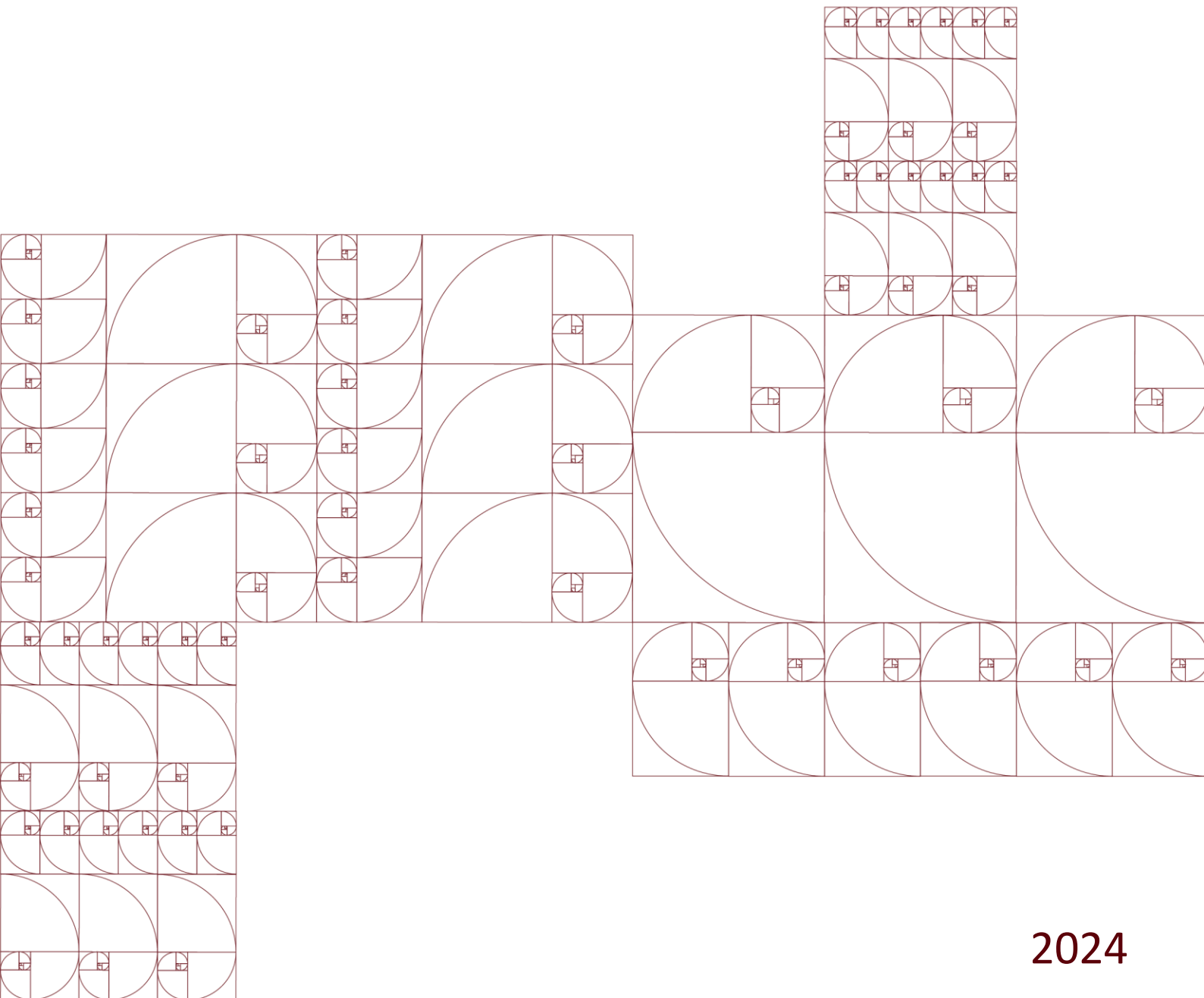


FEEDBACK ON PROGRESS AFTER INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW



