

STUDIJŲ KOKYBĖS VERTINIMO CENTRAS

ŽEMAITIJOS KOLEGIJOS VEIKLOS VERTINIMO IŠVADOS

INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW REPORT Of ZEMAITIJA COLLEGE

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I. INTRODUCTION

This report describes a review of Zemaitija College (the College) carried out in 2012 by the Centre for Quality Assessment in Higher Education (SKVC) invited team of experts from Lithuania and other European countries (the team). The report summarizes the activity and findings of the institutional review and presents the collective judgments of the review team. The report is based on the information provided by Zemaitija college in the self- evaluation report (SER) and the information collected during the site visit to the college between 1- 5 October 2012.

The review was conducted in accordance with Lithuanian legal acts requirements: Procedure for the External Review in Higher Education approved by Government Resolution No 1317 of 22 September 2010 and the Methodology for Conducting an Institutional Review in Higher education, approved by the order of the director of SKVC No 1-01-135 on 25 October 2010.

THE INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW PROCESS

The Self Evaluation Report

1. The College submitted the SER that addressed the key elements required by the Lithuanian Institutional Review process. The SER was prepared by a working group within the College that included managers, staff, students and a representative from employer and social partners. Staff, students and partners who met the Team confirmed that wide consultation was undertaken in the development of the SER and a wide range of stakeholders was invited to contribute comments and responses as the report was developed. The report drew on information from student feedback reports, and staff activity reports, and made reference to key themes and issues that the College felt to be of significance at the current time. The SER was well written and clear with a tone of self-critical comment about the issues which were presented.
2. The SER covered the information required to prepare the team for its visit to the College. This was presented in a clear format with self-critical comment and a number of appendices to elaborate detail of the following aspects of provision, these included *inter alia*; College management structures, student profile data. Staff public activity reports and the 2010/11 Annual Report. Additionally the SER included a full list of all programmes currently on offer.
3. During the site visit to the College the team learned of significant issues, understated in the SER, facing the College. The most important of these issues

concerned the significant reduction in student enrolment over the past three years and a worryingly high attrition rate of students at all stages of their programmes. This has led to a drop in student numbers that has the potential to threaten the viability of the College if the situation is not addressed with urgency. However, the review team found the key data in the annual report describing current challenges rather than the SER. The team considered that such a serious matter should have been represented expressly and clearly in the SER. The SER, whilst providing good critical commentary on many aspects of the ongoing operation of the College, failed to address the strategic strengths and weaknesses of the College adequately.

4. *The Review team recommends that in future review and evaluation self-assessment reports, greater attention is paid to highlight the most significant issues drawing on systematic evidence available to the College* drawing on quantitative and qualitative data.

THE PROCESSES OF REVIEW

5. Before visiting the College, members of the team reviewed the SER and its annexes, commenting on the points made and the questions that were prompted. Each member submitted initial questions and comments on the SER against the review criteria. This was mapped onto a document for the team that highlighted recurring issues and areas requiring further information. This facilitated the development of the programme of activities of the review, and enabled identification of potential areas of enquiry for the team. SKVC employees introduced the team to the process and organized the training about higher education system in Lithuania; procedures that must be followed for Institutional Review; and the protocols & courtesies to be observed within the review process. An external assessment of the Academy's learning resources was provided for the Institutional Review by Lithuania's Research and Higher Education Monitoring and Analysis Centre (MOSTA). The team was able to learn more about the national policy arrangements including the funding arrangements which were pertinent to Zemaitija College.
6. The team travelled to Telsiai County on the first evening of the review. The site visit to Zemaitija College took place over the three days (2,3,4 October 2012) and included 12 formal meetings with College staff, students and external partners. A full tour to review facilities Zemaitija and Telsiai campus sites was also included in the site visit programme. The team spent the final day of the review day at SKVC reviewing the evidence collected during the review, discussing and agreeing the

findings and conclusions of the review, and coming to collective and full agreement on the judgments in the final report. During all meetings the Secretary to the team, Professor Sue Frost, took detailed notes, and after each meeting the team identified key points and areas for further exploration in subsequent meetings.

7. Additional Material was available to the team before and during the site visit. The members of the team were presented with the results of the review of learning resources, associated infrastructure conducted by MOSTA and with the evaluation decision of 22 June 2012. The team received a range of information from the College in advance of the visit including the annual report, a breakdown of the student profile and information on the staff profile of the College.
8. While on site, the College provided further information including student withdrawal documents, minutes of College Board meeting and minutes of College Academic Council Meetings and further data on student numbers.
9. College staff participated actively in meetings and colleagues were committed to the process of review. The team was impressed with the willingness of staff, students and external colleagues to engage with the review process and the number of external stakeholders who travelled to meetings and the large number of staff who attended for the final feedback meeting exemplified this. All meetings were conducted with the aid of an interpreter to support the three members of the team who do not speak Lithuanian. Lithuanian speakers in the team confirmed the accuracy of the translation. Many staff were able to speak English but understandably reluctant to use their second language in meetings they considered to be of considerable importance to them and their College.
10. At the beginning of each meeting the Chair explained the purpose of the review, assured those attending of the non-attributable nature of any comments and invited colleagues to be open and frank in their responses. Lack of experience in reviews of this type perhaps led to some interviewees being unwilling to be critical occasionally even calling the College “perfect”. While effort was made to reassure colleagues, such defensiveness was common in all meetings of students and staff; though it did not detract from the team’s ability to gain an understanding of the key points that were made.
11. The review team consisted of the following members:
 - Chair: **Professor David Timms**: Higher Education Consultant and former Deputy Vice Chancellor, Bath Spa University (1996-2009). Chair of many European reviews including those of ENQA.

