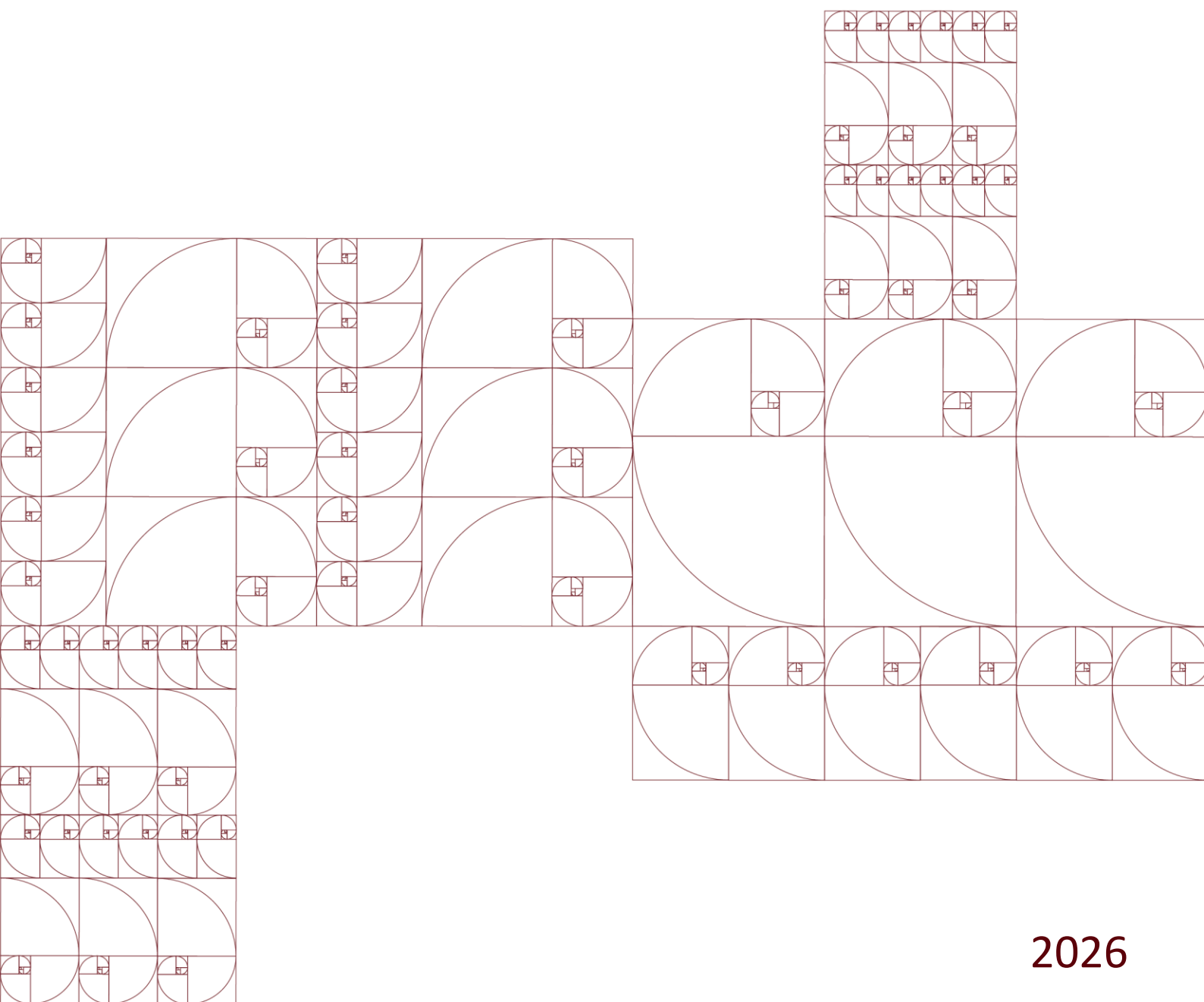


FEEDBACK ON PROGRESS AFTER INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW



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 10 to 12 May 2022.

The decision on accreditation granting a 7-year accreditation came into force on: 7 October, 2022.

