](#) of the Minister of Education, Science and Sport of the Republic of Lithuania of 19 of December 2019 (hereinafter – the Procedure), and the *Methodology for Conducting an Institutional Review in Higher Education* approved by [Order No V-32](#) of the Director of SKVC of 9 of March 2020 (hereafter – the Methodology).

8. According to the Procedure, external review consists of the following stages: submission to the Centre of a self-evaluation report prepared by the higher education institution; formation of an expert Panel whose members analyse the self-evaluation report; a visit by the Panel to the higher education institution; the preparation of the external review report leading to decisions on the external review as well as the accreditation of the institution and the publication of the report; and 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 a Self-Evaluation Report (SER) with annexes. The Panel requested some additional documents (e.g., faculty self-assessment reports; Quality and Study Committee regulations; minutes of Programme / Field Committee, and of Academic Council and Faculty Council meetings; Dropout Reduction Plan) and data (e.g., full-time and part-time staff holding a PhD). SKVC provided additional information about the College, as set in the Methodology (Chapter 26), including statistical data on students and staff; financial data; findings from the 2014 institutional review and study field reviews, 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.

10. The site visit was undertaken after a training session organised by SKVC staff and preparatory Panel meetings. The Panel visited the College between 22 and 24 November 2022, where it had meetings with internal and external stakeholders, including the governing bodies, heads of academic units, staff, students, graduates and social partners. Subsequently, the Panel met both in-person and online to agree review conclusions and recommendations. The review report was finalised by correspondence and submitted to 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 considered the recommendations of the previous review conducted in 2014.

12. The review of a higher education institution assesses each of the evaluation areas and assigns 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. A **positive** evaluation is made when none of the evaluation areas is evaluated unsatisfactorily (1 point). A **negative** evaluation is made when at least one of the evaluation areas is evaluated judged to be unsatisfactory (1 point).

14. In line with the Methodology, the review report is reviewed by SKVC and sent to the higher education institution to submit comments on factual errors and the evaluation based thereon. The Panel then revises the report in response to the comments from the higher education institution (if applicable) and submits it to SKVC.

15. The Panel did not received comments from Vilnius College regarding factual errors in 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 Order [No. V-5](#) of the Director of SKVC of 8 of January, SKVC takes one of two 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 is entitled to lodge a reasoned complaint to the Commission for Appeals formed by SKVC.

The decisions of SKVC 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 publishes 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 review of the institution and publishes the external review report on its website where it maintains until the next external review.

2.2. Background information about the institution

19. Vilnius College is a state higher education institution established in 2000 through the merger of nine advanced education institutions, when the Law on Higher Education introduced a binary higher education system of universities and colleges. VIKO is the largest professional higher education institution in Lithuania.

20. VIKO's 2012-2020 Mission was to prepare practice-oriented specialists with college degrees in biomedicine and natural sciences, humanities, social and technological sciences and the arts, thereby meeting the economic and social needs of the Vilnius region and Lithuania; to ensure that the study process is modern and in compliance with European standards, and to develop effective cooperation with representatives from the business world; and to develop students' general abilities and civic values, necessary for the future work of the College's graduates and their continuing education. In the 2021-2025 Mission, the College, through the efforts of its socially responsible academic community, aims to provide modern higher education programmes in line with European standards and to ensure the development of nationally and internationally recognised applied research and professional art in effective cooperation with the business world, and in pursuit of successful professional careers for its students and the prosperity of the Vilnius region and the Lithuanian state.

21. In the academic year 2021/2022, the student population was 6,086, with the largest numbers of students in the fields of Business (1,061), Nursing and Midwifery (649) and Pedagogy (574), and the smallest numbers in Polymer and Textile Technology, Theatre Studies, Agriculture, and Food Technology (between 49 and 40), and Chemistry (21). An overwhelming majority of the students, 5,260 (86%), were enrolled on full-time programmes, and 826 (14%) on part-time programmes. The number of students in programmes delivered in an online format grew from 387 (6% of the student population) in the academic year 2020/2021 to 562 (9%) in 2021/2022.

22. In the academic year 2021/2022, there were 828 staff (951 job posts, with some staff holding more than one position) at the College, including 447 academic staff and 2 research staff, and 379 non-academic staff (managers, student support, teaching and research support and other administrative and support staff). Among the academic staff, 92 (20%) held a PhD, 24 were studying for a PhD, and 26 were recognised artists.

23. The College has seven faculties located in two campuses in Vilnius: the Faculty of Electronics and Informatics, the Faculty of Economics, the Faculty of Business Management, the Faculty of Health Care, the Faculty of Agrotechnology, the Faculty of Pedagogy, and the Faculty of Arts and Creative Technologies. It offers 41 Professional Bachelor programmes in 27 fields of study within 12 groups of study field: (1) Computing: Information Systems; Software Engineering; (2) Physical Sciences: Chemistry; (3) Engineering Sciences: Electronics Engineering; Environmental Engineering; (4) Technological Sciences: Polymer and Textile Technology; Food Technology; (5) Health Sciences: Cosmetology, Medical Technology; Nursing and Midwifery; Nutrition; Rehabilitation; (6) Veterinary Sciences: Veterinary; (7) Agricultural Sciences: Agriculture; (8) Social Sciences: Communication; Economics; Social Work; (9) Business and Public Administration: Accounting; Business Studies; Finance; Management; Marketing; (10) Education Sciences: Pedagogy; (11) Humanities: Translation Studies; and (12) Arts: Design; Music; Theatre. Eleven (27%) of the 41 programmes are offered in an online format. Nine programmes (24%), including joint and double degree programmes, are delivered in English (Banking; Management of Cultural Activities;

Creativity and Business Innovation; Programme Systems; International Business; Tourism Management; Business Economics; Hotel and Restaurant Business; and Popular Music).

24. There are also several units in the College which provide practical training to students and / continuing education or lifelong learning (LLL) courses, and / or where staff and students conduct applied research and experimental development and art activities. These include: SIMULITH Centre (which coordinates the activities of Practice Enterprises in Lithuania); Technology Centre (Faculty of Electronics and Informatics); Simulation Companies, VIKO Bankas and VIKO Drauda (Faculty of Economics); Science Shops (Faculty of Business Management); Farmers' Regional Continuous Training Centre, Ornamental Plants and Greening Centre Viko Flora, and Veterinary Clinic (Faculty of Agrotechnologies); and Sign Linguistics Centre and Teachers' Competence Development Centre (Faculty of Pedagogy).

25. The College's SER covered the period between 2016 and 2021. The SER and its annexes provided a useful insight into the College's aims and activities. However, the SER could have been edited to avoid redundant evidence and unnecessary repetitions and, thus, to focus on key issues to be addressed under each evaluation criterion. Although the SER included a list of areas for improvement for each evaluation area, it would have benefitted from a more analytical approach in its main sections and some evidence in the main sections to underpin the list of areas for improvement.

III. ANALYSIS BY EVALUATION AREAS

3.1. Management

The *Management* area is analysed in accordance with the following indicators and criteria.

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. Since the previous review, the activities of the College have been guided by the 2012-2020 and 2021-2025 Missions and Strategies (for the Missions, see par. 20). Both Missions and Strategies have some common themes or objectives such as the provision of labour-market relevant degree programmes, the development of applied research and professional art and lifelong learning activities, enhancement of the quality assurance system, staff competence development and the upgrading of infrastructure. However, reflecting its institutional development over the years, the College has shifted focus in its current Strategy to strategic partnerships, social responsibility and impact on the country and region, and internationalisation as key objectives or "horizontal" priorities.

Digitalisation is also an integral part of VIKO' strategic focus. Although this is not explicitly addressed in the 2021-2025 Strategy, it was clear to the Panel from the SER and the meetings with VIKO's managers during the visit that its current and planned activities are also guided by an aspiration to become a University of Applied Sciences authorised to provide professional Master's degree programmes.

27. The 2021-2025 Strategy is consistent with the Mission. In line with the national legislation and policy documents (*Lithuania's Progress Strategy, Lithuania 2030, Learning Lithuania 2030*), it confirms VIKO's commitment to providing degree programmes based on professional practice and lifelong learning opportunities, and conducting socially responsible applied research and professional art activities. It is also aligned with national policies and with the European Higher Education Area (EHEA) and European Research Area (ERA) agendas in focusing on the quality and labour-market relevance of degree programmes, wider LLL opportunities responding to stakeholder needs, the enhancement of research capacity and needs-based activities, internationalisation, and such cross-cutting issues as social responsibility, equality and inclusiveness.

28. The documents *Results of the strategic sessions* provided to the Panel demonstrate that VIKO invested commendable effort in ensuring that the 2021-2025 Strategy and the accompanying Action Plan consider the views of the College's management, teaching and administrative staff and students. The Panel also learned that inputs from social partners were integrated in the draft Strategy, which was then thoroughly reviewed by the College Council, involving external members.

29. The 2021-2025 Strategy is based on an appropriate methodology insofar as it draws on the brainstorming strategic sessions, a SWOT (Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats) analysis and a review of progress in the implementation of the 2012-2020 Strategy. However, unlike the 2012-2020 Strategy, it merely lists as its background a few of the strengths and weaknesses selected from the SWOT analysis, without the kind of in-depth analysis of the current situation that would provide the rationale for the Strategy's objectives and implementation measures. This issue could be addressed through the revision of the Strategy that is planned for the coming months. Leaving that issue aside, the objectives and measures chart a clear course for VIKO's development in the coming years. There are 20 strategic indicators and a large number of additional indicators in the Action Plan. The Panel viewed the former as relevant whilst noting that the latter could make the tracking of progress a rather complex exercise. Nevertheless, the indicators provide the means for a thorough assessment of the institution's performance, and the Panel found no evidence that their number puts an excessive strain on VIKO's resources. Ideally, the Action Plan would also contain a cost estimation for implementation measures but, considering VIKO's sound financial management (see paras 52-55), it is unlikely that the implementation of the Strategy will be hampered by a shortage of resources.

30. The target values set for the quantitative indicators in the Action Plan appear realistic for the College as a whole, based on the current performance data and the implementation measures described in the Action Plan and the SER. The Panel noted, however, that performance or success levels vary – quite significantly in some cases – between degree programmes, fields of study, research areas and faculties (for example, in terms of student enrolment, first-year student dropout rates, student involvement in mobility, graduate employment rates, or the extent of involvement in

research or research production). As the Panel learned during the visit, the Directorate (Director and Deputies, Heads of Departments, Deans of Faculties, the President of the Student Representation and the President of the Academic Council) work as a team with a sense of shared responsibility and values, and institution-level managers provide leadership and support to ensure the balanced development of the entire institution. Nevertheless, VIKO could consider analysing in greater depth the root causes of the varying performance levels of programmes, fields and faculties and include in its Action Plan or annual activity plans specific measures or incentives for those areas which need to do more to ensure the achievement of the target values set for the indicators.