- Professor Georges **Monard**: Former Secretary General of the Ministry of Education Member of OECD-review teams ; Chair/member NVAO reviews in Belgium and The Netherlands
- **Mrs Jolanta Bareikiene**: Dean, English language lecturer at Kaunas College Kėdainiai Jonušas Radvila faculty.
- **Mr. Guido Wolf**: (Employer representative) Baltic Red, Zabolis Partners Group - Director for Advisory Services & Group Development
- **Mr. Darius Vizbaras**: Student Representative. 2nd Year. Vilnius College
- **Professor Susan Frost**: Review Secretary. Emeritus Professor and former Pro-Vice Chancellor Academic Affairs, University of Huddersfield UK. Institutional Auditor and Reviewer for UK QAA 1999-2012

II. BACKGROUND INFORMATION ABOUT THE INSTITUTION

12. Zemaitija College is a state higher education institution of Lithuania, located in the Somatigia region of the country. The College was founded in 2002 as part of the reorganization of the former Rietavas Agricultural School, which has a long history. In May 2003 the College merged with Telsiai College of Applied Arts and in December 2003 the Mazeikiai management Studies Branch was opened. This formed the three faculties that currently operate in the towns of Rietavas, Telsiai and Mazeikiai. There are currently (2012-09-01) 902 students enrolled on programmes across the three campus sites: 388 in full-time mode, 514 on part-time basis . Additionally a number of students undertake short adult education courses as well as bespoke company courses on the Rietavas site.
13. 15 programmes of study operate across campuses with a focus on agronomy, management, engineering, information systems and land management at the Rietavas campus; arts & crafts pedagogy, music pedagogy, dance pedagogy, culture, tourism and social work at Telsiai Faculty campus; and business, enterprise and logistics subjects at the Mazeikiai Faculty.
14. Zemaitija College plays a very active role in its local community and works with employers and social partners in all three towns in the County. The College has 35 partnerships with other institutions in Lithuania and internationally, which support student and staff exchange and broader collaborative project work.
15. In 2011/2012 Zemaitija College had a total of 137 teachers of whom 74.6 were full time academic staff and 15 had doctoral level qualifications. This represents a

reduction in the total number of academic staff number by 15% over the last five years.

16. The SER reports a total of 1228 students in 2011 (headcount), of whom about 60% are part time mature students. In the 2012/13 academic session there appears to have been a 25% decline in the enrolment of students. The number soon after the beginning of the 2012/13 academic session is thus estimated to be in the region of 800. Precise student numbers at Zemaitija College are difficult to determine as the number of students withdrawing at any point is high.

THE FINDINGS OF THE REVIEW TEAM

General Comments

17. The team found the College to be a cohesive team of staff with a loyal and committed approach to the College and to students. Students put a high value on the support, care and assistance of the staff, which matches best practice in institutions of this size. There is a strong regional focus, particularly at County level, which results in effective partnerships with employers and social partners. It is clear that the College plays a key part in the life of the local community, particularly in relation to adult education.
18. The College is strongly vocationally oriented, and the practical focus is strongly emphasized. Staff offer expertise in practical applications in their subjects, and curriculum development reflects the changing needs of local practice areas. This is a considerable strength that is regarded highly by students and employers. Many students come to this College because of its specialist vocational programmes after studying at other higher education colleges and universities in Lithuania.
19. The Review team spent considerable time exploring with staff how the College had managed the reduction in student numbers, and was preparing for the future. The culture of loyalty and support was self-evident but there was less evidence of critical, debate, and some defensiveness and resistance to explore those aspects of strategy where the College might exert some control. Staff at all levels suggested that the problems lay wholly outside the College, including adverse financing arrangements, inappropriate national policies and the challenge of continued emigration from the region. The College leadership believed that all of its problems stem from current government policy, from the national focus on Vilnius and emigration from the region. While it appeared to be true that the funding flow and voucher system in Lithuanian higher education had contributed significantly to the

decline in student numbers, and that the demographic changes affecting all Lithuanian higher education may have had a more marked effect in the regions, the Review team saw little evidence of coordinated internal action at the College to stem student withdrawal, or to consider radical decisions about the curriculum in the light of new conditions.

