



STUDIJŲ KOKYBĖS VERTINIMO CENTRAS  
CENTRE FOR QUALITY ASSESSMENT IN HIGHER EDUCATION

---

## COMMUNICATION FIELD OF STUDY

### OVERVIEW REPORT

**Prepared by the chairperson of the Communication field of study expert panel:**

1. Panel chair: Assoc. Prof. dr. Bradley Wiggins
2. Academic member: Prof. dr. Anastassia Zabrodskaia
3. Academic member: Asst. dr. Prof. Lars de Wildt
4. Academic member: dr. Andželika Bylaitė (KK, VIKO, and ŠVK)
5. Social partner: Svajūnė Marcinkevičienė (KK, VIKO, and ŠVK)
6. Student representative: Viktorija Lankauskaitė

**SKVC coordinator:** Aleksandras Kačanauskas

Report prepared in 2024  
Report language: English

## I. INTRODUCTION

Overview report is based on the external evaluation of the Communication field of study in the following Lithuanian Higher Education Institutions (HEIs):

- Kazimieras Simonavičius University (hereinafter KSU)
- Vilnius Kolegija (hereafter VIKO)
- Kauno Kolegija (hereafter KK)
- Šiaulių valstybinė kolegija (hereinafter ŠVK)

The external evaluation was organised by the Centre for Quality Assessment in Higher Education (SKVC), Lithuania.

This Overview report focuses on the main findings of the external evaluation of the field of study from a general point of view. External evaluation reports containing more detailed information on the field of study in the relevant HEIs, including evaluation points, commendations, and recommendations, are available on SKVC's website.

Based on the findings of the evaluation, the decision has been made to give a positive evaluation to the following HEIs and cycles:

- KSU, first cycle in Fashion Industry, and second cycle in Integrated Communication
- VIKO, first cycle in Public Relations
- KK, first cycle in Applied Communication
- ŠVK, first cycle in Corporate Communication and Marketing

Based on the findings of the evaluation, the decision has been made not to give a negative evaluation to HEIs.

Upon receiving a positive evaluation, SKVC decides to either grant full accreditation to the field of study and cycle for a period of 7 years or provide partial accreditation for a period of 3 years. If the field of study and cycle is given negative evaluation, it is not accredited.

## II. OVERVIEW BY EVALUATION AREAS

This section of the Overview report highlights the overarching observations made by the expert panel regarding the positive aspects of the Communication field of study in Lithuanian HEIs, as well as areas identified for improvement. In April 2024, a panel of experts conducted comprehensive accreditation reviews at four higher education institutions (HEI) in Lithuania: Kazimieras Simonavičius University (KSU), Vilnius Kolegija (VIKO), Kauno Kolegija (KK), and Šiaulių valstybinė kolegija (ŠVK); hereafter this overview report will refer to these institutions with the abbreviations shown in parentheses. This report provides a comparative summary of the findings from these reviews, categorised under the same seven headings featured in each separate report completed by the expert panel. The accreditation reviews reveal that each of the four Lithuanian HEIs possesses unique strengths and areas for growth. By addressing the identified areas for improvement and also by leveraging their strengths, these institutions can continue to enhance their educational offerings and research contributions, benefiting students, faculty, and the broader Lithuanian society.

### 1. STUDY AIMS, LEARNING OUTCOMES AND CURRICULUM

All four institutions have developed study programs that align with their respective missions and goals, and learning outcomes. Both in terms of the design and delivery of the programs, all four institutions clearly demonstrate a commitment to learning, research and the practical aspects of knowledge in preparing students to eventually enter the Lithuanian workforce. These programs emphasise practical and theoretical knowledge often by incorporating input from social partners and employers, by relying more on applied research among teaching staff but also as the guiding principle behind the design and implementation of final theses in both (the four) first and (the one) second cycle programs. KSU and ŠVK focus on interdisciplinary approaches and practical experiences, particularly in communication and marketing fields, with KSU's particular advantage being its Fashion Industry program that serves a niche market for those students passionate about all aspects of fashion communication. In the case of ŠVK, mobility of faculty and students as well as the inclusion of social partners and employers in giving their feedback about the curriculum, thesis topics, defences, internships, and more, clearly show the alignment of aims and learning outcomes with ŠVK's mission, goals, and strategy. VIKO's Public Relations program and KK's Applied Communication program both emphasise practical applications and workforce readiness specific to the students in those regions. There appears to be more of a need for courses taught in English and/or more opportunities to encourage students to write their theses in English and for faculty to publish more in English; this is especially the case for KK, given their desire to internationalise and to become a University of Applied Sciences, and for KSU which also wishes to internationalise its students. At VIKO, in addition to these points, the panel also strongly recommends the introduction of a portfolio of student work as part of the final assessment process based on input from current students, alumni, social partners and employers. At ŠVK, in addition to the points above regarding English, the panel recommends that teaching staff begin to move away from journals that require article processing charges; this is even more so the case at VIKO.