31. The College has in place an appropriate mechanism for tracking progress in the implementation of the Strategy, which involves an annual review as part of an institutional performance assessment against the strategic indicators, a mid-year review of the values of selected indicators (e.g. student enrolment and dropout rates) and ongoing monitoring, with findings shared on a less formal basis within the various organisational units and the Directorate. The implementation of the Strategy is largely decentralised, and institutional self-assessment reports are based on reports submitted by subordinate units. A sample of 2020-2021 faculty self-assessment / activity reports and the 2021 institutional self-assessment / activity report examined by the Panel were more descriptive than analytical or evaluative but identify some areas for improvement, and annual activity plans include improvement measures structured according to the strategic objectives. The evidence provided in the SER and in the Panel's discussions with the internal stakeholders (e.g., structural changes in the College, refined feedback collection procedures, a dropout reduction plan) demonstrate that annual reviews lead to improvements. For QA-related comments on self-assessment, see paras 68-74.

32. To support the implementation of the Strategy, VIKO has also adopted the 2022-2025 Programme of Applied Research, Experimental Development and Art Activities, the 2022-2025 Programme of Social Responsibility and Sustainable Development, the 2021-2025 Strategic Partnership Programme, and the Internationalisation Strategy, with priority goals for 2021-2025. For related comments, see the sections on Quality Assurance, Studies and Research and Impact on Regional and National Development.

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.

Governance structure and decision-making

33. VIKO's Statutes clearly define the remit of the College Council, the Academic Council and the Director as the governing bodies, in accordance with the division of powers and responsibilities outlined in the national legislation. Other key internal regulations could, however, set out (more) clearly the powers and responsibilities of Deans, Vice-Deans and Faculty Councils.

34. During the visit, the Panel found that the College Council contributes meaningfully to VIKO's development, for example in providing inputs to strategic plans, regularly discussing risks,

attracting new partners, and searching for new income sources rather than only approving institutional budgets, plans and reports as part of its statutory functions. The Panel's discussion with Academic Council members seemed to suggest that they perceive their responsibility for academic affairs and quality assurance as largely limited to ensuring compliance with procedures and requirements rather than implying more substantive engagement. For example, they struggled to explain how Academic Council ensures that research and art activities provide sufficient support for study activities, and how qualitative criteria (unity between studies and research and art activities, and impact of research and art activities on regional and national development) are employed in evaluating the effectiveness of the Programme of Applied Research, Experimental Development and Art Activities. The Panel also noted that Academic Council has yet to agree a clear and sound approach to evaluating the effectiveness of the quality management system (see paras 84-86 in the section on Quality Assurance).

35. The Panel learned from the College's documentation and from its meetings during the site visit that faculties autonomously take decisions regarding, for example, staff recruitment, the distribution of funding within the allocated annual budgets, collaboration with academic and non-academic partners and the provision of non-formal education courses as part of lifelong learning. Major decisions regarding institutional budgets and restructuring and academic matters such as degree programme approval, and specific decisions requiring substantial funding to be implemented are taken by the competent governing body at the institutional level. In practice, decisions taken by managers at the institutional level are always based on consultations with heads of units. In the view of the Panel, this approach ensures efficiency, transparency and a reasonable balance between centralised and decentralised decision-making.

36. In their meetings with the Panel, both students and graduates emphasised VIKO's familial atmosphere as a distinctive and major asset, an atmosphere that gives them a sense of belonging to a community of students and teachers. This is an achievement considering the size of the College. In this context, the students also appreciate the opportunity to participate in various events bringing together the entire community, and to use facilities available in other faculties.

Process management analysis and improvement; risk management

37. Process management is part of VIKO's quality management system and is linked to the implementation of the Strategy. Management processes are reviewed as part of an annual performance assessment, and activity plans and processes at unit and institutional levels are designed to ensure the achievement of the strategic objectives and to make optimal use of the available resources. The Director takes overall responsibility for process management, the Internal Control and Risk Assessment Specialist is responsible for continuous process monitoring and internal control, and staff in the academic and administrative units monitor processes and report operational problems to their superiors. Changes introduced in recent years demonstrate that annual reviews identify areas of improvement and follow-up action is taken. For example, in recent years the College has put in place an internal control system; streamlined management processes (financial, human resources and document management; public procurement; study information system) through digitisation; created two campuses and relocated some faculties to make management processes more efficient; and disposed of redundant assets, such as dormitories with low occupancy rates, to reduce administrative costs.

38. Risks are identified and prevention measures are planned and implemented at both unit and institutional levels, with the Internal Control and Risk Assessment Specialist taking a coordinating role and the financial risk management group monitoring the efficient use of resources. In their discussions with the Panel, Council members, managers and the staff responsible for quality assurance identified a number of relevant risks (e.g. demographic decline, student dropout, lack of experience in developing Masters programmes which colleges will be authorised to establish, based on the expected amendments to the legislation) and explained clearly to the Panel how VIKO seeks to mitigate them. The approach seems to work well but is somewhat formulaic. VIKO may wish to consider the advantages and disadvantages of a presumptive approach, based on a set of predefined risks, as opposed to an empirical approach, based on an analysis of the insights and experience of staff at all levels within the institution.

Stakeholder involvement in management

39. All key stakeholder groups are involved in management through their representatives in the governing and other bodies at both institutional and unit levels: the Council and the Academic Council, Faculty Councils, Study Field / Programme Committees and the Competition and Attestation Commissions responsible for the recruitment and attestation of teaching staff. Students and staff are represented on the Academic Ethics Committee, the Appeals and Disputes Commission, and Erasmus+ Selection Committees for mobility. Students can also voice their views on management processes and other matters in regular joint meetings of the Directorate and the Student Representation, and in round table and focus group discussions at faculty and departmental levels where, according to the teaching staff met by the team, students provide open and meaningful feedback. In their meetings with the panel, students, graduates and social partners expressed their satisfaction with the extent of their involvement in the management of the institution and confirmed that the College is keen to take their suggestions on board.

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.

Data collection, analysis and use

40. The College collects and analyses, on an annual basis, a wide range of performance data based on the indicators set in the 2021-2025 Strategy and Action Plan. For graduate career tracking, it uses its own data collected through surveys conducted at least 6 months after graduation. It also draws on data provided by SKVC, and data published by the Career Management Information System (KVIS), the Government Strategic Analysis Centre (STRATA) and the Employment Service of the Ministry of Social Security and Labour. Graduate employment data is analysed twice a year by the Commission for Academic Affairs and the Vice-Deans of all Faculties. In spite of their descriptive rather than analytical qualities, as noted above, annual self-assessment / activity

reports prepared at unit and institutional levels do indeed review key data and highlight areas for improvement, and annual activity plans include performance improvement measures. However, further to a related comment above (see par. 30), VIKO could conduct a more thorough comparative analysis of performance data for study fields or programmes and faculties to identify those where improvement should be prioritised and provide more specific guidelines for follow-up action. Furthermore, whilst it currently relies largely on quantitative data for the indicators, it could draw on other qualitative evidence (collected, for example, through roundtable and focus group discussions, peer observation of teaching) to analyse and improve its performance. For related comments, see paras 73, 74 and 82 in the section on Quality Assurance.

Information on performance

41. Leaving aside their largely descriptive quality, annual self-assessment / activity reports provide, in the view of the Panel, comprehensive information about activities and performance of the College. Reports are submitted to the national authorities and published on the VIKO website.

42. To improve its internal and external communications, since 2021 the College has adopted the Communication Plan and Guidelines, set up teams in all faculties to work as a ‘joint force’, and assigned to the Internal Control and Risk Assessment Specialist the task of assuring quality of public information. Some students mentioned to the Panel internal communication issues such as delays in the publication of study timetables. Efficiency in internal communication could be given more consideration in the Communication Guidelines, which focus mainly on channels and responsible units or persons. There is also room for improvement in external communication considering, in particular, that VIKO aims to attract more students to degree programmes and adult learners to non-formal education courses, and social partners for the development of applied research and art activities. Whilst the institutional website provides comprehensive and clear information about the College, the Panel agrees that the quality of information on faculty websites varies in its scope and quality. And therefore internal and external communication could be better aligned.

43. The Panel gathers from its meetings with the internal stakeholders that, in its external communications, VIKO tends to rely on its reputation in the country based on, for example, national rankings and such quantitative indicators as the size of the student population, graduate employment rates, and the funding for applied research and art activities allocated to the College as a share of the total State-budget subsidy for the college sector. The Panel concluded that VIKO could devote more effort to creating its own ‘unique selling proposition’, addressing all areas of its activity, including degree programmes, LLL and applied research and art activities, and that it could make better use of its website, social media pages and other ways and means for self-promotion. The Panel also endorses VIKO’s plans to expand such activities as visits to secondary schools, thematic lessons, seminars and open lectures.

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.*

Recruitment, management and evaluation of academic and non-academic staff

44. The College has in place a transparent *Procedure for Competitions for Teaching Positions and Attestation of Teachers*. This sets out clear conditions for the recruitment of staff for five-year terms (open competition) and two-year terms (so-called 'invited teachers' recruited without a competition), qualification requirements for each post, and arrangements for the selection and consideration of complaints. The impartiality of the process is ensured through the participation in Competition and Attestation Commissions of VIKO staff and students, and representatives of other institutions and organisations.

45. The *Procedure for Establishing and Accounting for the Full-Time Workload of Teaching Staff* sets clear expectations for academic staff in terms of the distribution of their workload between contact and non-contact hours, including the proportion of hours to be allocated to applied research and art activities (33% and 10% recommended, respectively, for associate professors, and lecturers and assistants). Such 'quantitative targets' could be combined with 'qualitative targets'. For example, the proportion of students giving a high rating in their evaluation of courses (the Action Plan includes an indicator relating to student satisfaction with the quality of courses), and the type of research products to be delivered (e.g., papers published in peer-reviewed journals).

46. The Panel was informed that heads of department hold interviews with teachers to discuss their annual performance reports and findings from student course evaluation surveys. If a teacher's performance is not satisfactory, she or he will prepare an improvement plan and present it to the head of department and to their colleagues. In accordance with the procedure for competitions and attestation, every five years a Faculty Competition and Attestation Commission undertakes an appraisal based on a teacher's annual reports and workload documents, other evidence relating to his or her activities, and students' course evaluation surveys. The Panel concluded that the arrangements in place are sound. Additionally, the College could consider collecting direct evidence by introducing a scheme for the peer observation of teaching (for related comments, see par. 82 in the Quality Assurance section).

47. The *Procedure for Recruitment of Persons and Termination of Employment Relationships* lays down transparent arrangements for the recruitment of non-academic staff. As the Panel learned from its meeting with administrative staff, in the case of regulated positions VIKO follows the open competition recruitment procedure that is required by national legislation; for other positions, it publishes vacancies in various media (e.g. on its website or in social media). Applicants are interviewed and selected by the head of a unit. The College also has in place an appropriate, although less formal, procedure for staff appraisal where performance is evaluated in an interview with the head of a unit as part of an annual performance assessment of the unit against the strategic indicators.