20. The strong culture of support at the College, combined with the exclusive practical arrangements also militates against a culture of critical debate in academic studies with less evidence presented to the team of a willingness to challenge one another through robust analytical academic processes. Students identified poor teaching on occasion and were aware that they could raise this with the College Director. There is no culture of peer appraisal and review that might offer a regular source of feedback and development for teachers who needed further preparation for their role.
21. Students who met the team commented on the value of the practice-based learning in the College, but suggested that the courses make limited demands in the area of theoretical enquiry. Students stated that they had not felt 'challenged' by their studies at the College. It should be acknowledged that such students considered that the practical bias was in fact more highly valued by their present employers, but the Review team was not convinced that the College had struck the right balance between theory and practice, and the proper professional aspirations of the College tended to outweigh the requirements of its students for the kind of academic and intellectual development inscribed in such sources as the European Qualifications Framework.
22. The College is a small and close-knit community of staff who rely on informal methods of communication. The team noted an over-reliance on anecdotal evidence for explanations of change. Underpinning data analysis does not evidence management decisions and anecdotal conclusions were sometimes at variance with the data analysis undertaken by the team. [e.g. the attrition data]. Minutes of meetings reflected limited information and give little indication as to the underpinning basis for strategic decisions [e.g. minutes of academic board discussion on student recruitment]

III. STRATEGIC MANAGEMENT

23. The College has a **strategic plan** that has been developed to address strategy between 2011 - 2016. The plan is updated annually and activity is included in the

annual report presented to the College Board. The strategic plan is derived from its core mission and emphasizes that the College is a higher education institution that *trains* (sic) specialists to meet the demands of the workforce in the Zemaitija region. The mission of the College informs the strategic plans and prioritizes education in the arts and social, biomedical & technological sciences to meet regional and national needs. Additionally priority is given to applied scholarship and research, efficient and effective support for lifelong learning and the creation of opportunities for study that reflect contemporary practice. The plan complies with regional and national policy and recognizes the principles of the European Higher Education Area and the European Research Area.

24. While the College mission refers to regional and national priorities, the College associates itself strongly with the region. The College takes account of national need but essentially provides education to meet local demand. The team noted that in the past some areas of the College provision have been regarded as areas of excellence with a regional and even national reputation. Land and agronomy studies were one example. The team was curious as to why such national excellence was not exploited to form a national centre. The tendency to marginalize the national perspective possibly undermines the national recognition that the College might otherwise be afforded. The College culture seems to be critical of national initiatives, particularly those in Vilnius, and there may be missed opportunities in Zemaitija to exploit the College's highly specialist expertise.
25. The team was concerned to note the lack of priority in **strategic objectives** given to the recruitment and retention of student numbers in the light of the challenges in student funding within the region and the student funding voucher system. This means that the overarching key considerations in the strategic plan did not make explicit targets to address these significant issues. Although the broad information was presented at the Board meeting, the discussion recorded in the minutes is superficial and does not inform the development of the strategic objectives in the plan.
26. Senior managers and governors who met the team took the view that the situation was generated by national funding policies that were particularly hostile to the funding needs of small regional colleges across Lithuania. Moreover the view of the College executive was that the main response of the College to the failure of student recruitment would be to undertake further lobbying to secure a change in national policy. The significance of this situation and the risks of "no policy change" were not considered in the strategic plan.

27. The strategic plan is overly general and does not address the issues that are specific to this College. The key objectives reflect a continuing commitment to the current direction and seem to reflect a conservative approach to maintain the status quo. There is no commitment in the College to develop a strategic drive to address the changing needs policy environment and the possibility of being required to re-engineer the College structures, provision and management approaches to address issues that threaten the continued stability of the institution.
28. The team was concerned to note, for example, that while the annual report 2011/12 makes clear the level of academic failure in some study courses, there is no evidence of systematic strategic review of the academic causes of failure. The annual reports, for example, that in the last academic year 446 students graduated and 392 students failed to complete their studies. The Review team undertook a short exercise to analyze the withdrawal statistics from a sample of students. A number of student documents were examined and a map of reasons for students discontinuing their studies. The annual report noted that 266 of the 329 non-completions were due to academic reasons, but the Review team's sample showed that most such failures were at a late stage in the course. Presented with the very high failure rates College staff blamed poorly prepared students, lack of commitment or inadequate preparation by schools. No reference was made to any formal consideration of whether there were faults in the programmes or the teaching, which might contribute to the failures, even though the rate of non-completion was much higher in some programmes than others. The team was not presented with evidence of quantitative analysis of these patterns that might inform key actions to retain current student numbers.
29. In addition, it appeared that the College's response to reduced numbers had been to make small cuts across the board rather than to tackle areas that are failing to recruit and retain students. The team recognized the hard work that is undertaken to try and conserve the current portfolio but felt that tactic reflected unwillingness to address difficult decisions. The team came to the view that the failure to consider the possibility of staff under-performance and to question the viability of the curriculum as a whole represents a failure of strategic leadership.
30. Students and alumni also expressed the view that poor performance is linked to poor attainment at secondary school, and they commented that many students who fail to complete have poor attendance and poor commitment to study. The team was surprised to learn that there is no current action to ensure attendance, identify learners at risk and to ensure that students entering with poor academic attainment

have an intense programme of support studies or other mechanisms to assist them to complete the course for which they enroll.