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

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

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

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

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

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

Timeline of the Institutional Review

The institutional review visit took place from 30 November to 2 December 2021

The decision on accreditation granting a 7-year accreditation came into force on: 14 May, 2022

Timeline of the Follow Up

The action plan has been approved on 26 September 2022

The progress report has been approved on 12 September 2024

The external progress visit took place on 8 November 2024

The feedback on the progress report has been prepared in November 2024 by:

- Dr. Ana Tecilazic, Vice-Rector for Quality of Algebra University
- Prof. Dr. Werner Inderbitzin, Emeritus Rector of the Zurich University of Applied Sciences

Introduction

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

The action plan, which was adopted in 2022, is very general and provides no assurance that the institution has thoroughly planned the actions with which it will respond to the panel's recommendations. However, it provides a broad framework for the development and implementation of actions in response to the recommendations made. In addition, the action plan does not include indicators that would facilitate the monitoring of actions taken, making it difficult for the institution to assess progress.

Guiding questions

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

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

1. Evaluation Area: Management

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

Recommendation 1:

The College should simplify the Strategic Action Plan with respect to the most important objectives and targets which contribute to its long-term and successful development.

In the progress report it is stated that “as a result of consistent improvement, a new version of the Panevėžys College (PC) Action Strategy and Strategic Action Plan for 2021-2026 was approved (Resolution of the Council of Panevėžys College No. KT-1, 2024)” and could be found on the institution’s web site. The Strategic Action

Plan has been simplified focusing on the most important objectives and targets which contribute to its long-term and successful development which is “to increase the competitive advantage and impact of Panevėžys College on regional and national development through innovative and high-quality study and applied science activities”, with six strategic priorities, three strategic activities/programmes and eight key performance indicators. During the meeting, the institution also explained what has been changed to simplify the plan, reduce the number of tasks and indicators and support it with financial resources. In addition, the revised strategic plan was aligned with the national framework objectives for the colleges. In summary, the revised strategic plan appropriately addresses the recommendations and measurable and sufficient progress has already been made. The College has identified 10 key performance indicators that are linked to the most important objectives.

Recommendation 2:

The College should consider adopting not only quantitative indicators but also a more qualitative approach in assessing the implementation of its strategy.

The panel of the institutional review recommended the adoption of additional qualitative indicators to assess the implementation of the College’s strategy. However, all performance indicators in the Strategic Action Plan are quantitative. Instead, the Manual on the internal quality assurance system for studies (IQASS Manual) is presented in response to the recommendation to consider adopting a more qualitative approach to assessing the implementation of the strategy. It includes additional qualitative indicators for each ESG standard.

Although the College did not adopt additional qualitative indicators in assessing the implementation of its strategy, it was explained during the meeting how all indicators measuring performance and efficiency are closely linked to the College's processes and are reflected in the IQASS Manual adopted in 2024, explicitly linked to the ESGs with qualitative indicators structured according to the ESG standards and supported by the internal process pursued through the Deming Cycle of the PDCA.

Qualitative indicators are in line with strategic goals of the institution. The college collects reports about the achievement of both quantitative and qualitative results and report annually to the Academic Council. These progress reports are available on the web site but only in Lithuanian.

The College is particularly commended for achieving a good alignment between the overall strategic goal of achieving a regional impact corresponding with its institutional profile and capacity and the relevant and appropriate indicators of increased access to higher education in the region, such as the share of the region's graduates enrolled at Panevėžys College.

However, it is difficult to monitor progress if there is no baseline for each target. The institution was advised to include the baseline in its progress reports so that external stakeholders can better understand the trends in the implementation of the strategic objectives.

Recommendation 3:

The College’s Strategic Action Plan should be complemented by strategic resource planning.

The College's Strategic Action Plan is complemented by a strategic resource plan. The Strategic resource plan of Panevėžys College for 2021-2026 shows how different funding sources support the College's key activities and shows a steady increase in recent years and in plans for the future.

Recommendation 4:

The College should set out its management structure and clearly define all reporting lines.

The College has established its management structure with clearly defined reporting lines. It clarifies the structural units and delineates their lines of responsibility. According to the institution, the management structure now has clearer links between the college's units and institutional processes, making it easier to identify the responsibilities of specific units.