48. The Panel collected ample evidence that VIKO has created a working environment that strengthens the motivation of staff and it was clear that the commitment of staff are VIKO's great

asset. The College grants bonuses, one-off allowances and other benefits (e.g. an allowance paid during sabbatical or study leave, contribution towards the costs of PhD studies, and grants to cover costs of study visits) to academic and non-academic staff. In their meetings with the Panel, heads of academic units and staff also emphasised the value of non-financial incentives citing, in particular, team spirit, freedom to express personal views and opportunities for peer collaboration and collaborative learning. The staff also place a high value on opportunities for career development by promotion to higher positions and/or involvement in institution-level projects and committees.

Number and qualifications of academic and non-academic staff

49. In the academic year 2021/2022, the College had 449 academic staff, including 2 researchers. Academic staff hold at least a Master's degree or a PhD in fine arts (associate professors), a Master's degree (lecturers) or a Bachelor's degree (assistants). Among the associate professors and lecturers, 92 (20%) hold a PhD, the proportion by far exceeding the minimum of 10% at the programme level, required by the national legislation; and 24 staff are studying for a PhD. Among those holding a PhD, 27% (30) work full-time or have a workload exceeding a full-time equivalent (FTE); the workload of 40% (44) ranges from 0.5 to 0.9 FTE, and is 0.49 or less for 33% (36) of academic staff. Over 65% of the academic staff have at least three-years practical experience, which exceeds the requirement set in the legislation. The Panel concluded that the number of academic staff is overall sufficient, and the teachers interviewed assured the Panel that their workload, although high, is manageable and comparable to that of teachers working in other Lithuanian institutions. There is, however, some room for improvement. As the students whom the Panel met pointed out, some teachers are overworked leaving little time for them to interact with students, and this could have an impact on the quality of courses. Staff qualifications are, in the Panel's view, adequate for both teaching and applied research and art activities. However, the distribution of staff with a PhD is rather unbalanced, with a much larger proportion in the fields of Economics and Management, and this is reflected in the volume of research production. In view of its plans to offer Masters degrees, VIKO might consider whether and how it might recruit more staff to the relevant faculties.

50. The College had 379 non-academic staff in the academic year 2021/2022. Staff hold a degree and specific qualifications vary depending on the job. The total number of non-academic staff is quite high in proportion to the number of the academic staff. 46% are staff providing professional academic support to students and academic and research support staff and this seems to be consistent with the range of services offered by the non-academic units. As the Panel learned from administrative staff, the digitisation of management processes has substantially reduced their workload, and additional staff can be hired when needed.

Staff development

51. The College has made commendable efforts to establish a coherent framework for staff development and to provide a wide range of opportunities for skills enhancement. Competence development has been included as an objective in both 2012-2020 and 2021-2025 Strategies, and progress towards the targets set in the indicators was rated as very good for 2021. The *Procedure for Staff Competence Development* has recently been revised so that it addresses both the assessment of need and the professional development of both academic and non-academic staff.

Based on a recent staff survey, VIKO has clearly defined a set of priority competences for academic and / or non-academic staff to be developed. These include teaching and research competence, competence in psychology, and IT, communication, intercultural and foreign language skills. The academic and administrative staff interviewed confirmed that they participate in a wide range of in-house and external training courses and competence development events such as conferences, seminars, guest lectures, internships within the country and abroad and international projects.

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.

Financial resources

52. The College has achieved good financial results and a steady financial growth since 2017, with its total income rising from 14.02 million euro in 2017 to 21.97 million euro in 2021, and a budget surplus of around 1 million euro in the last two years. State-budget subsidies represent the main source of income for the College (73% in 2017 and 62% in 2021). Although the SER identifies the search for alternative funding sources as an aspect to be improved, the Panel noted that VIKO had been effective in raising income from other sources, including EU funds, academic exchange and project grants and grants from international organisations (5% in 2017 and 18% in 2021) and fees for services and rent of premises (21% in 2017 and 16% in 2021). In the view of the Panel, there are also good prospects for raising more funding as VIKO has signed contracts with companies to sponsor student training and scholarships, and incentives are offered to academic staff to seek funding for research.

53. As the Panel learned from its meetings with the College Council, senior managers and heads of academic units, VIKO uses a bottom-up approach in the planning and allocation of financial resources. Units draft budget proposals taking into consideration the current number of students and expected enrolments, staff workload, and teaching, research and art activities and other activities planned in the context of the strategic objectives. Proposals are discussed by the Directorate. The financial risk assessment group advises the Directorate when funding is to be allocated for activities which are not necessarily self-sustainable but are important in the context of national needs (e.g. the *Chemical Analysis* programme, with a small number of students enrolled, delivered to satisfy the demand on the labour market). Draft institutional budgets and annual reports are approved by the College Council. The Panel concluded that this is a sound approach, which allows VIKO to reconcile competing demands of the units in a transparent way, while ensuring progress in the implementation of the Strategy. It is also commendable that VIKO has created a reserve fund as a strategic financial management mechanism. Specific amounts are set aside to cover necessary expenses in the case of an unexpected drop in income, to co-finance

investment and other projects and to cover unforeseen expenses in the current year, thus ensuring continuity of activities.

54. The 2021 Activity Report indicates that the College makes good use of the available financial resources to carry forward its strategic objectives. It also pays much attention to the efficient use of resources, as evidenced by, for example, structural changes, cost reduction through the digitisation of management processes and the disposal of unnecessary assets, with a reduction in the number of administrative and maintenance staff, and the renting of unused premises during the COVID-19 pandemic. The digitisation of the financial management system has made the planning, allocation and use of resources more transparent and efficient.

55. Overall, with funding attracted from various sources, sound financial resource planning and efficient use of resources, VIKO has been able to raise or top-up salaries, upgrade facilities and invest in the development of applied research and art activities in line with its strategic objectives.

Resources for learning, teaching and research and art activities

56. Resources for state-funded student places are planned and allocated in accordance with the national legislation. In planning and allocating other resources, the College follows essentially the same bottom-up and, in the view of the Panel, rational approach as for financial resources. Proposals drafted by faculties in line with the strategic objectives are reviewed by the Directorate and, additionally, the Research, Development and Innovation Department as the unit responsible for the coordination of applied research and art activities. The Panel was informed by the heads of academic units that, where the available funding is not sufficient to meet the needs of all units in a given year, proposals are re-submitted and considered for approval one or two years later.

57. In recent years, VIKO has received and allocated substantial funding for the development of its teaching, learning and research facilities, including over 10 million euro raised under major investment projects. It has units and laboratories for practical training, lifelong learning and / or research and art activities within its structure (see par. 24). It has recently modernised infrastructure in the Faculties of Business and Management, Health Care and Agrotechnologies; established new laboratories and upgraded existing facilities in, for example, the fields of engineering, IT, humanities and fine arts; and it has purchased equipment or instruments for projects in various areas. The College has a well-developed IT network, with computerised workstations and a wide range of suitable equipment, including hardware and software for online or blended learning. The IT network provides access to national and international services and resources. The central and faculty libraries have reading rooms with computerised workstations, there are subscriptions to most of the international databases, 141,153 physical items (books, audio or video-recordings, etc.) are available, and access is provided to 729,277 digital resources, with over 600,000 euros allocated for physical and digital resources between 2017 and 2021. Based on its discussions with the heads of academic units and students and on its tour of facilities in two faculties, the Panel concluded that the teaching, learning and research facilities are generally adequate to meet the needs of the College and, importantly, they provide conditions for the training of students in small groups. However, some items of equipment need to be upgraded, and some premises in the faculties visited by the Panel are not readily accessible to students with a disability. These issues can be addressed under an ongoing investment project, which aims to further modernise the learning environment of the College.

58. **In summary**, the College's Strategy is consistent with the Mission and aligned with the national and European policies and sets a clear and coherent framework for the development of the institution, although the rationale for the strategic objectives can only be inferred from various other documents which fed into the development of the Strategy. Progress in the implementation of the Strategy is, overall, properly reviewed and findings are used for improvement. The team noted, however, that the self-assessment reports are largely descriptive and would benefit from a more in-depth and self-critical analysis.

The governance structure is transparent, and decisions are taken efficiently, with a reasonable division of related powers and responsibilities between the institutional and unit levels. Process management has been improved based on regular reviews, and plenty of data are available and analysed for performance improvement. Performance analysis and improvement would be helped, however, by collecting a wider range of, including qualitative evidence. Students, staff and social partners are genuinely involved in institutional management through formal structures at various levels. Beyond the formal structures, the College has built a close-knit and collaborative community, which is much appreciated by all stakeholders. Whilst published annual reports provide comprehensive information about the College, there is room for improvement in the range and quality of information available in online media, and room for the expansion of self-promotion activities. The College is aware of communication issues and is taking action to address them.

The College has in place sound procedures or mechanisms for the recruitment and appraisal of staff, and has created a motivating working environment, with a strong team spirit in daily work, various incentives and wide competence and career development opportunities. The academic and non-academic staff teams are sufficiently strong in terms of their number and qualifications to carry forward the strategic objectives and planned teaching, training and research and art activities. Human resource management could, nonetheless, be enhanced by addressing such issues as the excessive workload of some teachers and, given the planned development of Masters programmes, an unbalanced distribution of staff holding a PhD.

Financial and teaching, learning and research resources are well planned and managed to accommodate the needs of the units and to support the implementation of the Strategy. Substantial funding, raised from various sources, has been used effectively to upgrade the College's teaching, learning and research facilities. The facilities are generally adequate, although equipment available in some faculties would benefit from upgrading.

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

60. **Recommendations for the area:**

- The College should gather a wider range of qualitative evidence, in addition to the largely quantitative data currently collected for the strategic indicators, to improve its performance (paragraph 40).
- The College should improve the quality of information available on its websites and in social media, emphasising the distinctive features of the institution and promoting all aspects of its provision (paragraphs 42-43).

- The Academic Council should consider how it could perform more effectively its function as a senior academic body, in particular, in overseeing the implementation the College’s quality management system and applied research activities (paragraph 34).

61. **Good practice examples:**

- An environment that gives students a strong sense of belonging to a community, and a motivating working environment for staff, with a coherent framework and wide opportunities for competence development, a set of incentives, and collaborative spirit (paragraph 48).
- Efficient use of resources and a reserve fund established as a strategic financial management mechanism to ensure continuity of routine and development activities (paragraphs 52-55), together with successful efforts to raise funding for, and consistent investment in, the upgrading of the College’s infrastructure (paragraph 57).

3.2. Quality Assurance

Quality Assurance is analysed in accordance with the following indicators and criteria.

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.*

62. The College established its internal quality management system in 2008 and has introduced various improvements during the subsequent period. The system covers all areas of VIKO’s activity regulated by the national legislation: management, quality assurance, degree programmes, applied research and art activities, and impact on regional and national development. The *Quality Manual* and related procedures have been approved by the Academic Council and are published on the VIKO website.