31. The Review team noted positively that the College maintains academic standards, and in spite of the pressure to retain students does not lower the level of achievement that required for an award. The team came to the view however that preserving all activities, albeit at a reduced level, and simply hoping for external conditions to change was unlikely to preserve the College in the face of the present threats. A more strategic approach, with firm leadership, would be more likely to attract and retain the College's student numbers, and secure its future.
32. *The review team recommends that in the light of the serious problems of falling enrollment and student non-completion, the College acts with urgency to review its strategic and operational planning processes to ensure that plans addresses the immediate priorities and drive appropriate actions to address the problems associated with those study courses where non-completion is most marked. (Recommendation 2)*
33. The College has an **information management system** that gathers data to follow the formal requirement for reporting within the annual reports and the annual summaries of performance that are considered by the key committees. The team considered that the data was not sufficiently comprehensive or systematically analysed to inform the College properly about the progress of implementing its strategic plan, and that annual data collection was unlikely to meet the needs of a situation changing so rapidly. Examples included the lack of detailed analysis of student withdrawal data and a lack of data concerning the first destination statistics of students graduating from programmes of study.
34. The strategic plan is not written in ways that enable **impact measures and performance criteria** to be identified and key performance indicators are difficult to determine. The result is that the annual report is not sufficiently sensitive to alert the College Board to critical changes in performance and explanations for poor performance in some areas of the College. Senior managers and governors of the College are overly reliant on conversations and other anecdotal evidence to underpin the measurement of strategic performance leaving the College vulnerable to weak responses to key events.
35. The **decision making** in central committees of the College is dependent on an upward flow of information from departments. Reporting activity is largely organized in departments and an annual report is prepared for the faculty. Faculty

reports are reported to the Director who forms the overall annual report for the College. [SER54]. The team came to the view that the decision making approach is insufficient for internal processes to assure external success. The decision making of central committees is hindered by a lack of systematic data collection, little deliberation, poorly recorded decisions and a lack of action planning to ensure that there is a feedback on outcomes.

36. *The review recommends that as a matter of priority, there is a review of the ways in which data is collected, reported and used formally to support the College's ability to measure the key goals of its strategic plan using quantitative and qualitative indicators. (Recommendation 3)*
37. The team had the opportunity to visit two of the three faculty sites. College premises are well maintained and provide a good range of resources for students. There is a library facility on each campus that is complemented by a virtual collection of papers and databases. The work on display and the book and journal collections reinforced the commitment to professional and practice based learning. The academic and theoretical collection was more limited but adequate. Staff are welcoming and use the learning environment well to support students in their studies.
38. Students commented very favourably on the quality of their accommodation and meals.. The team saw classes in action including practice sessions, music laboratories and the use of information technology. In view of their observations and the outcomes of the MOSTA survey, the Review team saw no reason to consider that the learning resources provided by the College are anything other than fully satisfactory.
39. The College has an **internal quality assurance system** that is derived from national guidelines and the European Framework for Quality Management (EFQM). It owes a strong debt to the industrial or commercial model of quality assurance favoured by the International Standards Organization (ISO). The quality guide gives an overview of the principles of quality assurance and quality management. Oversight of quality assurance procedures is located in the remit of the College Quality Committee. During discussions with staff who met the team, it seemed to the panel that quality management is the responsibility of the Quality Committee and the model is a compliance approach ensuring that educational activity meets the requirements of the quality policies of the College. The approach is to ensure that quality assurance is controlled and coordinated centrally where the self-assessment reports from teachers and departments are considered by the

Quality Committee of the College. The approach is to use an hierarchy of regulating documents that ensure compliance with quality requirements of the College.

40. Peer review is not a principle of the College's system, and 'ordinary' academic staff are not in membership of the College **Quality Committee**. Staff have a superficial understanding of quality processes and are not actively engaged in the deliberative processes that underpin quality enhancement and review of practice. Ideas and improvements are shared positively at the level of the department but there is little evidence of cross-College quality engagement that would support peer challenge, peer observation or the personal development planning required in areas of poor academic performance. The model is focused on regulation and compliance that arguably undermines active learning from critical comment of one another and a willingness to learn from each other.
41. The views of students are taken seriously. Surveys are conducted to gain feedback and students have meetings with faculty staff to discuss any concerns or issues. The student representative system is in place and examples were readily given of changes that had occurred as a result of student feedback. Pastoral support of students appears sound and students confirmed that staff are supportive and active in helping to solve problems that arise.
42. Staff who met the team were unable to give an explanation of the ways in which study programmes meet **European Qualification requirements**. The study guides available to the team used professional competence descriptors with little use of academic and intellectual reference in the learning outcomes of programmes. There was little use of external contribution to decision making at the level of the course, even when mapping against the level descriptors of the EQF were first undertaken, and it is not clear how new teachers from a professional background are supported in understanding the core and transferable academic and theoretical developments required in students at level 6. The Review team considered that while courses may operate at the level of their award, the College does not have effective mechanisms to assure itself that this is the case.
43. The team came to the view that in the light of the very low turnover of staff, a quality system focused on regulation and compliance as well as the limited evidence to suggest a deep understanding of academic levels, the College might benefit from a review of its quality assurance mechanisms. This would, potentially strengthen the college's ability to measure performance and enhance academic quality.