Timeline of the Follow Up

The action plan has been approved on 9 December 2022.

The progress report has been approved on 9 December 2025.

The external progress visit took place on 22 January 2026.

The feedback on the progress report has been prepared in February 2026 by:

- Prof. Colin Raban, Emeritus Professor, University of Derby, United Kingdom;*
- Mag. Dr. Oliver Vettori, Dean Accreditation and Quality Management & Director Program Management and Teaching and Learning, WU Vienna University of Economics and Business, Austria.*

Introduction

The institutional review of Kaunas College (hereafter referred to as “KC” or “the College”) was carried out in May 2022. The review report concluded that the College should receive a positive evaluation with three of the Evaluation Areas deemed “good”, and one (Management) being assessed as “very good”. The report offered a total of 13 recommendations and identified seven examples of good practice.

In July 2024 the College was merged with Alytus College (hereafter referred to as “AC”). The 2021 review of AC had resulted in a negative evaluation. Whilst AC’s impact on regional and national development was assessed as “good”, management was deemed “unsatisfactory”, and the remaining two evaluation areas were judged to be “satisfactory”. The AC review panel offered a total of 27 recommendations and only two examples of good practice. The sections of the AC’s review report that dealt with the third and fourth evaluation areas concluded that “the main issues in (these areas) are rooted in the limited strategic planning and management capacities and/or effectiveness of the quality assurance system of the College”.

This report draws on the institutional review findings for both colleges, together with a progress report and improvement plan which addressed the recommendations contained in the two review reports. The College also supplied a copy of its *Strategic Plan for the Development of Internationalisation*. Issues arising from this documentary evidence were discussed during an online progress visit that was held on the 22nd January 2026. The visit was attended by 15 of the College’s senior staff and by a student representative.

The documentation that was made available to the panel provided a useful basis for its preparations for the online progress visit, and for an open and productive dialogue with KC’s senior staff. However, the panel is mindful of the fact that the indirect nature of the evidence gathered from the progress report and from the visit did not enable it to verify the accounts provided by the College or to make final judgements on the effectiveness of the actions that it has taken. That is the task of the panel that will be visiting the College for its next institutional review.

Where relevant, this report refers to the recommendations in the 2021 review of Alytus College and the 2022 review of Kaunas College. For clarity, the panel has employed the same numbering convention as that which had been adopted in the KC progress report.

The merger with Alytus College

At the time of the 2021 review, Alytus College offered a diverse range of programmes, catering for 708 students who were supported by 80 academic and 34 administrative staff. The panel learned from the progress report that AC had been incorporated within KC as a discrete Faculty, and at the progress visit the panel was able to explore the impact that the merger has had on the College. Senior staff described the merger and the need to address the numerous recommendations in the AC review report as “a big challenge”, and as “work in progress”. Nevertheless, it was apparent that much has been achieved in the eighteen months since the merger. Alytus College has been brought within KC’s management system and is subject to the College’s revised strategy, mission and vision, and its administrative systems.

The challenges cited by senior staff also included the consolidation of study programmes, and the merging of the “two different communities”. The panel was told that study programme consolidation entails the merging of similar or overlapping programmes, reviewing their profitability and viability, and standardising curricula. Whilst it was apparent that this “key element” is currently consuming the time and energy of the study field committees, the panel was unable to determine whether the progress achieved in establishing college-wide strategies and management systems is matched by the full integration of staff, students and programmes at Faculty level. The panel was also unable to establish whether the creation of an Alytus Faculty is a transitional arrangement, with the consolidation of study programmes leading ultimately to the absorption of AC staff and programmes into the four original KC Faculties. These, together with the College’s longer-term strategy for completing the merger, are issues that KC might wish to consider in preparation for its next institutional review.