## **2. LINKS BETWEEN SCIENTIFIC (OR ARTISTIC) RESEARCH AND HIGHER EDUCATION**

The integration of research into higher education varies among the institutions. KSU and ŠVK have strong connections with social partners and employers, facilitating research projects in real-world contexts. VIKO and KK incorporate research outcomes into their curricula but could benefit from increased international cooperation and publication efforts. KSU, KK and ŠVK exhibited strong patterns and outcomes in research; the emphasis for all HEIs in this review is clearly applied research, and this also corresponds with the topics in students' final theses. In the case of VIKO, there was concern about the emphasis on publishing in journals with article processing charges; the administration at VIKO indicated a desire for prestigious third-party funding, such as Horizon grants; thus the panel recommended publishing in higher quality journals. KSU and ŠVK clearly show tested experience in producing strong practical research with significant involvement from social partners; this process also applies to the research conducted by students during the final thesis, and also applies to the second cycle program at KSU. VIKO and KK have solid research foundations but these need to emphasise journals that do not require article processing charges. As both wish to increase their internationalisation, VIKO and KK should enhance their international research presence through participation in more international conferences and by publishing in high-ranking journals.

## **3. STUDENT ADMISSION AND SUPPORT**

Student admission remains consistently aligned with national regulations across all four HEIs under review. KSU follows the national regulations for the first-cycle studies, and organises its own admission to the second-cycle studies. At VIKO, although the numbers of applicants and admitted students are fluctuating, they remain high in comparison to other HEIs, and overall demographic situation in Lithuania. At KK, one concern was the decreasing competitive score among admitted students. ŠVK's student numbers are decreasing, but since the study programme caters to the region, some fluctuation and smaller groups of students are expected. Student support services are demonstrably robust across all HEIs in this review, with each offering psychological counselling and mobility options through programs like Erasmus+, and in the case of ŠVK, academic mobility is also made possible through its membership in the international NEOLAiA Alliance. KSU and VIKO provide notable support for students with disabilities, though VIKO needs to reduce the psychological support burden on teaching staff; similarly at KSU, it provides psychological consultations to students, but a number of them informed the panel about seeking such support in teachers instead. KK and ŠVK also offer comprehensive support but need to address specific accessibility and resource awareness issues.

## **4. TEACHING AND LEARNING, STUDENT ASSESSMENT, AND GRADUATE EMPLOYMENT**

At all the HEIs reviewed during the site visits, teaching and learning practices are clearly designed to ensure that students are well-prepared to enter the Lithuanian workforce. All institutions integrate practical experiences, such as internships liaising with social partners and employers to

inform their applied research projects, into their programs. VIKO and KK focus on flexible learning options; however, given concerns about the proficiency of English among the students as well as the teaching staff, the panel recommends enhancing English language offerings and professional literature in English. This includes publishing in English and/or offering courses or modules in English to ensure a stronger preparedness of students as they enter the professional realm. Graduate employment rates are strong across the four HEIs, with positive feedback from employers and social partners, especially at KK and ŠVK where social partners and employers made it clear that receiving a resume from an applicant who studied at the relevant institution means that the student is likely ready to start as a working professional right away.

## 5. TEACHING STAFF

Teaching staff qualifications and involvement in quality assurance are strong at all institutions. KSU and VIKO emphasise staff participation in decision-making processes, while KK and ŠVK encourage publications in high-ranking journals and increased academic mobility. At KSU, the faculty's diverse expertise, international experience, and involvement in decision-making processes contribute to the programmes' continuous improvement and adherence to high standards. At VIKO, it is clear that it provides teachers with possibilities for academic mobility and the development of teacher competences. However, the panel noted that VIKO should increase the hours of development of teachers' scientific competencies, because the duration of research competence development in hours is still the smallest among the hours of development of other teacher competencies (development is especially needed in the hours for writing scientific projects). At KK, it was clear that the integrity of academic staff with practical experience and PhDs ensures a balance between learning, practice and science, incorporating the latest science and practical experience into the study process. Similar to the other HEIs in this review, but especially at ŠVK, Erasmus+ mobility enables them to deepen English knowledge, to teach in English, gain new academic experience, establish new partnership relations, which increase the academic mobility of incoming teachers at ŠVK.

## 6. LEARNING FACILITIES AND RESOURCES

All institutions provide adequate facilities and resources to support learning. KSU and VIKO offer well-equipped digital resources and learning spaces but need to improve software awareness and subscriptions to relevant periodicals. KK's facilities are highly praised, though they should publish course schedules earlier. ŠVK needs to address accessibility issues and ensure media production resources are available to all relevant students. One drawback at KSU was that while it has otherwise ample room for educational needs, the majority of staff does not have private, permanent offices, instead occupying variable hot desks. In addition, while subscriptions to academic journals and databases are adequate for the subject area; there are currently no subscriptions to literature from the industry, including fashion magazines. The panel views this as a missed opportunity for a programme so invested in all things Fashion Industry. At VIKO, while the material resources and spaces available are impressive, students were not aware of the availability of Adobe software, nor