44. *The review team recommends that the College must review the mechanisms by which it assures itself that study programmes match the learning outcomes of the European Qualifications Framework. In developing this assurance the College is advised to consider the use of external academic experts to support the regular oversight of academic performance (Recommendation 4)*
45. The **enhancement of the professional elements** of study programmes is active and evidenced by the numerous examples of curriculum design that meet the demands of the labour market. On the other hand, while students value the practice based learning opportunities that are available to them, there seems to be a tendency to underplay the academic demands of programmes. As described above, the Review team's analysis of a sample of student withdrawal information showed that there is a marked tendency for students leave in the third year. This is particularly noticeable in courses such as engineering technology. The Quality Committee discusses general aspects of courses but there does not seem to be evidence of systematic review that identifies poor student performance and makes appropriate assessment of the teaching and learning strategies that are being used.
46. The Review team believes that the quality assurance system does not support the deliberation and questioning characteristic of peer-review systems such as those implied by the European Standards and Guidelines, and is less likely than such systems to expose particular teaching and learning challenges, or to provide assurance that proper academic support, development and remediation is put in place.
47. *The review team recommends that the quality management system should be reviewed to ensure that as a result of active engagement by staff in quality assurance and there are more robust mechanisms to support, develop and enhance the academic quality of poorly performing courses (Recommendation 5)*
48. Staff in the College appear to be highly professional and cohesive. They are highly valued by managers and by students. However, there appears to be a lack of leadership ensuring focus on the business priorities of the College, and directing staff activity towards the key priorities, the recruitment and retention of students. The College does not collect and utilize systematic data on staff performance other than descriptive reports on activity plans.
49. The College has sought to retain the level of **teaching staff** in the face of formidable financial challenge. Staff numbers have remained fairly constant, though student numbers are dropping, with reductions in contracted contact hours and in

salary levels for staff. This has been applied across the board, without reference to the quality of teaching or academic performance of students.

50. The College has moved to improve the use of learning technology and the use of applied research in teaching design, which reflect some recognition of the need to develop and change. The approach, however, is largely *permissive and reactive* without the central steer and impetus necessary to ensure that the new approaches genuinely improve the quality of the academic learning experience. One example is the use of the virtual learning environment, Moodle. The College has invested in a system capable of providing a platform for interactive learning. This resource however is largely used as a repository for teaching materials. Where a small number of teachers exploit the potential of Moodle their expertise and experience is not disseminated widely to optimize the use of the resources available.
51. The effective management of change in the College demands a more proactive approach than hitherto. Energy and drive is needed to ensure a whole-systems focus on the key priorities. The College must recognize that trying to maintain the status quo in the hope that external conditions may change for the better is unlikely to secure its future, and that it must capitalize on its strengths and eradicate its weaknesses. The team came to the view that while the important quality controls are in place and used according to the requirements of the Quality Guide, the system is not such as to provide assurance that the College's study programmes will excite and engage students in ways that make it possible for all, including those with less capability on entry, to complete their programmes successfully.
52. *The College is recommended, as a matter of urgency, to develop the leadership of the College at executive and Board level to ensure that there is a greater direction for staff, at all levels, to focus on the key risks and priorities of the College. (Recommendation 6)*
53. The team noted the **rationality with which funds are used**. The College is committed to its mission and all resources are utilized in securing the purposes of the College. The College performs very well in competing for project funding, EU resources and other structural funds. This is supported in the MOSTA analysis that confirms good stewardship of the College resources. While the College is not able to provide all the services available to students in large institutions, some of the facilities, such as student dormitories and the equipment for some specialist courses is as good or better than can be found anywhere in Lithuanian HE. The Review team considered that students have access to the resources that they need and there is strong pastoral support from staff of the College.

54. The College has a **code of ethics** which largely relates to academic conduct matters. Some study courses within the College have developed a code of professional ethics, such as those in social work. The College may find it useful to extend its professional practice development to include a more general code of Professional Ethics for all students to support the continued development of practice placements and project activity.
55. **In summary**, the team believes that Zemaitija College has a number of inherent strengths in relation to strategic management. The close coherence of staff, the commitment to students and the loyalty to the College are strongly evidenced and commended by the panel. The College has the capacity to direct staff action and to manage change because of this clear focus on students, strong support from external partners and a willingness to strive to ensure the standards of awards and the integrity of the College are maintained. The team notes however a number of weaknesses of strategic management that have the potential to undermine the College's capability and its capacity to manage change in the context of the current economic and demographic climate. The failure to employ measurable strategic objectives effectively, the lack of systematic data management, a reluctance to recognize and manage poorly performing programmes leave the College **exposed to considerable risk**.
56. **The Review team's judgment on strategic management is negative.**

IV. ACADEMIC STUDIES AND LIFE LONG LEARNING

57. The Review team explored academic studies and life-long learning of Zemaitija with reference to the **criteria** set out in the Methodology and considered their compliance with the requirements for Lithuanian higher education and harmonization with the principles of the European Higher Education Area.
58. The main focus of the self-evaluation report was largely focused upon full-time students. Although 57 percent of the students are adult, part-time learners, these students were not represented in the group of students and alumni who met the panel.
59. The team noted that the programmes and life-long learning provision offered were compliant with the University's mission and also contributed to meeting the needs of the regional economy and social and cultural development.