1. Evaluation Area: Management

The report on the 2022 review of Kaunas College concluded that “the effectiveness of (its) management arrangements gives grounds for confidence in its ability to meet the challenges that lie ahead for all higher education institutions within Lithuania and further afield”. By contrast and as previously noted, the panel for the review of Alytus College had deemed that its “limited strategic planning and management capacities” were a root cause of the shortcomings identified in the other evaluation areas. The incorporation of AC as a KC Faculty means that its strategic planning, management and administrative systems have been superseded by those of Kaunas College, thereby reducing the significance for present purposes of the management recommendations (1.3-1.13) in the report of the Alytus College review.

The College was invited to consider whether its approach to strategic planning resulted in a degree of complexity that could impede its effectiveness (Recommendation 1.1). Paragraph 30 of the review report added that the review team had “sought to establish whether the complexity of the strategy ... could act as a straitjacket”, limiting the College’s ability to adapt in an agile manner to unforeseen changes in the institution itself or within its operating environment”. And paragraph 31 of the report suggested that “the large number of (its key performance) indicators ... could impede the effective execution of the monitoring and implementation process”. Whilst recommendations 1.4-6 and 1.9 in the Alytus College report also dealt with aspects of that college’s approach to strategic planning, Kaunas College’s progress report records that the Alytus Faculty is now subject to KC’s management and planning systems.

In its response to Recommendation 1.1, KC provides details of the measures that it has taken to ensure and improve the effectiveness of the strategic planning process. These measures include the revision of KC’s strategic plan to take account of the new opportunities and challenges brought by the merger with Alytus College, the integration of annual with longer term planning, and a reduction in the number of key performance indicators. The College’s response to the recommendation did not, however, address directly the issue of complexity. Instead, the panel was told that the simplification of the planning process would be “a task for the future”.

One of the College’s strategic goals is to “develop a sustainable community that nurtures the culture of a learning organisation”. Having noted that the College defines a ‘learning organisation’ as one that is committed to the continuous development of staff competences, the review report suggested that KC might consider the implications of the concept for the College’s “structure, culture, and preferred styles of management” (Recommendation 1.2). The College responded by describing the work of its recently established Lifelong Learning Centre. The Centre is located within the Human Resources Unit and it, together with the Study Development Unit, is dedicated to the task of providing training services to internal and external users and coordinating the dissemination of micro credentials and individual credit bearing modules. Although the work undertaken by the Lifelong Learning Centre has intrinsic value, the College’s response to the recommendation suggests that it has not considered the implications of the concept of a learning organisation in the manner suggested by the review report.

The remaining recommendations in this evaluation area were for Alytus College to consider. Recommendations 1.3 and 1.7 relate to the governance of AC: all relevant stakeholders should be

represented on Council, students should be encouraged to actively participate in the governance of the institution, and action should be taken to ensure the accountability of governing bodies. These issues have been addressed through the incorporation of AC as a Faculty of Kaunas College. The progress report provides detailed evidence of the training and support that students, and “student representatives in governance”, will receive. This, in the view of the panel, is commendable and consistent with one element in Recommendation 2.1 (see below).

The review report for Alytus College contained a recommendation (1.8) that has a more general relevance to the new, post-merger institution. This was that AC should “develop and implement a proactive risk management system, ... covering strategic, performance, reputational, financial, academic and political risks”. The report (paragraph 39) explained that AC’s approach to risk management “is more reactive than proactive”, identifying a risk once it has occurred, and focusing on external risks to the exclusion of a wider range of potential threats. In responding to the recommendation, the College’s progress report revealed a preoccupation with financial matters and made little mention of the wider range of risks. However, the progress report did state that the current approach “forms the basis for more systematic risk identification...”. When the panel enquired into the College’s plans for the future development of its risk management procedures it was assured that the broader range of risks is considered in annual self-assessment reports, and that the monitoring of study fields provides an opportunity to “foresee some possible risks”.

2. Evaluation Area: Quality Assurance

There is a stark contrast between the ways in which the two review reports assessed the effectiveness of the colleges’ quality assurance arrangements. The report on Kaunas College stated that “the particular strength of (these) arrangements is the thorough and comprehensive nature of the College’s procedures” which, in turn, “owe their effectiveness to a management culture which places a strong emphasis on the mutual accountability of the institution’s stakeholders”. The report on Alytus College, on the other hand, found that “the internal quality assurance system is not yet fully compliant with the European Standards and Guidelines’ and that ‘there is little evidence of (its) effectiveness”. As is the case with the management of the College, the incorporation of AC as a KC Faculty means that its quality assurance system has been superseded by that of Kaunas College. The significance of the quality assurance recommendations (2.4-2.11) in the report of the Alytus College review is, therefore, reduced.