Recommendation 5:

The College should define clearly and transparently how new academic staff are appointed, including who takes the final decision to appoint a person.

The appointment of new academic staff is now clearly defined. There are two different types of procedures, the first involves recruitment on the basis of a public competition and the decision of the standing Admission Committee and the second without a public competition with a decision by the Dean.

Recommendation 6:

The College may wish to strengthen its efforts at integration and perhaps recruit more full-time teaching staff so that a higher proportion have their primary allegiance to the College and its norms.

The College has made efforts to increase the percentage of full-time teaching staff with primary allegiance to the College and its norms. It is clearly reported that there was an open advertisement for 20 teaching staff in 2023, of which 7 are 1 full-time equivalent (FTE) and 11 are 0.5 FTE. And another one in 2024 for 15 teaching posts of which 11 are FTE and 4 are 0,5 FTE. 5 lecturers (4 posts) and 3 assistants (2.5 posts) have been recruited so that the academic staff has been expanded with qualified lecturers at a minimum of 0.5 FTE. In some departments, such as the Department of Medical Studies, an increase in FTEs from 8 to 10 FTEs was achieved. However, the experts were not able to clearly understand the state of affairs in terms of full-time teaching staff.

The College agrees that qualified professors who are employed full-time are important for quality and it is aware of the challenges regarding the recruitment of teaching staff. The target of 40% full-time faculty has not yet been achieved (currently 36%).

In addition, the college has recruited international teaching staff to strengthen its internationalisation as suggested by the experts (para. 42). However, engaging international visiting professors may be beneficial to internationalisation and improving the diversity and quality of teaching, but is not clearly in line with the recommendation to provide more stability through a higher proportion of full-time faculty, which was mainly addressed in paragraph 41 of the institutional review report and should not be confused with internalisation.

Recommendation 7:

In addressing its target of internationalization of the College should make the information that it provides available not only in Lithuanian but also in English, internally as well as externally.

The College made the information that it offers study programmes in English on its website, Facebook, Instagram, LinkedIn, and other social networks. In addition, these activities, as well as probably other activities to support institutional internationalisation, contributed to an increasing number of international students (15 students in 2022; 97 students in 2023; 178 students in 2024).

Conclusion:

In summary, it can be said that most areas in which improvements are recommended are covered by specific actions and that the **outcomes of the review** are appropriately addressed by the **actions**. However, in the institutional review it is stated that sometimes it was not clear to which basic variable the percentage referred (para 24) and that remains to be an issue.

The actions taken effectively address the specific outcomes identified in the review in most of the cases. One exception is the action to engage international teachers as visiting professors in response to Recommendation 6. which recommends that the College “increase the proportion of full-time teaching staff with primary allegiance to the College and its norms”. Engaging international visiting professors can be beneficial to internationalisation and improving diversity and quality of teaching but does not clearly align with the recommendation to ensure more stability through a higher proportion of full-time teaching staff.

All **actions** have a clear link to specific **outputs** and intended enhancements (a change that has occurred or is pending). This makes it easy to measure the progress in the implementation of the action plan.

The links between the actions and the specific outputs are **well-communicated** in the Progress report and are aligned with the actions. All documents and other supporting evidence can be found on the institution’s website. However, terms are not always used consistently in English, so strange terms appear such as “lecturers with a degree”, “student-centred studies”, “European quality assurance regulations”, etc. This may be a consequence of the use of Large Language Models (such as Chat GPT). Therefore, proofreading English documents can be useful.

Measurable and sufficient **progress** has already been made, in line with the expected **timeline**. However, it is confusing that the revised Strategic Plan covering the period 2021-2026 was adopted in 2024 and as a result of meetings held between 2022 and 2024. Although it may have been intended to include the entire period in the revised Strategic Plan, even the past years that were originally included in the first version of the Strategic Plan, it would be clearer if the Strategic Plan only covered the period after its adoption and that it clearly presents the baseline values distinguishing them from the planned targets.