60. There is a significant number and wide range of programmes that reflect a diverse range of professional practice skills. Study programmes are adapted to reflect **contemporary approaches and applied research in practice**. The team met students who had undertaken studies in other universities and enrolled in Zemaitija College to gain professional qualifications to prepare them for specific areas of practice.
61. **Life-long learning includes various forms of study**: full-time, part-time and transfer from one cycle to another. There are also individual plans of study as well as the regular programmes on offer. A major challenge for the College is the inability to offer short cycle awards in Lithuania. The College recognizes that many students would benefit for a staged learning approach that offers qualifications at EQF level 4 and level 5. An application was made, by the College, to the Ministry of Education for permission to provide short cycle, professionally focused programmes such as those in other EU countries but the application was refused. The review team recognizes the absence of short cycle awards and affirms the College view that such awards could be of considerable value to students wishing to study vocational pathways at different levels of access.
62. The College **accredits prior learning** and credit obtained on some exchange schemes. There is evidence that students are welcomed from other institutions and many students in Zemaitija leave to enter other higher education programmes.
63. More than 50 percent of the College students are undertaking studies on a part-time basis, though all students and alumni who met the team were studying on full-time programmes. College staff who met the team emphasized that all students are treated in the same way regardless of the mode of study. In discussion the team learned that the College does not make any specific adaptation to cater for the needs of mature part-time students who may be returning to study, sometimes after some length of time. While recognizing the strong commitment to supporting students the team came to the view that the College could develop further its approach to supporting students studying on a part-time basis, in particular exploring ways of providing enhanced support, managing programmes in ways that accommodate family and work commitments and the provision of out-of-hours resource.
64. *The College is advised to consider what, if any, additional mechanisms could be developed to support part-time learners and improve the arrangements that enable them to complete their course of studies.(Recommendation 7)*

65. Students are represented on all major **decision making committees** in the University, including the College Board and the Academic Council. Students were involved in the consultation about the self-assessment report and the strategic plan.
66. Programmes are drawn up according to a standard format which involves completion of a course description. They included **learning outcomes** linked to programme content and assessment with a particular focus on practice. It was not clear to the team that learning outcomes were in everyday use everywhere in the College, or whether all staff had a clear understanding of the concept and need for clear articulation of learning outcomes. Additionally there is less evidence of academic skills specification and the team believes that this could be strengthened in the design of learning programmes.
67. **Teaching and learning activity** is largely classroom based with a range of lectures, seminars and laboratory activity. Timetables are planned to reduce the gaps between taught sessions to avoid timetabled time for students. There is less evidence of a learning culture that fosters independent and reflective learning that exploits the unique relationships between theory and practice development.
68. *The review team recommends that the College explores ways in which courses are supported to develop reflective, independent learners able to apply the deeper concepts of theory in practice. (Recommendation 8)*
69. The opportunity for **international exchange** is highly valued in broadening the horizons of staff and students. Several examples of international mobility of staff and students were shared with the team. Staff reported support for work abroad and noted that the Erasmus programme helped staff to travel and bring new understanding and skills back to the College.
70. In student exchanges, outgoing students are more numerous than incoming. The team heard from students of some of the barriers to taking up an exchange place. The likelihood of having to give up a job in Lithuania with no guarantee of another on the student's return was seen as a major barrier. Language problems were also thought to inhibit exchanges. The cost of travel was also perceived by students to be a barrier. Moreover there is little opportunity for part-time students to undertake exchange given the commitment to work and family responsibilities. The College works hard to overcome these barriers and the level of student exchange is high for a College of this size.

71. ***The team commends the commitment to support student and staff mobility which makes an active contribution to the College community (commendation 1)***
72. The College has a good record of student employment on completion of courses. The College reports high levels of student employment at levels approaching 99%. There is no systematic collection of first destination data with follow-up reports to examine the trajectory of the student career after graduating. Alumni and former students enjoy making continued contact with the College and are often invited to an annual event and to College activities such as cultural events. Alumni seem eager to promote and support their College. The team came to the view that the College could do more to track the progress of former graduates and engage Alumni actively in marketing the College.
73. ***The College is encouraged to review the ways in which it might make better use of graduate data and alumni engagement to improve the tracking of former graduates and the promotion of the College to potential students (recommendation 9)***
74. The use of practice based learning in the College is impressive. College has considerable expertise and strength in using employers on final project assessment teams. The team learned of a number of student projects that made significant impacts, transforming aspects of the workplace. The tri-partite agreement between student, teacher and workplace mentor is innovative and an example of best practice. The team commends highly the involvement of employers and social partners in the learning process and the way in which external partners participate in the assessment of student projects.
75. ***The team commends the development of practice based education that supports external partners in making an active contribution to the development and assessment of students. (Commendation 2)***
76. The commitment to the development of learning in practice is underpinned by a teaching workforce that is immersed in the practice field. The team learned of the close links that supported continuing professional education to ensure that staff are up-to-date and skilled in their subject areas. This includes the facility for practice sabbaticals whereby academic staff return to a period of practice to update skills and maintain expertise in practical disciplines. Additionally the opportunities to secure practice experience abroad through mobility programmes that enhance skill and knowledge are commended.