Recommendation 2.1 encouraged KC to “consider the opportunities to develop sector-leading practice in assuring the quality and standards of its provision”. The review report directed the College’s attention to four possibilities. It could: take more responsibility for the setting and maintenance of academic standards by involving academic experts in the approval of new programme proposals and by instituting College-wide requirements for the moderation or second marking of students’ assignments; adopt a procedure for the peer observation of teaching; further develop the College’s due diligence and risk assessment procedure when it considers new partnerships; and establish a programme of training for student representatives.

The panel noted the unevenness of the College’s response to these suggestions. The College’s revised procedures provide for the involvement of social partners rather than academic experts in the programme development process, and the progress report made no mention of KC’s approach to

programme approval. The issue of moderation or second marking is not addressed by the progress report which, instead, describes various revisions to its procedures for the assessment and crediting of learning achievements. During the progress visit the panel was informed that second marking is “a work in progress”, and that the practice of criterion-referenced assessment is encouraged.

It appears that the College is making some progress in developing a system for the peer observation of teaching: there is a draft procedure, and the progress report emphasised “the importance of collegial feedback as an integral element of the institution’s quality culture”. The panel was told that while this, too, is “a work in progress”, the College is an active participant in a national project to establish the system for the evaluation of a teacher’s didactic competences. The College is also an active participant in the European Universities Alliance (EUA) initiative and it intends to work in accordance with EUA guidelines, and with reputable partners, to develop Erasmus Mundus joint masters programmes. The panel is confident that the stringent award criteria for Erasmus Mundus programmes will be of assistance to the College in developing its own due diligence and risk assessment procedures.

Finally, it was apparent to the panel that the College has gone beyond the suggestion that it establish a programme of training for student representatives. In addition to the introduction of a training programme, the College has approved procedures to ensure student representation in study field and other committees, and developed a student intranet through which users can access a comprehensive range of documents and information.

The report on the 2022 review of Kaunas College suggested that KC should enhance its Quality Manual so that it provided “a more user-friendly and comprehensive guide for students” (Recommendation 2.2). The panel found, however, that the version of the Manual that is published on the KC website continued to “set out the general principles that inform the development and operation of the College’s quality assurance system”, rather than include in a clear and more readily accessible form “the procedures and steps to be followed by users of the quality system”. It seemed, therefore, that KC had not yet produced a version of the manual that integrates KC’s supplementary documents into the main body of the text. However, the College’s response to an AC recommendation (2.4) indicated that a new version of the Quality Manual had been produced in a form that is consistent with the Kaunas College recommendation (2.2). When the panel sought to clarify the position during the progress visit, it was informed that the merger had provided KC with the opportunity to revise its regulatory and procedural documents and that the College is planning to build on this work to update the Quality Manual as an accessible, “unified and interactive tool” once the College’s Strategy 2030 has been approved. The response to Recommendation 2.4 also listed various activities in support of the development of the quality assurance system. These include consultations with staff, training sessions, and seminars on “the application of specific quality assurance measures in the operational practice of KC’ and the alignment of the College’s procedures with the European Standards and Guidelines”.

Recommendation 2.3 complements Recommendation 2.2 by advising the College to consider the development of a programme level handbook as a specific location where students can refer to the full range of relevant policies and procedures. The progress report provided a credible account of the action taken by KC to inform students of “institutional policies, procedures and requirements”. This does not, however, include the production of programme level handbooks.