The **progress** in moving towards the intended outcomes is **sufficient**. The Panel explicitly commends the College for providing for continuous monitoring of the strategic action plan, indicators and allocated financial resources with annual updates based on the assessment of their relevance and appropriateness. In addition, the Panel commends the institution for establishing a good link between strategic developments and quality improvement, considering the recommendations of the institutional review.

Institution is aware of the potential **challenges** in implementing the recommendations that have emerged or might arise in implementing the recommendations and specifically in relation to the recruitment of full-time employed teachers.

Finally, the experts recommend that the challenges related to the implementation of the institution's action plan and strategic plan be mitigated through the joint efforts of all internal and relevant external

stakeholders. To date, the Strategy Committee and the Director have been the driving force behind the implementation of the institution's strategic plan. The involvement of more students, teachers, local authorities and social partners could be beneficial for the institution and could enhance future implementation of the recommendations.

2. Evaluation Area: Quality Assurance

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

Recommendation 1:

The College should reflect on the adequacy and applicability of its present ISO 9001 quality management system. Even though the College has taken measures to simplify the system by making incremental changes, it is still very large and complicated for a relatively small institution.

The report from the institutional review questions the adequacy of the ISO standards for the internal QA system and gives recommendations to simplify it. It also states that the institution was **reluctant to make any changes** of the internal quality assurance system. In the progress report the institution claims that the internal QA system is compliant both with ESG and ISO standards and that it is continuously **monitored and improved** and that the new version of the IQASS Manual reflects the recommendations from the experts.

In its Progress report, the College reports on developments in its internal quality assurance system since the institutional review, particularly in relation to the adequacy of the ISO 9001 standards and the appropriateness of the adopted quality management system for its size. The Progress report refers to the Internal Quality Assurance System for Studies Manual (IQASS Manual) as the main document setting out the institutional internal quality assurance system, which is directly aligned with the ESG. The reference to the ESG is incorrect when it refers to "European Regulations" which may be related to the translation. However, the experts believe that it is important to emphasise that the ESGs are a very general QA framework which is intended to be translated into national systems through standards and guidelines set by the QA agencies operating in a country. Therefore, the ESGs should not be understood as a norm but rather as a framework.

In addition, the College provides with explanations on how the ISO 21001 standard for educational institutions has served them well as a supporting tool for quality management. This statement **contradicts the recommendation** from the institutional review where the institution was advised to reflect on the appropriateness and applicability of their ISO standards to support quality assurance and improvement. The statement is also congruent with the reluctance of the institution to make any changes of the internal quality assurance system and to implement recommendations from the previous institutional review (2013), as it reported in the last institutional review (2021) in the paragraph 103.

The adherence to ISO standards and the focus on processes and their very specific descriptions leads to an over-regulation of overly prescriptive processes that do not sufficiently encourage a focus on outputs and results and are therefore not consistent with the development of a quality culture in which individuals and groups of individuals have autonomy, flexibility and appropriate responsibility to achieve agreed objectives which is an approach more adequate to higher education culture in the EHEA. The panel believes that the culture of ISO standards seems to be deeply rooted in the Lithuanian higher education system, and it will

require collective efforts at different levels to move away from ISO standards to a more ESG-like quality culture.

The Progress report lists in details various capacity building activities attended by the College staff on process quality improvement (7 seminars) and also different events related to quality assurance in higher education (under the recommendation 3).

The experts therefore reiterate the recommendation that the institution reconsider even more the appropriateness and applicability of ISO standards to support quality assurance and enhancement and focus more on capacity building activities offered by the SKVC, other higher education institutions or organisations and associations in the EHEA than on seminars related to ISO standards and procedures.

Nevertheless, the experts commend the institution for using the ESG as a framework for developing its own internal quality manual. This can serve as an example of good practice for other institutions in the country that adhere even more closely to the ISO standards.

Recommendation 2:

The College should evaluate critically the need for its Quality Management System to consist of two separate parts, both very detailed, rather than one comprehensive whole that would simplify the functionality of the system for staff and external stakeholders.