77. *The team commends the commitment to practice based education that supports professional sabbaticals for staff in ways that underpins contemporary and relevant curriculum development. (Commendation 3)*
78. **In summary**, the Review team found much strength in the College in relation to academic studies and lifelong learning, including the major contribution that it makes to regional education, close and long-standing contact with social partners, and the tripartite agreements with practice, which ensure the professional relevance of the programmes. Weaknesses identified by the team include the need to enhance the development of independent learning and extending the tracking system to use alumni more systematically in the promotion of College programmes.
79. **The Review team’s judgment on the area of Studies and Life-Long Learning is positive.**

V. RESEARCH AND ART

80. The Review team explored research and art activities in the College with reference to the criteria set out in the Methodology and considered the relevance, international links and the harmonization of research/art activities in the College with the provisions of the European Research Area.
81. Applied research features in the College’s strategic plan. The College recognizes that this is an emergent function but it has sought to prioritize the development of applied research and scholarship within all of its academic activity. To achieve this there is a commitment to the academic skill development of staff. This is largely linked to applied research projects and it is difficult to identify the academic research skill progress. The number of staff with PhD qualifications is relatively low and some have left to move to other academic institutions. Departments encourage staff to contribute to the nature of research at the College including active partnership and collaboration, consistent with its other activities. In particular the College has taken part in a project with national and international partners to develop systematically what it calls ‘tailored applied research’, which may be conducted by groups of students as part of their final project studies or by groups of staff. The College aims to ensure that research is not seen as totally separate from teaching and learning, and is conducted in the areas where it offers programmes of study.
82. The College provided a detailed account of its applied research projects. Results are disseminated through meetings as well as publications, but peer-reviewed

publications remain limited and mainly located in professional journals. The College does not take part in the evaluation of research conducted by the Research Council of Lithuania. The Review team encourages the College to consider addressing the national authority to being able to take part in this evaluation. This would provide a benchmark for the standard of the College's research, and although the current standard might be rather low, this would provide both an incentive to enhance research and a way of measuring success in doing so.

83. The College's research seems to match its mission well, but its international standing could be enhanced by introducing a more explicit strategic goals to increase the number of publications in academic peer reviewed journals and conference proceedings nationally and increasingly outside of Lithuania. The College might usefully consider what being research active should mean for its staff, particularly in terms of expected outputs, expectations with regards to academic peer review and what proportion of its staff should be more research intensive.
84. The College is very clear in the expectation that its research activities are explicitly directed towards regional goals. Zemaitija College is the only higher education institution in the region and thus makes an important contribution to scholarship and knowledge development in the municipality. The team learned of areas of expertise that could contribute to national excellence if developed further. More could be made of the College research outputs if academic staff supervising the projects were encouraged to integrate the results from successive projects into coherent research programmes that could develop into specialized centres of excellence producing original contributions to knowledge. Currently the staff supervision of student projects is regarded as academic research activity. Involving students in research that addresses regional and national priorities reflects the emphasis of the College's programmes of study, and should help student employability as well as external relations.
85. The College's research is complemented by consultancy provided for a fee or free of charge for the public good. Some consultancy also attracts funding from private companies and other organisations. This consultancy seems to be working well and staff are actively engaged in significant projects in the region. The team would affirm the College's commitment to this work and encourage further development to widen opportunities beyond the region. The team respects the focus on the immediate region but considers that the expertise, partnerships and resources available might enable further collaborative scholarship with other small organisations in the Baltic States and beyond.

86. The College's academic and social and business partners make a positive contribution through the commissioning of project work and the active support of students and staff. This enables the College to participate in research that is more responsive to local needs, engage staff and students more effectively, and give good support to its partners. The influence of the College's partnerships in the workplace seems to make a difference that is measurable and highly valued by local organisations.
87. The College's research strategy complies with the expectations of the European Research Area as far as is reasonable for a small institution in one of the smaller European countries. The College continues to stimulate activity and support consultation and scholarship in ways that seem to fit with the capacity of the College while continuing to improve the research capability.
88. There is limited research mobility within Europe given the developmental nature of the research endeavour. However the team commends and affirms the continuing commitment of the College to enhance applied research and scholarly activity.
89. **In summary**, the team came to the view that the College's scholarly activities are matched to its teaching programmes and to regional needs. It is not entirely clear to the team what relative priority the College assigns to regional, national and international recognition of research quality in deciding how much effort to put into different types of research and how to prioritize different approaches to applied research. What is achieved is commendable at this current stage of development and the team would encourage the College to continue to develop its research activities and to explore the opportunities for working in partnership with organisations of a similar size nationally and internationally to progress its ambitions for a research based culture.
90. **The Review team's judgment in the area of research and art is positive.**