The remaining recommendations in this evaluation area (2.4-2.11) are drawn from the AC report. Taken in combination, they urged Alytus College to undertake a wholesale upgrading of its quality assurance arrangements. To a large degree, these recommendations have been overtaken by the merger, with the Alytus Faculty being subject to the well-established procedures of Kaunas College. It is apparent that appropriate action has been taken in response to these recommendations, and the panel is confident that, as the College continues to develop its approach to quality management, it will keep under review the helpful advice contained in the review report for Alytus College. This includes the need to: maintain an appropriate balance between procedural compliance and quality enhancement (paragraph 72); secure the active involvement of teachers and students in the annual review of the quality assurance system (paragraph 76); and ensure that the system does not become “excessively bureaucratic” and “burdensome” (paragraph 82).

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

KC provided detailed updates on 11 recommendations in this evaluation area, although six of these had been addressed originally to Alytus College. KC’s decision (following the recent merger) to provide separate responses to these recommendations is laudable and it reflects the College’s ambition to achieve integration as soon as is possible; on the other hand, the responses to the AC recommendations also demonstrate that the full incorporation of Alytus College (now Alytus Faculty) into the merged institution is still some time away, as can be seen from the instances of actions having been taken within the new Alytus Faculty, rather than at whole-institution level (e.g. the response to Recommendation 3.6).

With regard to study programmes and teaching and learning, KC appears to have made considerable progress since the review visit. It is apparent that the purpose of the review report’s recommendations was to encourage KC to develop a clear profile and position, for example with regards to its commitment to innovation (Recommendation 3.1). KC is clearly working towards this goal by embedding curricular elements dedicated to innovation and entrepreneurship across the portfolio.

Both, KC and AC, had received recommendations regarding their rather low student numbers in some programmes and, for reasons that are not fully clear, but which echo the above observation, those recommendations are addressed separately in the progress report. Kaunas College has taken well-documented actions regarding its programme portfolio and, according to the online meeting with members of the College’s leadership and professional services team, student numbers seem to be increasing for most of the institution’s provision, and programmes for which there is low student demand have been or will be abandoned or amended. The number of English language programmes has been cautiously increased, with KC being committed to raising the number further in the future. However, from the panel’s perspective, these plans lacked concrete detail.

The situation is similar with regard to KC’s internationalisation efforts (see Recommendation 3.4, but also Recommendations 3.10 and 3.11). These efforts are targeted at the hitherto stand-alone Alytus College. The progress report itself is rather sparse regarding progress in this area, but mentions the International Development Plan for 2026-2030. The Plan is impressive with respect to the underlying situational analysis, and contains clear objectives together with tentative key performance indicators (KPIs) for each objective. However, it provides little detail on how these objectives should be

achieved. Participants in the online meeting with the panel accepted this point and the need for the further development of the Plan.

The KC review report recommended that the College should monitor the balance between contractual research and the institution's other needs and the needs of its relevant environments. Although the progress report did not fully address the recommendation, it was apparent during the online meeting that staff were aware of the issue. Overall, KC has a plan for its research activities which also includes the new Alytus Faculty. It is also clear, that achievement of full integration, with respect to research structures and cultures, will take some time.

In conclusion, KC has demonstrated that it has taken appropriate steps to address the review report's recommendations for this evaluation area. The institution has taken the feedback seriously and in a transparent manner, and there are clear measures of success presented for all major areas of operation. In line with panel concluding remarks (see below) it might have been advisable for the College to address the AC recommendations in a different way, even though the approach taken by the progress report reflects KC's commendable ambition to secure a swift incorporation of the Faculty within the new structure. The way the institution responded to some recommendations, however, also highlights where the College and Faculty levels are not yet fully aligned.

It might also be helpful if the College were to invest more time and effort in developing roadmaps towards the institution's ambitious objectives for this area. KC has shown a laudable capacity to define its strategic objectives and its measures of success. However, a stronger emphasis on the actions that are intended to lead to these outcomes would facilitate the management of the development process.