of the available electives; while social partners and students indicated a clear preference for more experience with such software. Relevant courses may need to be included in the programme by default, or electives should be more clearly offered. In addition, and as noted above, the panel recommends a portfolio of student work toward the end of the study program; this is based on inputs from current students, alumni, social partners and employers. The logic here is that the portfolio may help to encourage students' use of the software programs but also will foster a space at VIKO to better address these opportunities with the students. The facilities and resources at KK (library, sports, relaxation, computing, video conferencing, etc.) are quite impressive and surely add to the educational and professional atmosphere. One area of concern was artificial intelligence: at KK, with regard to the desire to further develop the programme's use of (Generative) Artificial Intelligence software, current use is limited to free versions of Midjourney, DALL-E, ChatGPT, and similar software. This has forced some staff members to pay for their software use individually. Elsewhere, systems are in place to check plagiarism, and they will require updating to identify AI-assisted plagiarism. Additionally, the panel felt that KK should make its scheduling for courses more transparent in the interest of students, many of whom work or have families of their own and need to plan accordingly. At ŠVK, there is a comprehensive and accessible library system with special attention for visually impaired students, and there is adequate access to necessary databases and electronic resources.

## **7. QUALITY ASSURANCE AND PUBLIC INFORMATION**

Quality assurance processes are well-established at all institutions, with continuous improvement mechanisms in place. KSU and VIKO actively involve teaching staff in these processes. KK and ŠVK are recommended to increase international research publication and enhance public information about available resources and support services. An internal quality assurance system at KSU is aligned with international standards and guidelines. This system emphasises continuous improvement and involves stakeholders such as students, social partners, and graduates. KSU's emphasis on collecting, using, and disseminating information about study programmes, external evaluations, improvement processes, and outcomes is commendable. Prioritising openness and accessibility through various channels promotes transparency and facilitates continuous improvement. Despite these points, the panel recommends that KSU expand the channels for collecting student feedback to ensure comprehensive coverage. At VIKO, annual evaluations, strategic planning, and performance assessments are integral to the system. VIKO uses these tools to make informed improvements based on stakeholder feedback and performance data. Information about programs, external evaluations, improvement processes, and outcomes is collected and made publicly available. However, since VIKO heavily relies on surveys, which may not capture the full spectrum of issues, this might lead to survey fatigue among students and staff; diversifying solicited input and feedback is therefore recommended. At KK, there was concern that some students feel reluctant to give feedback when problems arise; one suggestion is to conduct student surveys in class but also to keep alumni more up to date on the college's events so as to bridge current and former students in a learning and practical setting. One additional point for KK,

is that while assessment relies heavily on alumni feedback, alumni are not sufficiently aware of surveys. A more reliable and up-to-date database of contact information may be needed.

## III. RECOMMENDATIONS

### STRATEGIC RECOMMENDATIONS FOR THE COMMUNICATION FIELD OF STUDY

Strategic recommendations at an institutional level (for HEIs)

#### **Kazimieras Simonavičius University (hereinafter KSU)**

- There is concern among students and based on evidence from the site visit, that more encouragement should be given to students to write their theses in English. This is in response to KSU's desire for more internationalisation.
- KSU could benefit from more explicit links of the impact of the research conducted.
- The panel recommends that KSU redirect the psychological counselling responsibilities from teachers to professionals available at the university.
- KSU would benefit from encouraging more exchange programmes, joint research projects, and partnerships to expose teaching staff to a wider range of perspectives and practices in communication.

#### **Vilnius kolegija (hereafter VIKO)**

- VIKO should institute a required portfolio. The panel therefore recommended adding a required (digital) portfolio to the PR program due to unanimous feedback from alumni, social partners and employers, but also based on input from current students.
- Given VIKO's internationalisation ambitions, the panel recommended English as a language of instruction for more courses beyond the 10 ECTS of Business English.
- VIKO should avoid the apparent pressure it places on teaching staff to publish within an academic year thus the outcome is that many teaching staff opt to publish in journals with article processing fees, which should be avoided if possible.
- VIKO should develop students' research competencies more; Students seem not quite able to understand how to formulate basic research questions.

#### **Kauno kolegija (hereafter KK)**

- KK should continue to develop students' research competencies by encouraging students to publish and present papers in English or another foreign language to increase the internationalisation of the college.
- Considering that KK aims to become a University of Applied Sciences by 2028, in terms of academic mobility the numbers of outgoing and incoming teachers could be higher.

#### **Šiaulių valstybinė kolegija (hereinafter ŠVK)**

- ŠVK should take a critical look at its internal policies and processes of encouraging research production and dissemination among teaching staff but also among the students; publication in higher quality journals and participation in international conferences should be prioritised.

- ŠVK obviously has opportunities for mental and emotional health and support, but it should examine its processes about addressing current students and therefore future alumni in terms of burnout and related mental and emotional health issues.
- ŠVK clearly pays considerable attention to the research competencies of its teachers; however, due to the low level of English, the aspect of internationality is not sufficiently ensured in scientific activities.

#### Strategic recommendations at the national level (for the Ministry of Education, Science and Sport)

- The panel recommends exploring new and innovative ways to stimulate and facilitate more academic cooperation between and among colleges and universities in the Baltic region and beyond.