European Standards and Guidelines and the College’s quality assurance documents

63. According to the SER, VIKO had drawn on ‘EU experience and support’ to develop its quality management system. As stated in the College’s *Quality Manual*, the system ‘is based...on best practices of quality management of studies in educational institutions of the European Union countries...(adapted) to the needs of the College’. Staff said that they have engaged and continue to engage with European communities of practice through VIKO’s membership of the European

Association of Institutions in Higher Education (EURASHE). They acknowledged, however, that they have limited awareness of quality management practices in other Lithuanian institutions.

64. The SER and the *Quality Manual* place particular emphasis on compliance with European expectations. These include *The Standards and guidelines for quality assurance in the European Higher Education Area* (ESGs) and the *Manual* includes a table listing the various documents that ensure their 'implementation'. The SER also stressed the importance of the *Law on Higher Education and Research* in setting out 'the principles of quality assurance' together with the role of SKVC in accrediting the institution and its programmes. For reasons explained later in this section of the report, the Panel concluded that there is scope for further work in securing the full alignment of the College's quality assurance arrangements with the ESGs.

65. In addition to the *Quality Manual*, the SER identified three documents as 'the most important' components of the quality system: the first deals with the quality assessment of activities, the second with the quality assurance of study fields, and the third with the provision of public information. The *Manual's* stated purposes are to 'summarise (the institution's) internal quality assurance processes and procedures' and to 'develop community awareness and individual and collective responsibility' for assuring the quality and improvement of the College's provision.

66. The *Manual* itself describes the College's quality policy and assessment areas in abstract and theoretical terms, and it includes a lengthy and complex catalogue of indicators against which the institution's provision is assessed and the implementation of its Strategy is to be monitored. The final section of the *Manual* lists the various internal documents and procedures that are designed to 'ensure the implementation of the ESG'. Whilst staff described the *Manual* as an expression of the institution's values, in the view of the Panel it does not constitute an accessible and useful guide for everyday use by staff. The College might wish to consider whether the *Manual* could be usefully revised to provide step-by-step and user-friendly instructions on how staff should engage with each of the various quality assurance procedures, supported by a commentary on the significance of these procedures.

67. The Panel sought to establish whether VIKO has developed (and is continuing to develop) its quality management system in compliance with external influences and requirements, or whether it has the confidence to develop and apply an approach that is distinctive and fit for its own purposes. It was noted that the *Quality Manual* sets out some general principles which, if they were to inform the design and operation of the system, could lend a distinctive quality to the College's approach. These principles were 'autonomy and accountability', 'contextualism', 'systematicity', 'insights for the future' and 'partnership'. However, in the Panel's meetings with staff it was not clear that the practical implications of these principles were widely understood, and they struggled to identify the distinctive features of VIKO's approach, particularly by comparison with other institutions in Lithuania. The Panel concluded that there may be a tension between the College's commitment to these principles and its concern to demonstrate its compliance with European expectations, legislation and its own statutes.

Self-assessment

68. The SER states that VIKO's quality management system includes internal monitoring and analysis of all of its activities, and it goes on to indicate that self-assessment is the institution's

primary quality assurance instrument, 'taking into account the results of external evaluation'. Self-assessment, and in particular the institution's annual activity report, also serves the purpose of monitoring and ensuring the implementation of VIKO's Strategy and this process is carried out at all levels from the individual teacher to the College as a whole.

69. The areas for assessment mirror SKVC's evaluation areas which are then linked with the goals and objectives of the College's Strategy. In some documents assessing VIKO's performance against the criteria and indicators listed in its Strategy seems to take precedence over assuring the quality of the institution's provision. Thus, the *Quality Manual* and the Procedure for Internal Quality Assessment of Performance describe the role of the quality management system as 'an essential component of strategic management, ensuring the quality of strategic planning and implementation', with the purpose of self-assessment being 'to analyse and critically evaluate the implementation of the ... Strategy for 2021-2025'. In its emphasis on the role of this procedure in assessing the management and implementation of the Strategy, the College is adhering to the EFQM *International Standard for Quality management*.

70. The *Manual* goes on to provide an account of the qualitative and quantitative indicators for evaluating the College's 'performance and the evaluation of study programmes and fields of study'. The qualitative indicators fall into four categories – contextual, contribution (input), process and outcome. These are cross-tabulated against the second and third of three assessment levels – systemic, institutional and individual – producing a total of 54 institution-level and 46 individual-level qualitative indicators, and targets are set for each of some 20 quantitative indicators.

71. The *Procedure for Internal Quality Assessment of Performance* describes the method for the production of annual activity reports by individual staff members, departments, Faculties, central departments, and the Deputy Directors. Reporting is sequenced, commencing with the production of teachers' activity reports and culminating in the submission by the Director of the institution's Annual Activity Report, first to Academic Council and then to Council. There is a separate annual monitoring procedure for study fields. Whilst the monitoring reports of study fields are considered by Faculty Councils, the Panel was unable to establish the relationship between these reports and the Self-Assessments or Activity Reports that are produced by the Faculties and which feed into the Annual Activity Report of the College as a whole.

72. The Panel was supplied with copies of two Faculty self-assessments. These were lengthy documents containing a considerable amount of descriptive material and, in both cases, they were accompanied by an action plan that was organised according to the College's strategic objectives and indicators. One of the two Faculties also supplied a second action plan that identified a number of quality issues for improvement, together with a description of the measures to be adopted and the individuals who would be responsible for the proposed actions. Although this second action plan was not cross-referenced to the Faculty's self-assessment report, it was similar in focus to the field quality monitoring reports that were seen by the Panel. The field reports adhere to a common format based on such quantitative indicators as student numbers, entry qualifications, dropout and completion rates, staff losses and graduate employment. For each indicator there is a brief identification of strengths, weaknesses, and 'measures envisaged for improvement'.

73. The two field reports seen by the Panel varied in terms of their length and the depth of their analysis of the area's strengths, weaknesses and action proposals. Field committee minutes also

vary in terms of the attention apparently given to these reports. The Panel also noted that the narrow range of issues addressed by the field reports by comparison with the guidance that accompanies ESG standard 1.9 for programme monitoring and review. There is, for example, no reference in these reports to programme content, procedures for the assessment of students, and the fitness for purpose of the learning environment and support services.

74. In their content, the Faculty and College activity reports encompass the full range of the institution's provision, including its social partnerships, research and third-stream activities. The reports are comprehensive and informative and are clearly the product of considerable diligence on the part of their authors. The Panel considered, however, that the strategic focus of these reports, together with their length and their descriptive and largely non-evaluative properties, make them less useful as working documents for the purpose of identifying quality issues and proposing remedial action and enhancements. The Panel also noted that, in stating their appreciation of monitoring and self-assessment, staff gave particular emphasis to the value of informal exchanges and meetings at Faculty level rather than the value derived from the procedures themselves. The Panel concluded that there is a risk that, in producing their reports, staff will behave in a 'satisficing' manner if they experience the procedures as unduly time-consuming and burdensome. This, in turn, would impair the validity and reliability of the evidence generated by these reports.

Programme and partnership approval

75. The College's procedure for the design and approval of study programmes prior to their accreditation by SKVC is set out in the *Procedure for Internal Quality Assurance of Study Fields*. Whilst the procedure is commendably thorough, it was apparent from the committee minutes available to the Panel that programme proposals are discussed mainly by the Study Committee, and that Academic and Faculty Council approval is treated as a formality. The Panel was also unable to find any evidence to indicate that the approval process addresses such issues as the content of study programmes, assessment strategies and the sufficiency and suitability of learning resources.

76. In the guidance for ESG Standard 1.2 it is stated that programmes 'benefit from external expertise and reference points'. Whilst the Panel was aware that SKVC's programme accreditation process draws upon the expertise of academics from other institutions, it considers that the College could benefit from the participation of external academic experts in its own approval process. Staff confirmed that experts of this kind are not currently involved in the College's procedure for programme approval, and they explained that the competitive nature of the Lithuanian higher education sector would make it difficult for them to introduce such a measure.

77. The Action Plan for the implementation of VIKO's Strategy includes commitments to increase the percentage share of programmes taught remotely from 20 to 30% and to increase the number of distance learning programmes in English from the current value of zero to five. The College's arrangements for approving such modules or programmes distinguish 'blended' from remote learning and they depend on the proportion of learning that takes place outside the classroom. In broad terms, blended learning requires approval at department level whilst remote learning is subject to approval by an institution-level Attestation Committee. The Panel concluded that the College's attestation procedure is suitably rigorous.

78. The *ESG* apply to all higher education offered in the EHEA ‘regardless of the mode of study or place of delivery’. The standards and guidelines are applicable, therefore, to all ‘transnational and cross-border provision’. This prompted the Panel to consider VIKO’s arrangements for the quality assurance of its international partnerships with a particular focus on joint and double degrees, having noted that the Strategy commits the College to increasing the number of double degree programmes from the current two to at least five by 2025. In considering this area, the Panel took the view that, because double degree programmes are not subject to SKVC accreditation, the College has a particular responsibility for applying rigorous procedures for the approval of programmes that it delivers in partnership with other higher education institutions.

79. In 2019 the College published a working group report entitled *Recommendations for Strategic Partnership*. The working group had set out to examine *inter alia* the ‘characteristics an external institution should have to be considered a strategic partner, what procedures we should follow to formalise a strategic partnership, how to enable it, how to monitor it, how to evaluate it and when to continue or to end it’. Several of the report’s recommendations deal with the quality assurance of partnerships and one has a direct bearing on the approval of new partners. This is that the College should ‘conduct a thorough analysis of partners, paying attention to the following criteria: the reputation of the organisation, relevance to the Faculty’s strategic objects and needs of the Department, work culture, and legal aspects of operations, such as intellectual property protection, employee rights, etc’.

80. The Panel endorses the working group’s recommendations, and it views the report as an example of good practice. The Panel also considered a later document that sets out the purposes of the Strategic Partnership Programme and its governing principles, some 14 evaluation criteria and the arrangements for the implementation of the programme’s action plan. It became apparent that the evaluation criteria would be applied to assess the performance of the Strategic Partnership Programme as a whole, rather than as the basis for determining the ability of a prospective partner institution to make contributions of an acceptable quality to the planned double degree programme. When the Panel sought to establish the methods by which the College vets its prospective partners, it was told that, whilst there is no documented procedure, informal enquiries would be made by study programme committees. In view of the reputational and quality risks entailed in this kind of provision, the Panel recommends that the College should introduce a formal due diligence procedure that is administered by and which leads to the approval of a proposed partnership by Academic Council or by the Study Committee working on its behalf.

Teaching quality and student assessment

81. ESG Standard 1.5 states that ‘institutions should assure themselves of the competence of their teachers’, and the guidance that follows draws readers’ attention to the need to institutions to provide an environment that supports and encourages enhancement and innovation. In accordance with this standard, the College’s *Quality Manual* acknowledges that the ‘competence, knowledge and skills of ... academic staff’ as ‘one of the most important factors in the quality of ... studies’.

82. When staff were asked how an academic department might assess and thus enhance their competence as teachers, they cited the use of indirect evidence generated by teachers’ annual performance reports and student course evaluations and feedback obtained from their meetings with their heads of department. Whilst the Panel was satisfied that the College and its departments

were diligent in the application of these measures, it felt that the institution might benefit from a scheme for the peer observation of teaching thereby obtaining direct evidence on the competence and development needs of its staff. To this end, VIKO might draw on its current practice of mentoring new teachers.