The College has revised and updated its QMS, combining the two previous parts describing the system in a single IQASS manual. The manual describes the quality assurance of study processes at Panevėžys College.

As a minor remark, the experts would like to point out a semantic issue. In the IQASS Manual students are sometimes also referred to as customers. While this is a common label, especially in private higher education, it is not appropriate and is not consistent with the principles of ESG, in which students are seen as active agents in the learning process and creators of their own knowledge, rather than passive consumers of the information presented by teachers.

Recommendation 3:

The College should benchmark its quality assurance and quality system with another Lithuanian College, even better, a comparable foreign institution of higher education.

The Progress report contains a list of 9 events attended by the College staff, all of which are relevant to capacity building in the area of quality assurance policy and culture in the EHEA. The institution also claims that “drawing on the experience and good practice of other HEIs, the quality system and its manual have been improved, processes have been updated, redundant documents or activities have been eliminated and the survey system and feedback management have been improved”. There are also plans to take part in other similar events in the future. The Panel believes that this type of events can be very useful for the institution to take further steps away from the ISO culture towards the ESG quality culture.

Recommendation 4:

The College should streamline its quality management system in order to avoid overburdening the organisation. It should carefully assess and improve the efficiency of its quality management system,

evaluating the resources allocated in relation to the results achieved from the quality management system. An optimal balance between input and output of the system should be accomplished.

The institution claims that systematic monitoring of the adequacy, effectiveness and efficiency of the QMS and its ability to meet the requirements set out in the QMS was carried out to maintain an optimal balance between the inputs and outputs of the quality system, that it is regularly presented to the director, and it is currently assessed to be adequate, appropriate and effective. The College also stated that continuous improvement and customisation of the QMS, optimising the use of resources and time, without burdening it with additional activities, is also carried out in accordance with the recommendations of the internal auditors, following a process evaluation carried out during the audit. Following the findings and recommendations of the internal audits, 14 procedures are currently being updated in 2022-2024, the IQASS Manual. As a relevant example for this, the College gives “the creation of a single functional and simpler description of the IQASS” as well as a number of processes and procedures that have been revised and simplified.

Recommendation 5:

The College has identified and named 25 different processes in management, studies and research, support and improvement activities. However, the College has not actually defined the content of these processes and could not provide adequate descriptions when requested by the Panel. The College should identify, define and describe its relevant and most important processes in the quality system.

The College reports that it has optimized its processes so that 10 processes have now been identified instead of the previous 25. This is a result of the response to the institutional review recommendation, which can be seen as a step in a good direction. During the meeting, the experts gained the impression that the institution is using these processes to ensure and improve the quality of its activities. However, when reporting on achievements, the institution focuses more on the adequacy of procedures, which can blur actual achievements. Therefore, the institution is recommended to continue even more building its capacity in ESG-like quality culture.

Recommendation 6:

The College should concentrate on a realistic and balanced set of quantitative and qualitative performance indicators in its quality management system to follow. The current number of quantitative indicators is unnecessarily large, but on the other hand no qualitative indicators are defined, even if the College has set qualitative targets in its strategic programmes. If the College endeavours to achieve its own goals such as ensuring innovative study process, the achievement cannot be measured solely with quantitative indicators, as qualitative assessment is obviously needed also.

Although the College did not adopt additional qualitative indicators in assessing the implementation of its strategy, it was explained during the meeting how all indicators measuring performance and efficiency are closely linked to the College's processes and are reflected in the IQASS Manual adopted in 2024, explicitly linked to the ESGs with qualitative indicators structured according to the ESG standards and supported by the internal process pursued through the Deming Cycle of the PDCA.

It is envisaged that the qualitative indicators in the IQASS Manual reflect the quality of studies which is the main strategic objective of the institution. Therefore, a qualitative indicator described as “Planning new study programmes or updating existing ones should correspond to this objective.

The College is specifically commended for establishing quality improvement and enhancement as a part of the strategic management of the organisation, which is monitored and managed in accordance with the Strategic Action Plan of Panevėžys College for 2021-2026 in order to ensure the highest quality of learning, teaching, study programmes and research. The College links the quality assurance with the quality improvement and enhancement, in the IQASS describing internal quality assurance system and the processes supporting the quality culture in the institution.