4. Evaluation Area: Impact on Regional and National Development

The College's awareness of the importance of developing and maintaining effective relationships with regional and national stakeholders was apparent from its progress report and during the progress visit. In the 2022 review, the institution had been encouraged to systematise these efforts, i.e., to use the successful example of relationship building with Tauragė Municipality as a model for establishing further collaborations in the region (Recommendation 4.2), or to systematically analyse the data that it collects to monitor the impact of its graduates and research activities in meeting regional and national objectives (Recommendation 4.1). Whilst the progress report lists a number of new collaborative efforts, institutional "impact monitoring" still appears to be at an early stage. The College continues to gather data from alumni and from companies, and it has started a process of "self-assessing" the impact of the various academic units and the institution as a whole. The self-assessment of impact raises several methodological questions, and KC has declared its intention to give priority to developing a more effective methodology within the context of its new strategic plan.

Kaunas College has made progress in the field of lifelong learning. For example, it has increased the number of non-formal education programmes and the number of adult learners. KC sees this as evidence of being on an upward trajectory in the field of continuous professional development. The report and the online meeting showed, however, that a clearer and more targeted strategy might be of greater long-term benefit and it would facilitate the promotional activities suggested in Recommendation 4.3. At the moment, the College's apparent intention is to serve a wide range of learners from a variety of professional backgrounds and at different stages in their career and

personal life cycles. KC's target groups also include its own staff. This is a very broad mission given the institution's size and resources, one that will make it difficult for the College to build a distinctive profile.

The progress report for this evaluation area responds to recommendations originally addressed to Alytus College (namely Recommendations 4.4 – 4.6). This creates the impression of a certain unevenness since some of the actions that have been taken (or which are planned) seem to be limited to the newly established Alytus Faculty, whilst others apply to the College as a whole. Whilst this impression may not have been intended, it raises questions concerning the current position with respect to the incorporation of AC with Kaunas College.

In conclusion, KC has clearly made visible progress in this evaluation area and, to a large degree, it has itself defined additional actions to be taken in the near future. The College is encouraged to further develop its impact assessment methodology and to take a more strategic and focused approach with respect to its lifelong learning activities.

General Commentary and Reflections

The report on the institutional review of Alytus College had suggested that the weaknesses identified in the third and fourth evaluation areas stemmed from the College's "limited strategic planning and management capacities" and the ineffectiveness of its quality assurance system (paragraphs 114 and 131). In this respect, the reports for the two colleges complemented one another, and many of the recommendations to Kaunas College are phrased in terms that convey the reviewers' confidence in the College's ability to discharge its responsibilities. This is particularly apparent in the report's recommendations for the continuing enhancement of KC's quality assurance and management arrangements. On this basis, and in the light of the evidence discussed in this report, the current panel is satisfied that the strength of these arrangements will ensure the successful management by KC of its merger with Alytus College.

This report has noted that the College's responses to several of the recommendations do not directly address the issues identified in the KC report. This may be the result either of misunderstanding or of disagreement. In view of the fact that these recommendations were expressed as suggestions rather than requirements, disagreement would be entirely legitimate and, as such, the College's responses do not undermine the current panel's trust in its handling of its responsibilities. In its conversations with staff, and from KC's progress report, the panel also learned that a number of actions are either ongoing or will be undertaken at some point in the future. The panel regards this as evidence that the College has undertaken a realistic assessment of the challenges presented by the merger with Alytus College, including the need for it to schedule the actions it will take over an extended time period.

Occasionally, however, the progress report includes responses to recommendations for both of the original colleges thereby conveying a sense of "separateness" rather than alignment. Similar recommendations are not always dealt with in the same way. In some cases, the merger is treated as resolving the problem because the Alytus Faculty is subject to the KC management system; in other cases, different actions seem to have been taken at the College and Faculty levels. This is not to say that there is a misalignment between the actions at the two levels, but rather that the coherence of the narrative is impaired with the result that the experts gained the impression that the progress

report had been written by several authors with differing interpretations of the recommendations and the appropriate way of responding to them. Nevertheless, and as previously stated, the strength of KC's management and quality assurance arrangements should provide a sound basis for the College's continuing work in incorporating Alytus College.

© Centre for Quality Assessment in Higher Education (SKVC), 2024.

A. Goštauto g. 12, 01108 Vilnius, Lithuania

tel.: +370 5 205 3323

ivs@skvc.lt

skvc.lrv.lt