83. The College has a well-developed procedure for the assessment of students (*Assessment Procedure of Academic Achievements*) although Academic Council members conceded that there is scope for improvement. The Panel enquired into the grounds on which departments can be confident that staff are consistently applying appropriate standards in their assessment of students. Apart from the practice in certain circumstances of ‘collegial assessment’, it is not usual for staff to second-mark or moderate work that has been assessed by their colleagues. The Panel was also informed that moderation is not common practice in Lithuanian institutions, and that marking standards are assured instead through the use of checklists and marking criteria. The Panel concluded that the adoption of second marking as common practice across the institution would provide a more reliable means of assuring assessment standards, and that it might also lead to a reduction in the incidence of student appeals against their lecturers’ grading decisions (see par. 91).

Evaluation of the quality management system

84. Academic Council is responsible for evaluating the quality management system and for making recommendations for its improvement. When the Council was asked for information on how the effectiveness of the system might be reviewed, the Panel was informed that it would pay particular attention to the results of alumni, staff, student and social partner surveys together with the College’s position on national league tables. The staff responsible for quality assurance also suggested that the indicators in the Action Plan would provide a measure of the effectiveness of the quality management system. The Panel considered that evidence of this kind could only be of indirect value for an evaluation of the system, and that the relationship between the performance of an institution and the effectiveness of its quality management arrangements is problematic.

85. The *Quality Manual* lists various criteria for assessing the effectiveness and efficiency of the quality management system. In view of the comments made earlier in this report, the Panel would wish to endorse, in particular, criterion 12.4 since the ‘(active and willing) involvement of the College community and social stakeholders in quality assurance processes’ could be construed as a measure of the credibility of the system with staff, and as a precondition for the veracity and value of their monitoring and activity reports. In view of the possibly tenuous relationship between an institution’s performance and the quality of the learning opportunities it provides, the College might also be cautious in applying criterion 11.1 (the orientation of the system towards the achievement of VIKO’s strategic objectives’) in its evaluations of the system.

86. The *Quality Manual* sets out some ambitious principles upon which the quality management system is ostensibly based. In developing its arrangements for evaluating the system, the College might usefully consider how these principles could be operationalised as assessment criteria, and whether an evaluation based on these principles, and which leads to reforms of the system, might provide VIKO with an opportunity to demonstrate the distinctiveness of its approach.

Student and staff support

87. The SER provided details of the support that the College provides for its students. This includes advice on financial and academic matters; the support provided by library staff, Erasmus Coordinators and the Careers Centre the induction and mentoring of first-year students; and psychological counselling. The SER also reported that the results of the 2020 student satisfaction survey had revealed a degree of dissatisfaction with career counselling. In the Panel's meetings with current students and graduates, however, participants identified support for employment as a strength of the institution, citing the value of internships, the practical focus of the College's programmes, and department's close relationships with business and social partners. In general, students and graduates expressed a high level of satisfaction with the support that they receive or have received from the College.

88. Support for staff includes the training and mentoring for newly recruited lecturers, in-house courses to enhance their competence as teachers, and the provision of counselling services. There are also biennial job satisfaction surveys which enable the College to identify staff support needs, with the survey results being discussed by the Directorate, the Deans and at Faculty Council meetings. In their meeting with the Panel, academic staff stated that they received adequate support for their research activities and that this support included the provision of funding and equipment and, where required, a workload allowance. Administrative and support staff also expressed satisfaction with their working conditions, including their opportunities to participate in the Erasmus+ programme and to receive role-related training. (See related comments on human resources management in paras 49-51).

Academic ethics, appeals and malpractice

89. The College's *Code of Academic Ethics* is based on the principles of honesty, trust, fairness, respect, responsibility and equality. Violations of the *Code* are dealt with by an Academic Ethics Committee. According to the SER, only 12 complaints about unethical behaviour were received between 2017 and 2022, and during the latter part of that period (2019-2021) no complaints had reached the Office of the Ombudsperson for Academic Ethics and Procedures (SKVC Information). There is, however, a Dispute Settlement Commission which is convened by the Director for the purpose of hearing disputes and it acts as the College's final court of 'appeal' for members of the institution who are dissatisfied with the outcome of their appeal or complaint.

90. There are well-developed procedures for ensuring academic integrity and for the prevention and, where necessary, prosecution of plagiarism. These measures include detailed guidance for students on the production of the various types of written paper, a clear explanation of the various forms that plagiarism can take, and advice on the action that they should take to ensure the originality of their work. The College uses plagiarism software to check the authenticity of papers and, in cases where plagiarism has been detected, various penalties may be imposed. The guidance issued to students also contains clear and helpful advice on referencing and the presentation of work in oral as well as written form. The students met by the Panel confirmed that staff ensure that they understand the guidance and the procedures for dealing with cases of suspected malpractice. The Panel concluded that the guidance issued to students is an example of good practice.

91. Students lodged a total of nine appeals between 2017 and 2021 and, in the majority of cases, these were appeals against the grades that had been awarded for work that they had submitted. Unlike the practice in some other European countries, the College's assessment and appeals

procedures allow students to appeal if they disagree with an assessment outcome. The Panel noted, however, that students are not allowed to appeal against the grade awarded for final theses because they are assessed ‘collegially’. The College may wish to consider whether the practice of collegial assessment (second marking or moderation) might be usefully extended to all ‘non-forming’ (i.e., summative) assignments (see par. 83).

Responses to external review

92. Following the institutional review conducted in 2014, VIKO was granted re-accreditation for the maximum period of time. The College provided details of its responses to all the formal recommendations in the 2014 report. However, the main body of the report also made numerous suggestions for action by the College. The current review Panel was satisfied that the College has, where practicable, responded appropriately to these suggestions.

93. **In summary**, the College has developed (and it continues to develop) its quality management system in a manner that is consistent with the The Standards and guidelines for quality assurance in the European Higher Education Area (ESG) and with Lithuania’s legislative requirements, and the values and principles which underpin this system are set out in the institution’s *Quality Manual*. However, the Panel has some reservations about the Manual’s accessibility and usefulness for staff and students.

Self-assessment is a key component of VIKO’s quality management system. This procedure, which is conducted at all levels within the College, embraces the full range of VIKO’s activities and it entails the annual evaluation of the institution’s performance against each of its strategic objectives. The Panel observed that there is a potential tension between monitoring an institution’s performance and assuring the quality of its provision. It was also noted that reports at study field level are limited in focus, and the detail and depth of the analysis they provide varies from field to field.

The College has rigorous procedures for the approval of study programmes and for the delivery of programmes by means of remote and blended learning. It is also apparent that the College has given careful consideration to the means by which it might ensure the viability and quality of its strategic partnerships. There is, however, scope for the enhancement of VIKO’s procedures for programme and partnership approval, and for the adoption by the College of sector-leading practice in assuring the standard of its curricula and assessment decisions, and the quality of teaching.

VIKO provides good support for its staff and students and it has appropriate arrangements for ensuring academic integrity and the adherence of all its members to the College’s *Code of Ethics*. The institution also has appropriate procedures for handling appeals and complaints.

The recommendations offered in this section of the report are designed to support the College in achieving its aspiration to be designated as a University of Applied Science with the right to offer professional Masters degrees.

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

95. Recommendations for the area:

- The College should consider how the *Quality Manual* might be made more accessible and useful to staff and students (paragraph 66).
- By acting on the suggestions in paragraphs 74-75, 79 and 81-82 the College could establish an approach to quality management that is both distinctive and effective.
- There should be a review of the self-assessment procedure paying particular attention to its focus, the extent to which self-assessment and activity reports furnish Academic Council (or its committees) with sufficiently rich information on the quality of the College's provision, and to the possibility that compliance with the procedure may place an undue burden on staff (paragraphs 72-74). The College's approach to quality management could also be strengthened by widening the scope of its quality monitoring reports (paragraph 73) and its procedure for programme approval (paragraph 75).
- Academic Council should institute a formal procedure for the periodic evaluation of the quality management system and consideration should be given to the value and feasibility of assessing the system against the principles and criteria set out in the current version of the *Quality Manual* (paragraphs 85-86).

96. **Good practice examples:**

- The College's Report on Strategic Partnerships and, in particular, its quality assurance recommendations (paragraphs 79-80)
- The attention given through the Self-Assessment process to the implementation of the College's Strategy (paragraph 74)

3.3. Studies and Research (Art)

The *Studies and Research (Art)* area is analysed in accordance with the following indicators and criteria.

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.

Studies

97. In both the current and the previous Mission Statements and Strategies, the College has aimed to provide degree programmes meeting the needs of the labour market. As explained in the SER, the programme portfolio is designed to meet, in particular, the needs of the Vilnius region, and the demand for professionals in the financial, business, health, social, education and IT sectors. VIKO has consistently carried forward this strategic goal by offering a wide range of programmes (see par. 23),

some of which are unique in the college of higher education sector, and by introducing new specialisms rather than full programmes to respond swiftly to emerging needs. Practical learning is a compulsory and robust component of all programmes. Courses in entrepreneurship are offered as part of all programmes, and elements of social responsibility education are integrated into some programmes, with both components to be enhanced in all programmes in the coming years. Both the students and the graduates met by the Panel highlighted as great strengths of the College the ample opportunities it provides for practical training, and the wide range of organisations hosting internships from which they can choose.

98. The labour market relevance of the College's programmes is demonstrated by high rates of graduate employment (e.g. 98% of graduates employed or self-employed within 12 months of graduation (Employment Service 2022 data), with 65% finding employment in sectors corresponding to their degrees (VIKO data provided in the SER)). VIKO outperforms other Lithuanian colleges in terms of the proportion of graduates employed in the main 0-3 groups of the Lithuanian Classification of Occupations or self-employed within 12 months of graduation (average rates of 53% and 44%, respectively, between 2017 and 2020) (SKVC data)). The College has also held the first place in the rankings of the Reitingai magazine, based on surveys among a selected group of employers, in most of the years since 2017. As the Panel learned in its meetings with graduates and social partners, graduates felt that they had been well-trained for their jobs, and that their practical skills and knowledge are highly valued by their employers.

99. The Panel also noted that graduate employability varies between degree programmes, with the highest employment rates for programmes in Software Engineering, Medical Technology, Information Systems, Nursing and Midwifery, and Translation Studies (SKVC data). As explained in the SER, VIKO analyses the variations each year, but this could be helped by a more systematic and forward-looking assessment of labour market needs (see par. 100).

100. To identify labour market needs, the College analyses national and regional strategies and labour market data and its own graduate tracking data, involves social partners in programme development and review via Programme / Field Committees, and gathers feedback from social partners through surveys on student internships and in ongoing cooperation at departmental and faculty levels. Whilst this approach works well in that it enables VIKO to respond to employer demands, it is more reactive than proactive. The Panel found no evidence that VIKO has in place an institution-wide mechanism for forward-looking and systematic needs assessment which would cover a representative range of external stakeholders (extending beyond the circle of collaborating social partners) in the sectors for which it trains students. This issue is further addressed and taken into account in the Panel's judgement and recommendations in the section on the Impact on Regional and National Development.