Recommendation 7:

The College should publish its quality assurance information in English and place the relevant internal quality documentation, now only available on its intranet, on the public website. Publishing most of the documents only in Lithuanian makes them much less accessible for external stakeholders and the international academic community.

The College’s webpage on Quality has been revised and the information about quality assurance at the College is available in English. It is easily accessible and understandable to the internal and external community and international partners.

Recommendation 8:

The College management should pay attention to creating an open atmosphere and culture where change, innovation and initiative are encouraged. Continuous improvement should include also a willingness to improve the quality system itself. In all the interviews with management, teachers and staff, all these internal stakeholders uniformly rejected any suggestion that there might be any need to change anything or that there might be any scope for improvement in the existing quality management system.

As mentioned under the Recommendation 1 in the area of quality assurance, although recommended two times to move away from the ISO 21001 standard focused on processes and procedure to more ESG-like quality assurance and enhancement approach, the institution insists that the existing system serves them well and that there is no need for major changes. This strong adherence to process-based quality management systems can perhaps be explained by the fact that the institution has 15 staff members who are trained as internal auditors and make recommendations for process improvements. However, the institution should consider opening up even more to a quality culture that is more ESG-oriented. The Panel gives here some concrete examples of what this cultural change would entail.

The institution provides the examples of changes introduced based on the recommendations from the experts and ISO standard audits to prove its openness to change. As a first example presented in the Progress report, it is stated that “the Academic Council, in line with the latest trends and requirements of the HEIs and the implementation of the ESG provisions, continuously discusses and approves new or updated descriptions of procedures related to studies and their quality, plans, reports and other relevant documents and their revisions throughout the year.” On the other hand, it would be in the spirit of the ESG if the Academic Council were to discuss the **study programmes themselves** and not the **procedures related to the studies**. The procedures are just the basis, the framework, the first step in developing an internal quality assurance system

in a higher education institution. The experts advised that, in the context of this example, the Academic Council should rather discuss questions such as: Are the leaning outcomes relevant? What measures have been put in place to assure their relevance? Is the organisation of studies efficient? What is the progression rate? What are the main reasons for students to drop out without a degree? What measures have been taken to address this? etc. The institution's response to this recommendation is that these issues are in fact included in the discussion of the Academic Council in a way that discussion about "procedures" implies discussion about all these issues.

As a second example of its openness to change, the institution stated that "students and social partners are involved in quality improvement through surveys leading to the implementation of improvement measures". During the meeting, the College explained how this information and knowledge has been used to revise and improve the quality of the study programmes.

Other examples of openness to change include various activities proposed and adopted by different people and have nothing to do with a willingness to improve the quality system itself. A suggestion "to start counselling on oral hygiene care for primary school students" (and other similar) is not even remotely a suggestion to think about introducing changes in the approach of the internal quality assurance system. Of all the examples cited by the institution, which are all interesting and relevant activities for the institutional development and are all commended by the Panel, there is not a single one that can be taken as evidence that the institution is willingness to improve the quality system itself. The institution continues to firmly believe that its quality culture is understood as a spontaneous process that occurs continuously and influences change at the College and that there is no need to change anything in response to external institutional review by independent experts unaffiliated with the institution. This conservative approach may be efficient in the local environment but is also seen by the Panel as an obstacle to further developments in the international environment, which is, among other an explicit strategic goal of the institution.

Conclusion:

In summary, it can be said that all areas in which improvements are possible are covered by specific actions. The actions taken and provided effectively address the specific outcomes identified in the review.

In addition, the College provides with explanations on how the ISO 21001 standard for educational institutions has served them well as a supporting tool for quality management. This statement **contradicts the recommendation** from the institutional review where the institution was advised to reflect on the appropriateness and applicability of their ISO standards to support quality assurance and improvement

The actions have clear links with specific outputs and intended enhancements. These links are well-communicated and aligned.

There is measurable and sufficient progress already achieved so far, and it aligns with the expected timeline. The progress in moving towards the intended outcomes is sufficient.