VI. IMPACT ON NATIONAL AND REGIONAL DEVELOPMENT

91. As indicated above the College makes a significant impact on regional development. This is so significant that any threat to the viability of the whole College could arguably also be a threat to the labour supply for the local economy. This is due to the intimate relationship between the College and employers in the region. This impact comes through training professionals, stimulating innovation, and influencing the local social and cultural environment. The College makes

explicit its commitment to the maintenance of the region's traditions and culture that support the retention of the local population and diminish the continued emigration from the region.

92. College staff are actively engaged in regional public affairs, including outreach from professional activities and student groups. The Director of the College is the elected President of one of the business representative organisations. The College is very proud of its regional role and has a number of examples where recognition has been gained for its contribution to particular projects. Less evidence is provided of measures that enable the College to quantify its contribution and assess the impacts of different types of engagement. To this extent the College is encouraged to find ways of improving its impact measures in ways that demonstrate regionally and nationally the significance of its contribution.
93. The College's strategic focus on supplying graduates for the labour market creates a clear focus on work-skill development. The College has established an adult education centre that provides short courses for local organisations and bespoke education to meet regional development needs. Employers who met the team spoke very positively of their own experiences in using the College for the further education of their staff and in some cases for personal development learning programmes.
94. **In summary**, the work of the College is strongly focused on regional development goals and this appears to be successful, although more systematic evaluation would be valuable to support this impression and to guide further development.
95. **The Review team's judgment in the area of impact on Regional and National Development is positive.**

VII. GOOD PRACTICE AND ENHANCEMENT RECOMMENDATIONS

96. Zemaitija College is a small institution with a strong commitment to its local community and region. Its mission is clearly focused on supporting, developing and retaining the strength of the local community through its role in developing the workforce and supporting the local traditions and cultures. There is a commitment to students that is real and evident. Staff are close to their students and committed to their progression and achievement. Learning resources are highly satisfactory and the learning environment is comfortable and supportive. Students value the

portability of their qualifications and their ability to use their practice learning in the real work of work when they graduate.

97. However, the College is currently facing a critical financial environment compounded by a continuing loss of students from its courses. The magnitude of this challenge is sufficient to threaten the viability of the College if measures are not put in place urgently to improve recruitment and reduce student attrition, without lowering standards. The strategic plan, while broadly effective for a stable financial environment recruiting large numbers of students, is not fit for the purpose of directing and driving management action in the current context.
98. Management and staff seemed to welcome critical debate and discussion through the present review process, and this positive approach may be useful in continuing the use of external expertise in helping the College at this critical time. The team hopes that the commentary in this report will help the College to catalyze its strategy for change and expedite action that will create a more stable environment for the development of the College. The College is too important to the region to allow it to flounder unaided at this time.

Commendations

- The team commends the commitment to support student and staff mobility which makes an active contribution to the College community
- The team commends the development of practice based education that supports external partners in making an active contribution to the development and assessment of students.
- The team commends the commitment to practice based education that supports professional sabbaticals for staff in ways that underpins contemporary and relevant curriculum development.

Recommendations

The Review team recommends that:

- in future review and evaluation self-assessment reports, greater attention is paid to highlight the most significant issues drawing on systematic evidence available to the College.
- that in the light of the serious problems of falling enrolment and student non-completion, the College acts with urgency to review the strategic and operational planning processes to ensure that plans addresses the immediate priorities and drive appropriate actions to address poor performance in study courses.

- as a matter of priority, there is a review of the ways in which data is collected, reported and used formally to support the College's ability to measure the key goals of its strategic plan using quantitative and qualitative indicators.
- the College must review the mechanisms by which it assures itself that study programmes match the learning outcomes of the European Qualifications Framework. In developing this assurance the College is advised to consider how the use of external academic experts might support the regular oversight of academic performance
- the quality management system should be reviewed to ensure that as a result of active engagement by staff in quality assurance and there are robust mechanisms to support, develop and enhance the academic quality of poorly performing courses
- as a matter of urgency, the College is advised to develop the leadership of the College at executive and Board level to ensure that there is a greater direction for staff, at all levels, to focus on the key risks and priorities of the College.
- the College considers what, if any, additional mechanisms could be developed to support part-time learners and improve the arrangements that enable them to complete their course of studies.
- the College explores ways in which courses are supported to develop reflective, independent learners able to apply the deeper concepts of theory in practice.
- the College is encouraged to review the ways in which it might make better use of graduate data and Alumni engagement to improve the tracking of former graduates and the promotion of the College to potential students

VIII. JUDGEMENT

Žemaitija College is given the negative evaluation.

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ANNEX. ŽEMAITIJA COLLEGE RESPONSE TO REVIEW REPORT

Žemaitija College accepts and agrees with the Institutional Review Report, we have not noticed any actual mistakes.