101. The College has been effective in pursuit of its strategic objectives of ensuring that studies are "oriented to students' expectations" (2012-2020) and improving "the student-centred study process" (2021-2025). It has done so by involving students in programme development and review and enhancing the flexibility and individualisation of its provision. The students and graduates met by the Panel emphasised that the feedback they give as members of various bodies and outside formal structures is taken into consideration in the development and review of programmes. The College offers both full- and part-time programmes and has expanded remote learning

opportunities supported by intensive training provided to teachers. According to the SER, 11 study programmes (27%) are currently delivered in an online format and the number of students who choose this option grew from 378 in 2020/2021 to 562 in 2021/2022. With the approval of their deans, high performing students can now follow an individual study schedule after the first semester. It was apparent from the Panel's meeting with staff, that teachers are strongly committed to supporting students and expanding individualised learning options, and the students met by the Panel place a high value on the supportive attitude and guidance provided by their teachers.

102. The plans for further individualisation in the coming years seem realistic as the College set up in 2022 task forces to draft procedures and recommendations for an individualised study schedule and an individualised study process in response to students' specific needs. There are also clear plans in the strategic documents to extend gradually the range of optional courses available to students – from a pre-defined set for a programme as is currently the case to a list of electives at the faculty and, finally, at the institutional level.

103. As part of the goal of providing labour-market relevant programmes, VIKO aims to “ensure the sustainability of student numbers”, focusing on enrolment, dropout management and on-time graduation. Enrolment and dropout management are listed in the SER as aspects to be improved. SKVC data demonstrate that in the context of the downward trend in student enrolments in Lithuania, which results from the population decline, emigration and an increasing number of young people choosing to study abroad, VIKO has competed successfully for students with other colleges and remains the largest institution in this sector. For example, the decline in VIKO's student population (19%) was significantly lower than the average (31%) for the sector, and the decline in its annual enrolments during that period was below the average for the sector (28% and 34% respectively). It is noteworthy that the College has held its high position in the sector without compromising on the admission standards with, for example, only 7% of applicants enrolled in 2021/202 through the general admission procedure scoring below 4.3, compared to the average of 23% for the sector. VIKO undertakes various activities to attract prospective students. These include participation in exhibitions, open days, visits to schools, thematic lessons, and online individual and group meetings with secondary school pupils. It also involves its alumni in these activities to share their success stories.

104. The Panel noted that the data provided by the College show that whilst student enrolment grew steadily and substantially or remained relatively stable in some programmes between 2017 and 2021, it declined significantly in other programmes. The most popular fields of study are business, finance, pedagogy, nursing, midwifery and software systems. This can be explained to a large extent by the increased demand for professionals in these fields and State-budget support for some programmes. Nevertheless, in analysing the reasons behind the varying levels of success of programmes in terms of attracting students, VIKO could also consider the Panel's comments about labour-market needs assessment (par. 100), self-assessment (par. 73) and external communication and promotion (paras 42-43).

105. The student dropout rates declined from 19.5% in 2016/2017 to 14.7% in 2019/2020 and rose to 16.1% in 2020/2021. Most of those dropping out were first-year students (with the rates remaining relatively stable over the years: 28% to 32% of all students enrolled in a given year), and they did so mainly for personal reasons and due to academic failure. In its Dropout Reduction

Plan, updated in 2020, the College aimed to reduce the dropout rate to 15%, but the Action Plan, adopted in 2021, sets the target of 13% for 2023 and 12% for 2025. The number of students graduating on-time as a proportion of the number of students enrolled in the same year varied only slightly (55% to 57%) between 2017 and 2021, and the targets set are 60% for 2023 and 65% for 2025.

106. The Panel agrees with VIKO that it should make greater effort to address the issues of student dropout and on-time graduation. As explained in the SER, faculties analyse the reasons for dropout, they consider findings from satisfaction surveys, provide learning support, seek to make the learning environment more student-centred and they organise integration events. The Panel also noted that the Dropout Reduction Plan lists a number of measures which are likely to both reduce dropout rates and increase on-time graduation rates (e.g. academic and career counselling; monitoring of student attendance, learning progress and satisfaction; promotion of student achievements; improvement of emotional well-being). Some of these are also included in the faculty activity plans provided to the Panel. The Panel noted, however, that the rates for both first-year student dropout and on-time graduation vary, significantly in some cases, between the fields of study and programmes. Whilst this can be partly explained by their specificity in terms of the degree of difficulty, it may also indicate that some activity plans would need to be reviewed and / or that the measures chosen to address the issues are not yet effectively implemented at faculty level.

Research

107. In both the 2012-2020 and 2021-2025 Strategies, the College aimed to develop its applied research and professional art activities. In the view of the Panel, the procedures, guidelines and the Programme of Applied Research, Experimental Development and Art Activities and the Strategic Partnership Programme adopted by the College set a coherent overall framework for the development of these activities. There is, nonetheless, room for improvement in the vetting of strategic partners (see par. 80), and for more thought to be given to the interpretation of the evaluation criteria for the Programme of Applied Research (see par. 34).

108. To maximise its potential and link research to education, VIKO has created 30 research teams in 14 research areas and 3 art areas which are closely linked to all 27 fields of study. It has also set clear expectations for academic staff in terms of the proportion of their working time to be allocated to research and art activities and the publication and dissemination of results (see par. 45). It is planning to hire additional staff whose main tasks will be research-related, and it is setting up a fund to support research and art activities in the faculties.

109. The College has successfully developed its research and art activities and disseminated results of its research. It is the leader in the college sector in terms of the number of research publications (29% of all publications in 2021). Between 2017 and 2021, it published 41 scientific monographs and research papers, 70 peer-reviewed articles in scientific journals, 246 articles in international and other databases, 375 articles in the proceedings of international conferences organised abroad and in Lithuania. Research results were also disseminated at 64 conferences and 114 seminars organised by the College, and by academic staff and students delivering 345 and 1,308 presentations on research results, respectively, in various research seminars and other events between 2017 and 2021. VIKO's staff and students were also involved in various art activities

(organisation and participation in exhibitions; a work of art or book produced; performance, film, dance composition, concert, etc.), including 42 abroad and 509 in Lithuania. Based on results of its research, art and related activities, VIKO has received the largest share of State-budget funding for the college sector (e.g., 39% in 2017 and 25% in 2021). The SER emphasises, however, that State-budget funding available to colleges is not sufficient to develop activities and prepare for the provision of Master's programmes.

110. VIKO is increasingly involved in commissioned consultancy, research and art activities, with the number of contracts growing steadily from 1 in 2017 to 25 in 2021. In their meetings with the Panel, the heads of academic units and members of Academic Council acknowledged that, although the level of involvement in such activities is not yet satisfactory and varies between the faculties, confidence in the capacity of the faculties to deliver the expected results is growing among social partners. In this context, the Panel also noted that whilst the Action Plan sets the targets of 10% for 2023 and 20% for 2025, the number of final theses commissioned by companies and other organisations as a proportion of all final theses is low (11% to 16% between 2017 and 2019 and dropping to 6-7% between 2020 and 2021). The recent drop is largely due to the COVID-19 pandemic, during which potential client organisations worked remotely, but there is an evident need for more intense efforts, in particular, in some of the faculties. In the future, a systematic analysis of stakeholder needs (see par. 100 above, and par. 130) can provide useful insights as to where VIKO can look for clients and what topics could be proposed for final theses.

111. The Panel learned that students are encouraged to get involved in research and art activities, and they appreciate this opportunity and the support provided by teachers. For example, student research societies, active in all faculties, formulate and solve problems related to research and teaching. In 2021, the Science Shop was established as a centre for applied student research, which organises and coordinates student-led research on topics of societal interest. The number of joint publications produced by academic staff and students accounted for almost one third (29%) of the total number of VIKO publications in 2021 (31% in 2020, 12% in 2019). The Panel noted, however, the small number of students involved in the research groups (56) and in research and development projects (30). The College is aware that it needs to address this issue, and the Panel endorses its proposal to award credits to students for their involvement in research activities.

112. Based on the evidence it examined, the Panel concluded that the level of applied research and art activities is, overall, sufficient to support the degree programmes provided by the College. However, it noted that the level of involvement in and, consequently, the volume of research production varies quite significantly between the faculties, even considering their size with respect to the number of students and the total number of academic staff. Most research papers (74% and 66% in 2020 and 2021) were produced in the social sciences, mainly in Economics and Management, followed by medical and health sciences, and medicine in particular (20% and 9% in 2020 and 2021). This results from the unbalanced distribution of staff with a PhD between the faculties and the heavy workload (see par. 49), and insufficient level of funding for research, in particular, from the State budget. The issue would need to be addressed in the context of planned establishment of Masters programmes.

113. As mentioned above, the 14 research and 3 art areas are linked to all the study fields. The teachers met by the Panel confirmed that they consider research or art activities to be an integral

part of their regular tasks and incorporate the results into their teaching. Brief descriptions in an annex to the SER indicate that results of research and development projects do indeed feed into degree programmes. Results were used, for example, to establish programmes in Music; introduce a new course on sustainability issues; develop course descriptions for virtual reality platform in economics, insurance and marketing; introduce e-learning training courses and tools, and a methodological tool for the development of soft skills for business; and produce a guide for the implementation of a simulation company concept.

Recognition of foreign qualifications, credits and non-formal and informal learning

114. The College has been authorised since 2021 to recognise foreign qualifications for academic purposes. It has in place a clear procedure (*Rules for Academic Recognition of Education and Qualifications Obtained in Education Programmes of Foreign Countries and International Organisations*) in which staff of the Study Department evaluate a foreign qualification and take the final recognition decision, which is then formally approved by the Director. However, since the evaluation includes an analysis of curricular contents to identify possible differences, the procedure could usefully involve a teacher and / or head of the department providing programmes in the field concerned. Having reviewed VIKO's 43 recognition decisions in 2022, SKVC made recommendations relating to staff competences, documents to be collected and analysed for recognition, and information for applicants available on the VIKO website. As the Panel learned from the staff responsible for this area of work, the recommendations have been largely addressed by attendance at training seminars but, as the Panel recommended earlier (see par. 42), the quality of information on faculty websites would need to be improved.

115. The *Procedure for Crediting Partial Study Results* lays down transparent arrangements for the transfer of credits earned in another higher education institution, with automatic recognition in the case of a curriculum harmonised as part of an inter-institutional agreement, and up to 75% of a programme recognised for non-harmonised curricula. Unlike the procedure for foreign qualifications, this procedure involves the study office of a faculty and the head of the department concerned in the assessment of the compatibility of achieved learning outcomes.