The College is specifically commended for establishing quality improvement and enhancement as a part of the strategic management of the organisation, which is monitored and managed in accordance with the Strategic Action Plan of Panevėžys College for 2021-2026 in order to ensure the highest quality of learning, teaching, study programmes and research. The College links the quality assurance with the quality improvement and enhancement, in the IQASS describing internal quality assurance system and the processes supporting the quality culture in the institution.

The Panel also recommends that the institution reconsider the appropriateness and applicability of the ISO standards to support quality assurance and improvement and focus more on the capacity building activities offered by the SKVC or organisations and institutions in the EHEA.

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

The evaluation area Studies and Research was rated 3 and therefore some recommendations are addressed more generally. Each recommendation from the institutional review is listed first, followed by the analysis. An overall conclusion on progress in the area of management is given at the end.

Recommendation 1:

The College should ensure that its study programs not only meet today's business and market needs but also foresee tomorrow's needs in today's changing world. This could include providing students with the skills that would enable them to build careers not only locally and nationally but also internationally.

Panevėžys College (PC) reports that a plan to revise all degree programs has been adopted. This measure is correct and necessary and in line with the recommendation.

However, in the progress report it does not indicate clearly which changes to the curriculum are planned or have already been made. This point was clarified in the panel meeting. PC reported that general competences such as collaboration skills (working in a team), digitalization, intercultural skills, etc. were integrated.

The panel meeting also made it clear that the reform of the study programs is being developed according to a standardized procedure in close cooperation with stakeholders, in particular industry. The experts encourage continuing along this path and communicating the results transparently to the outside world. Strengthening the feedback system and maintaining close contact with alumni and the business community is of great importance.

Qualified lecturers are also needed to implement degree program reforms. It is therefore right to invest in the qualification of teaching staff.

Recommendation 2:

International mobility and employability are enhanced by competence in English, especially in technical fields. Hence to support its mission the College should embed the use of spoken and written professional English into all its programs.

Recommendation 3:

It could also consider developing a plan to deliver some of its study programs entirely in English, with appropriate support for staff as well as students.

PC reports on what has been achieved in terms of increasing teaching in English and expanding international student exchanges. Specifically, there is an increase in exchange of international students (from 15 in 2022 to 178 in 2024!). It is reported that in 2023 and 2024 study programs were offered in English.

The use of English has obviously been extended, as a glance at the website shows. The comparison with the situation in 2021 is very positive. There is also a big leap in research and development (R&D), with research fields being described in English and research results being published in an English-language journal.

The measures taken are in line with the recommendations. There are some concrete indicators that show an increase in internationalization. The goals could be formulated more concretely. The experts recommend continuing along this path with the same intensity and monitoring the achievement of the goals. The experts assume that also a great deal of effort is required to qualify staff, whom have very often more difficulty with the conversion of lessons into English than young students. The experts also noticed that in the panel discussion not all participants were able to communicate in English.

Recommendation 4:

The College should develop an explicit internationalization strategy with indicators that measure its success in internationalizing its teaching and research.

The college reports that an internationalization strategy has been developed and adopted in line with the recommendation. The strategic plan 2021-2026 shows that the criteria E-5, E-6, E-8 and the criteria R-1.3.1 and R-1.3.2 have been defined. In the panel discussion PC claims that targets have been achieved. The experts recommend, that the - total or partial - achievement of targets are clearly reported, also for internal use.

Conclusion

The institution is clearly making progress in terms of internationalization. The experts assume that the level of international exchange can still be increased and therefore recommend maintaining efforts in this area. Furthermore, KPIs should be defined everywhere, and the achievement of targets should be clearly reported.

4. Evaluation Area: Impact on Regional and National Development

The evaluation area Impact on Regional and National Development was rated 3 and therefore some recommendations are addressed more generally. Each recommendation from the institutional review is listed first, followed by the analysis. An overall conclusion on progress in the area of management is given at the end.

Recommendation 1:

Since the College aims to become the center of applied sciences in the region and in the SER acknowledges R&D as an area to improve, it should allocate some of its funds to strengthen the basis of R&D.