116. The *Procedure for the evaluation and recognition of achievements acquired through non-formal and informal learning* allows VIKO to evaluate thoroughly an applicant's learning outcomes, with a team of experts appointed by the dean of a faculty reviewing the portfolio submitted and using additional methods (interview, test, demonstration of practical skills, etc.) if necessary. The final decision is taken by the dean. The overall success rate for applicants is 90% for the years 2017-2021, with annual rates varying between 72% and 100%.

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.

117. The College has continued to develop its international outlook since its establishment. Internationalisation is a “horizontal” priority in the 2021-2025 Strategy, involving all areas of VIKO’s activity and monitored by indicators that are set out in the Action Plan that accompanies the Strategy (e.g., number of strategic partnership agreements, outgoing and incoming students). The College’s Internationalisation Strategy sets clear objectives relating to: the internationalisation of the learning process; the competences of students and staff; the development of effective strategic partnerships; the creation of a multicultural learning and research environment; and the enhancement of the visibility, recognition and reputation of the institution.

118. Over the years, VIKO has developed an extensive network of partners through its membership of 13 international associations and a Nordic-Baltic Network, and 285 cooperation agreements signed with organisations and institutions in 46 countries. It has been increasingly involved in international projects (126 in total between 2017 and 2021, the number varying from 19 to 35 per annum but growing in recent years), including 78 Erasmus+ and 48 research and development projects funded from various sources. The projects were in a variety of areas: for example, computer science, entrepreneurship education, work-based learning and business partnerships, teaching and research capacity building of teachers in humanities. The staff responsible for international relations informed the Panel that the development of new and successful project proposals is a challenge and for this reason VIKO is pooling resources with its partners.

119. For the internationalisation of the learning process, it is commendable that the College offers nine English-language programmes (nearly one-fourth of all programmes) in Banking, Management of Cultural Activities, Creativity and Business Innovation, Programme Systems, International Business (with online learning modules offered since 2020/2021), Tourism Management, Business Economics, Hotel and Restaurant Business, and Popular Music. These include one joint programme and three double-degree programmes. In the faculties where there are no English-medium programmes, students are offered fee-free electives in English. As part of internationalisation at home, students have the opportunity to attend lectures and classes run by visiting teachers, both on individual visits and as part of annual international teaching weeks.

120. The College offers students a wide range of mobility opportunities. These, according to the students and graduates met by the Panel, are one of the institution’s strengths. Outgoing students as a proportion of the total number of students increased from 4.2% in 2016/2017 to 4.6% in 2018/2019. Although outward student mobility decreased significantly after the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic, it is currently on the rise making it likely that VIKO will achieve its 2025 target of at least 5%. To ensure more balanced mobility across fields of study and programmes, VIKO organises targeted information sessions and involves students who have been abroad in various promotional activities. The students interviewed assured the Panel that the credits earned abroad were fully recognised by the College. Students who have completed a study period abroad prepare their final theses in English, which evidently enhances their prospects for international academic and professional careers.

121. Among the aspects to be improved, the students met by the Panel mentioned the small number of incoming students. In the view of the Panel, incoming credit-seeking students represented a relatively large proportion of VIKO’s total student population (2.4%, on average) before the pandemic, and the proportion of degree-seeking students has been steadily growing in recent years

(1.5% in 2018/2019 and 3% in 2020/2021). Thus, the targets of 3% and at least 2.5% for credit- and degree-seeking students, respectively, to be achieved by 2025 appear to be realistic. However, since the proportion of international students varies across fields of study and programmes, VIKO could focus more on developing courses or modules in English and attracting credit-seeking students, in particular, for the fields which have so far been less involved in student exchange.

122. Staff mobility was also affected by the pandemic, but the overall figures are promising. For example, while 22% of all staff participated in international mobility in 2017 and 31% in 2019, the proportion dropped to 11% in 2020 and 4% in 2021. Since spring 2022, staff mobility has been on the rise again. On average, more than 60 teachers (around one-third of all academic staff) travelled to foreign institutions each year to teach and conduct research, and around 100 academic staff came to VIKO each year before the pandemic.

123. In addition to the development of joint and double degree programmes and other programmes delivered in English, VIKO's international engagements have inspired various programme innovations (for examples, see par. 113). As the Panel also learned from the SER and the staff it met, staff exchange and involvement in international projects is a valuable opportunity for them to improve subject-specific and teaching competences and foreign language and intercultural skills, and it has prompted revisions to learning outcomes and the development of new or updated teaching materials.

124. **In summary**, in line with its mission and strategic objectives, the College has created, and is continuing to enhance, a student-centred learning environment, and provides practice-oriented degree programmes suppling graduates who are sought-after in the labour market. It successfully competes for new students, but it has yet to implement more effectively a set of measures planned to reduce student dropout.

To pursue its strategic objective of developing its applied research and art activities, the College has set a coherent institutional framework, has been expanding its activities to cover all fields of study, and delivers research results which feed into degree programmes. However, the level of involvement in research varies between fields, reflecting an unbalanced distribution of staff holding a PhD. Whilst students contribute to a large proportion of the College's publications, a small proportion of the total student number is involved in research. The volume and quality of the College's research production are recognised by the national authorities insofar as it has been allocated the largest share of the state-budget subsidy for research in the college sector. Limited state-budget funding for research may, however, undermine the College's future efforts to enhance its capacity and develop further its activities, in particular, in view of the planned establishment of Master's degree programmes.

The College has a clear internationalisation strategy and has been extensively involved in student and staff mobility and institutional cooperation projects, covering both education and research. Considering the rising student mobility levels, currently and prior to the pandemic, it is likely that the targets set in the related strategic indicators for the coming years will be achieved.

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

126. **Recommendations for the area:**

- The College should ensure that faculties include in their activity plans effective measures to reduce student dropout, and carefully monitor their implementation. (paragraphs 105-106)
- In line with its plans, the College should put in place arrangements to increase the number of students involved in applied research and art activities and the number of final theses commissioned by external stakeholders. (paragraphs 110- 111).

127. **Good practice examples:**

- Relevance of degree programmes to labour-market needs, as evidenced by graduate employment rates being higher than the average for the college sector. (paragraph 98)
- A learner-centred environment, and support provided by teachers which is appreciated by students. (paragraphs 101-102)
- Extensive international involvement, with a large network of partners, an increasing number of cooperation projects and a large proportion of programmes delivered in English, including joint and double degree programmes, and wide mobility opportunities. (paragraphs 118-123)

3.4. Impact on Regional and National Development

The College's *Impact on Regional and National Development* is analysed in accordance with the following indicators and criteria.

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.*

128. The College's 2021-2025 Mission and Strategy focus strongly on its social responsibility and its impact on national and regional development. One of VIKO's four strategic goals, combined with specific objectives and implementation measures, is to strengthen its impact on the country and the region. To carry forward its objectives, VIKO has adopted three programmes which highlight the importance of its societal engagement and impact: the *2022-2025 Programme of Social Responsibility and Sustainable Development*, the *2021-2025 Strategic Partnership Programme* and the *2022-2025 Programme of Applied Research, Experimental Development and Art Activities*.

Needs analysis and areas of impact

129. One of VIKO's strategic objectives is to analyse the needs of the country and the region. As the Panel learned from the SER and its discussions with internal and external stakeholders, the College identifies needs by analysing national and regional strategic documents and data on graduate employment and skills shortages, findings from surveys on the demand for specialists in selected areas conducted by some organisations (e.g. Lithuania Invest), and in ongoing collaboration with its social partners at study programme, departmental, faculty and institutional levels (see also par. 100 in the section on Studies and Research). The Panel collected ample evidence that VIKO has strong links with its social partners and is responsive to their requirements.

To address these, it has introduced new degree programmes and specialisms (e.g. Chemical Analysis; Public Finance and Public Procurement) and non-formal education courses (see Lifelong Learning below), updated its programmes based on feedback from social partners in the Programme / Field Committees and in other collaboration settings, and it has been eager to provide applied research and consultancy services when commissioned by external stakeholders.

130. The SER acknowledges that the “fragmented identification of the needs” for research and art activities is an area requiring improvement, and the evidence collected by the Panel indicated that VIKO has yet to develop an institution-wide, systematic and proactive approach to assessing and responding to regional and national needs. This applies to all areas of its activity where it can make an impact, including degree programmes (see par. 100), Lifelong Learning (see below) and research and art activities. The Panel gathered from its meetings and from the documents relating to the quality assurance of programmes that, whilst all stakeholders (teachers, students and social partners) can initiate the development of a new degree programme or specialism or suggest changes to an ongoing programme, this is usually done in response to feedback from social partners. In its research and art activities and Lifelong Learning activities, the College also responds to the needs expressed by its social partners rather than canvassing a representative range of external stakeholders for their views on what is or will be needed and soliciting new clients and orders. There are no institutional guidelines on needs assessment. Feedback collected from social partners in various collaborative settings is shared within the College on an informal basis. However, findings are not documented to provide the College and Faculty Management with a broader picture and to identify gaps in needs assessment and in the services offered by the College.

131. Over the years, VIKO has built an extensive network of social partners (e.g. 59 to 76 cooperation agreements with public and private institutions and organisations signed each year between 2017 and 2021) to conduct activities fostering regional and national development. In line with the aims of the Strategic Partnership Programme, partnerships are being reviewed at the departmental, faculty and institutional levels in terms of both their value for the College and their potential societal impact. For comments on how the partner vetting process might be improved, see paras 79-80 in the section on Quality Assurance.

132. The College perceives itself primarily as an institution of the Vilnius region, with more than half of its students coming from, and most of its graduates finding employment in, the region. It exerts impact mainly through the provision of degree programmes in a wide range of fields (see par. 23) and by supplying graduates in response to employers’ demands. The relevance of programmes to labour market requirements is evidenced by high graduate employment rates (see par. 98). A key role of the College in providing professionals to the local labour market can be illustrated by, for example, the fact that 70-80% of nurses working in university hospitals in the Vilnius city are VIKO graduates. The social partners interviewed place a high value on the practical skills of VIKO graduates, as compared with university graduates who often require practical training to perform their jobs.

133. In accordance with its strategic goal of increasing the effectiveness of impact, the College aims to conduct socially responsible applied research, professional art and project activities. Although the focus on social responsibility is new, since 2017 VIKO has contributed to the development of the region and / or the nation through applied research, art and consultancy projects

in various areas. To illustrate the volume of its engagement, the number of contracts concluded with Lithuanian economic entities and public bodies increased from 29 in 2017 to 89 in 2021, with the total value of EUR 157,000 in 2017 and EUR 701,000 in 2021. Examples of project outcomes include an artificial intelligence-controlled relaxation system for children with emotional disorders; green spaces created to promote physical activity and healthy lifestyles in Vilnius City; injury prevention skills for healthy ageing developed in a rehabilitation centre; consultancy advice to enhance organic crop and livestock for agricultural companies and farmers; and a food safety system introduced at a gas station. The Panel's discussions during the site visit indicate that there are good prospects for increasing the impact of VIKO's research and art activities as it is gradually building trust among social partners in its capacity to offer high quality research and consultancy services.