Recommendation 2:

Applied sciences and R&D will be difficult for the College to handle if it relies solely on project revenue. Therefore, in addition to the base of funds allocated by the College itself, other sources of funding should be sought, such as EU Structural Funds and local and regional funds.

The recommendation refers to the well-known problem that good research cannot be guaranteed in the long term through project funding alone. As general funding for research is not solely dependent on decisions made by the institution, it was probably a major challenge to implement this recommendation.

Specifically, PC reports that more funds will be available in 2022, 2023 and 2024 and that it will also be possible to make material investments in the necessary infrastructure. In the panel discussion it became clear that these funds are supplementary, and it is not a re-allocation of funds.

When looking for other sources of external funding (EU structural funds; local and regional funds), the report mentions the measures that have been taken. The efforts have not yet brought the desired result, which is not surprising given the challenges and the competition from other higher education institutions (e.g. universities).

It is right to increase the chances of receiving funding by employing better qualified staff (researchers; scientific staff). The formation of research groups, the public advertising of services (in English) and the publication of research results are steps in the right direction.

The measures taken are in line with the recommendations; they have achieved the desired measurable result in terms of own financial resources but were not successful regarding external funding.

Acquiring funding from international and national funding sources requires proof of high research quality. The experts also recommended in the panel discussion to cooperate with other higher education institutions. It is also advisable to promote the qualification of in-house researchers and to recruit qualified people. Furthermore, consideration should also be given to having qualified administrative personnel that support researchers in the preparation of proposals for external funding organization.

Recommendation 3:

As the College itself mentions in the SER as an area for improvement, it could publicize more widely information about the research teams and available packages it can offer by way of R&D_services.

PC reports that important steps have been taken to increase reporting on R&D activities. The corresponding website has been updated and is now also available in English. There is a single contact (entry) point to which external parties interested in PC services can turn. A page on publications is available but only in Lithuanian. As an important step forward there is now a scientific journal in English. Obviously significant progress has been made in the area of marketing of its own research.

Recommendation 4:

The performance of R&D services and non-formal education should be evaluated by separate KPIs so that their individual achievements can be recognized.

There are indications of target achievement in R&D and in non-formal education (NFE). In the progress report there are no further explanations on the development of NFE.

The recommendation regarding KPIs for both R&D and NFE is implemented and there is also a report on target achievement in R&D. In the panel discussion, it became clear that NFE is also important for the institution. However, this would also justify somewhat more extensive reporting about this branch.

Recommendation 5

By helping students to acquire competence in other languages widely understood in the region, as mentioned earlier under 3.3. Studies and research (art), the College could support local industries and business needs focused in the free economic zone, where mostly international companies are being developed and where foreign investors are highly interested.

The report by PC on this recommendation is largely covered in the responses to Recommendations 2 and 3 in Evaluation Area 3 and therefore the experts have nothing new to comment.

Conclusions

The recommendations in Area 4 were addressed with specific measures. The institution has made significant progress in terms of marketing R&D, particularly in English. More of its own funds are being made available for R&D and the infrastructure is being improved. Little success was apparently achieved with regard to external funding - these efforts for external funds should be maintained and intensified, also in cooperation with other HEI's.

General Commentary and Reflections

Panevėžys College (PC) has addressed all the recommendations and has taken specific measures. The experts can say that PC is on the right track. The specific conclusions for each area are formulated in this report.

In the panel discussion, the experts noted that the institution has constructively reflected the recommendations from the 2021 review. The experts emphasized that the discussion should be understood as feedback from peers to peers and not as a discussion about 'right' or 'wrong'. Excellent quality requires continuous development, openness and a willingness to change. The experts would therefore like to encourage PC to continue on this path and, in line with the recommendations, to keep the management structure as well as KPI's clear and simple, to review openly the existing quality assurance approach and not primarily justify it, to increase further the proportion of full-time staff, to deepen internationalization and English language skills at all levels (students, professors, management) and to persistently strengthen the search for external sources of funding for R&D.

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