134. VIKO staff and students regularly participate in knowledge dissemination and artistic activities (e.g. national science festival “*Erdvėlaivis Žemė*”; annual Fair of Nations involving communities living in Lithuania; Design Week). They are also extensively involved in volunteering and social inclusion activities. Examples include sewing protective masks and caring for patients in local healthcare institutions during the COVID-19 pandemic; helping in refugee centres and social care homes, retirement homes and animal shelters; organising events for the deaf community; and participating in cultural events for all age groups and vulnerable people in cooperation with NGOs and public institutions. In these areas, too, the College is likely to enhance its impact in the coming years: the 2021-2025 Action Plan includes the objectives of promoting volunteering and participation in social inclusion activities, and specific measures such as a performance analysis and the development of partnerships and new initiatives for volunteering, and the development of guidelines, an action plan and new projects addressing social exclusion.

Evaluation of effectiveness of measures

135. The SER states in broad terms that VIKO identifies its impact on regional and national development through its participation in the UN Global Compact network and publishes annual reports on its social responsibility and sustainable development activities. However, whilst the 2021 Report examined by the Panel provides a detailed description of activities, it does not evaluate their effectiveness or impact.

136. As the College's managers and staff explained to the Panel, VIKO evaluates the effectiveness of its measures through a review of progress in the implementation of the Strategy as part of an annual performance assessment and through feedback collected from its social partners. It uses the various indicators set out in the Action Plan. These include graduate employment rates; the number of partners, cooperation agreements and publications; and the share of revenues from applied research and art activities in the total income. Most of these are quantitative rather than qualitative indicators, measuring the volume of activity but they do not enable the College to judge the effectiveness (e.g., relevance, value) or impact of its activities. The meeting with the Academic Council also suggested that VIKO has yet to agree a clear interpretation of “Impact of R&D and art activities on regional and national development” defined as a qualitative criterion in the *Programme of Applied Research, Experimental Development and Art Activities*. Furthermore, in addition to its current lag (backward-looking) indicators, the College could consider the adoption of lead (forward-looking) indicators to predict future outcomes and impact of its activities. These

lead indicators might include the properties of social partners with respect to the extent and depth of their engagement with VIKO, their size and their position in the marketplace.

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.*

137. The development of LLL activities featured as a measure for the objective of providing high-quality professional education in the 2012-2020 Strategy and is an objective in the 2021-2025 Strategy of the College. VIKO seeks to achieve this strategic objective by expanding its LLL services and developing the process for validating non-formal and informal learning (for comments on the validation process, see par. 116 in the Studies and Research section). The SER explains that LLL is understood to be the development of VIKO staff competence on the one hand and the provision of LLL services to professionals on the other hand.

Needs analysis

138. The College conducted a survey of the competence development needs of staff in 2018/2019. Teaching and field-specific competences, which were identified for development, are particularly relevant to extending the range of LLL services offered to professionals. The heads of academic units and staff met by the Panel confirmed that they have wide opportunities to enhance their competence and the Competence Development Centre, which was set up in 2022, will provide training courses not only to external stakeholders, but also to staff of all VIKO units. (For comments on staff development, see par. 51).

139. As for other aspects of its potential impact on regional or national development, the College has yet to develop an institution-wide, systematic and proactive approach to the assessment of LLL needs. As the Panel gathered from its discussions with the heads of academic units and social partners, the faculties are keen to provide training courses in response to the specific needs identified on an ad-hoc basis by their social partners, but they do not have in place a mechanism for regular needs assessment among a wider circle of stakeholders to whom they could offer training services. The Competence Development Centre is expected to identify training needs of professionals, but as explained in the SER, its activities are limited to those working in the education, social work and translation sectors. In developing an institution-wide approach, VIKO may consider whether LLL needs could best be identified separately or as part of a needs assessment covering all areas of its expected impact in the coming years. A document which compiles evidence on external stakeholder needs collected by individual teachers, departments and faculties would help the College to identify areas where it can expand or refocus its LLL services.

Diversity of forms and conditions

140. VIKO provides a wide range of training courses and organises various other learning events (their number varying from 43 to 96 per year between 2017 and 2021) for both young and adult learners (the number of participants varying from 1,463 to 3,783 per year). Examples include

courses in additional and digital competences for schoolteachers; courses in farming fundamentals for producers; a course for tourist guides; traineeships and courses for healthcare professionals; apparel sewing and garment construction courses for residents; and various courses and events for children. Some courses lead to a state certificate (e.g. for tourist guides) or are required by law for licensing purposes (e.g., for healthcare professionals). While training courses have attracted a large number of participants, the Panel noted that courses are not widely advertised via the VIKO or faculty websites. For related comments on external communication, see paras 42-43.

141. Some courses (e.g., for schoolteachers) provide credits which are recognised towards a qualification. Based on international best practice, the College could also consider offering credit-bearing courses where ECTS credits are recognised towards a professional Bachelor's degree, and towards a Master's degree once the expected amendments to the national legislation allow the College to offer programmes at that level.

142. VIKO evaluates its training courses using feedback surveys conducted among participants after each event and through informal communication with social partners. It analyses the results and then plans improvement actions for the next year. Useful hard metrics can be collected through a digital analytics system which is currently being developed, and could be compiled and shared across the Faculties and with the College Management for course improvement.

143. The Action Plan includes a set of indicators (e.g., number of courses delivered as a proportion of all courses developed; number of trainees completing courses per year) to assess progress towards the achievement of the strategic objective of developing LLL activities. As in other areas (see par. 136), such quantitative indicators measure the volume of activity, but do not allow VIKO to collect evidence which could be used to identify gaps in training provision or demonstrate the impact of activities. The Action Plan could also be revised to include an institution-wide review of current LLL activities. Combined with a proper needs assessment, it would help the College to chart the course for the expansion of its LLL activities, for example, in terms of sectors or areas where courses could be developed or stakeholders might be targeted.

144. **In summary**, the College's impact on regional and national development features prominently on its development agenda, which reflects a shift in its strategic thinking towards social responsibility. The College has forged strong links with social partners and is responsive to their needs. It contributes to development, primarily at regional level and mainly through the supply of graduates, whose practical skills are valued by employers. The College also increasingly engages with the region through the provision of applied research, consultancy and LLL services. However, in identifying and addressing regional and national needs, it is over-reliant on ad-hoc feedback from its social partners, rather than taking a systematic and proactive approach, and the indicators it uses are not yet fit for the purpose of evaluating the effectiveness or impact of its activities.

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

146. **Recommendations for the area:**

- The College should develop an institution-wide, systematic and proactive approach to assessing and responding to needs in all areas of its activity, including degree programmes,

lifelong learning and applied research and art activities, where it expects to achieve impact on regional and national development (paragraph 130).

- The College should define a set of indicators for evaluating the effectiveness of its activities aimed at regional and national development, in addition to those currently used to measure the volume of activity (paragraph 136).
- The College should make greater efforts to advertise its lifelong learning services, including training courses in the fields of fine arts and any other successful courses, to raise awareness among stakeholders and fill a niche on the market (paragraph 140).

147. **Good practice examples:**

- The College's strong focus on societal engagement and impact, as reflected in its strategic objectives and the operational programmes (social responsibility and sustainable development, applied research and art activities, and strategic partnerships) that it has adopted in pursuit of its strategic objectives. (paragraphs 128 and 137)

IV. EXAMPLES OF GOOD PRACTICE

The Panel identifies the following examples of good practice in:

Management:

- An environment that gives students a strong sense of belonging to a community, and a motivating working environment for staff, with a coherent framework and wide opportunities for competence development, a set of incentives, and collaborative spirit (paragraph 48).
- Efficient use of resources and a reserve fund established as a strategic financial management mechanism to ensure continuity of regular and development activities (paragraphs 52-55), together with successful efforts to raise funding for, and consistent investment in, the upgrading of the College's infrastructure (paragraph 57).

Quality Assurance:

- The College's Report on Strategic Partnerships and, in particular, its quality assurance recommendations (paragraphs 78-79).
- The attention given through the Self-Assessment process to the implementation of the College's Strategy. (paragraph 73).

Studies and Research (art):

- Relevance of degree programmes to labour-market needs, as evidenced by graduate employment rates being higher than the average for the college sector (paragraph 98).
- A learner-centred environment, and support provided by teachers which is appreciated by students (paragraphs 101-102).
- Extensive international involvement, with a large network of partners, an increasing number of cooperation projects and a large proportion of programmes delivered in English, including joint and double degree programmes, and wide mobility opportunities (paragraphs 118-123).

Impact on Regional and National Development:

- The College's strong focus on societal engagement and impact, as reflected in its strategic objectives and the operational programmes (social responsibility and sustainable development, applied research and art activities, and strategic partnerships) that it has adopted in pursuit of its strategic objectives (paragraphs 128 and 137).

V. RECOMMENDATIONS FOR ENHANCEMENT

The Panel's recommendations for further enhancement are:

Management:

- The College should gather a wider range of qualitative evidence, in addition to the largely quantitative data currently collected for the strategic indicators, to improve its performance (paragraph 40).
- The College should improve the quality of information available on its websites and in social media, emphasising the distinctive features of the institution and promoting all aspects of its provision (paragraphs 42-43).
- The Academic Council should consider how it could perform more effectively its function as a senior academic body, in particular, in overseeing the implementation the College's quality management system and applied research activities (paragraph 34).

Quality Assurance:

- The College should consider how the *Quality Manual* might be made more accessible and useful to staff and students (paragraph 66).
- By acting on the suggestions in paragraphs 74-75, 79 and 81-82 the College could establish an approach to quality management that is both distinctive and effective.
- There should be a review of the self-assessment procedure paying particular attention to its focus, the extent to which self-assessment and activity reports furnish Academic Council (or its committees) with sufficiently rich information on the quality of the College's provision, and to the possibility that compliance with the procedure may place an undue burden on staff (paragraphs 72-74). The College's approach to quality management could also be strengthened by widening the scope of its quality monitoring reports (paragraph 73) and its procedure for programme approval (paragraph 75).
- Academic Council should institute a formal procedure for the periodic evaluation of the quality management system and consideration should be given to the value and feasibility of assessing the system against the principles and criteria set out in the current version of the *Quality Manual* (paragraphs 85-86).

Studies and Research (art):

- The College should ensure that faculties include in their activity plans effective measures to reduce student dropout, and carefully monitor their implementation (paragraphs 105-106).

- In line with its plans, the College should put in place arrangements to increase the number of students involved in applied research and art activities and the number of final theses commissioned by external stakeholders (paragraphs 110-111).

Impact on Regional and National Development:

- The College should develop an institution-wide, systematic and proactive approach to assessing and responding to needs in all areas of its activity, including degree programmes, lifelong learning and applied research and art activities, where it expects to achieve impact on regional and national development (paragraph 130).
- The College should define a set of indicators for evaluating the effectiveness of its activities aimed at regional and national development, in addition to those currently used to measure the volume of activity (paragraph 136).
- The College should make greater efforts to advertise its lifelong learning services, including training courses in the fields of fine arts and any other successful courses, to raise awareness among stakeholders and fill a niche on the market (paragraph 140).

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