



## **STUDIJŲ KOKYBĖS VERTINIMO CENTRAS**

### **LIETUVOS VERSLO KOLEGIJOS VEIKLOS VERTINIMO IŠVADOS**

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### **INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW REPORT OF LITHUANIAN BUSINESS COLLEGE**

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## I. INTRODUCTION

The Institutional Review of Lithuanian Business College (former name - West Lithuanian Business College (WLBC)) was carried out between 9 October 2012 and 11 October 2012 by a team comprising:

- three experienced and senior academic staff from different European countries of whom one was Team Leader
- an experienced and senior professional services member of staff from a fourth European country who acted as Review Secretary
- two Lithuanian members representing different interests: a representative of the Business/Stakeholder community and a student.

The team was advised that WLBC had renamed itself and saw documentation and signage with different English translations of both the former name and the new name(s). However, for the purposes of this report, the name WLBC will be used as this was the name under which the team was commissioned to conduct the Institutional Review.

The Institutional Review Team was provided with a Self-Evaluation Report (SER), which was termed an Institutional Self-Assessment by WLBC, in advance and in accord with the Republic of Lithuania's Procedure for the External Review of Higher Education Institutions (22 September 2010) and its associated Methodology for Conducting an Institutional Review in Higher Education. The SER, which covers a six year period, was accompanied by annexes of supporting documentation, compiled by WLBC, including lists, tables and a sample study programme to offer the team an evidenced understanding of the four key areas covered by the SER:

- Strategic Management
- Academic Studies and Life-Long Learning
- Research and Art
- Impact on Regional and National Development

The team was additionally provided with the Republic of Lithuania's Methodology for Evaluating the Learning Resources and Associated Infrastructure of a Higher Education Institution (1 July 2011). In brief, this is an analysis commissioned by the Ministry of Education and Science, from an expert group in the Research and Higher Education Monitoring and Analysis Centre (MOSTA), against set indicators with metrics for Learning Resources, Withdrawal Rates, Infrastructure and other measures of Effectiveness. The team was also provided with the results of WLBC's Evaluation, which overall saw WLBC successfully meeting the requirements in all four headline areas:

- Adequacy and availability of Learning Resources and associated Infrastructure
- Composition and Qualifications of Academic and Professional Services Staff
- Student Academic Profile both at Entry and on Programme and Student Numbers
- Efficiency of the Use of Funds Allocated from the State Budget.

The team later noted that WLBC had more recently shown improvement in some of these areas but deterioration in other areas, such as Withdrawal Rates, and continued monitoring by WLBC was essential.

After consideration of the SER and annexes, the team sought supplementary information, particularly on detailed substantiation of statements in the SER, funding and budgeting matters and student enrolment.

WLBC informed the team that the SER had been compiled by a Self-Evaluation Group appointed by the Director, drawing on key staff across the institution. The Self-Evaluation Group's work had followed on from preparatory work for the preceding Evaluation of Learning Resources and Associated Infrastructure. The Self-Evaluation Group had had cross-membership with those staff responsible for strategic planning

and much of its work, including analysis of Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats, would continue to inform the WLBC's strategic planning.

Student representatives confirmed their involvement in the framing of the SER, including student surveys. Various staff confirmed having had the opportunity to inform the SER which had, for example, been debated at the Academic Council.

WLBC advised that this was the first experience of the SER process and that there had been some unintended factual omissions in the translation of certain documents into English. However, retranslated documents were subsequently provided to the team. Overall, allowing for the relatively small size and limited complexity of the institution, the SER allowed the team to conduct a fruitful review, although at times the SER was stronger on affirmation than evidence-based analysis.

In spite of the limitations of the SER as a background paper for the Institutional Review, the positive and open response of all WLBC participants at the formal meetings greatly assisted the team in working through its agenda and following through upon the range of issues to be addressed in the four key areas of the SER and Institutional Review report. The team is grateful to the Director, her staff and WLBC's students both for their generous hospitality towards the team and their openness and enthusiastic engagement in the review process.

## II. BACKGROUND INFORMATION ABOUT THE INSTITUTION

The team arrived at a time of quite significant change for WLBC. At national level, the Law on Higher Education and Research had been enacted in 2009. This was aimed, amongst other things, to increase competitiveness, reform financing, promote student choice and enhance institutional autonomy.

However, the Lithuanian Constitutional Court had found in December 2011 that the transfer of management functions characteristic of the self-government of higher education institutions, to the Council, on whose composition the academic community had no crucial impact, contradicted the Constitution. The legislation had therefore been amended during 2012.

WLBC had also recently transferred its main campus to a refurbished building in the attractive Old Town of Klaipėda. Additionally, WLBC faced significant changes in student funding in the context of a demographic downturn, of the global economic slowdown and of increased emigration from Lithuania.

WLBC was established in 2001 instead of the School for Further Education for Secretaries-Manager's Assistants which had been carrying its activity since 1995. In 2009, reorganisation of the College took place by a merger with Šiauliai Regional College of Management, Law and Languages, although some separate residual organisational arrangements still applied at the now Šiauliai campus.

WLBC has the legal status of a public institution and therefore is eligible to receive public funding but in the context of its private foundation by two Founders and essentially owners, who are also, the current Director and Vice-Director for Studies.

WLBC offers nine programmes of study, all of them accredited, which, from the organogram in the SER, are managed in six Klaipėda-based and two Šiauliai-based study departments:

- Management
- Recreation and Tourism
- Infomatics
- Technologies
- Economics
- General Subjects
- Administration
- Accounting and Law

In 2011, there were 837 students enrolled but with a decreasing trend. In 2011, there were 133 academic staff (43 FTE) and 22 administrative staff (17 FTE) but again with a decreasing trend. As a state College, WLBC is also charged with developing Applied Research.

WLBC professional services infrastructure, according to the organogram provided with the SER comprises thirteen small, dedicated professional services units or centres:

- Study Department
- Practical Education Centre
- Centre for Distance Studies
- Department of Applied Research
- Department of Marketing and Development
- Department of International Relations
- Business Information Centre
- Secretary's Office
- Library
- CISCO Laboratory
- Centre for Information Technology
- Finance Department
- Caretaker's Department

The eight study departments and thirteen professional services units or centres report to the Director, although the Klaipėda-based study departments and the Study Department do so through the Vice-Director for Studies.

Academic Council both governs WLBC's academic affairs and is consulted by the Founders on all strategic matters. Academic Council appointed the Founders as Director and Vice-Director for Studies. The Founders are also members of Academic Council and appoint some of its members. Other members of Academic Council are elected by staff and students.

WLBC's accredited academic provision comprises Professional Bachelors programmes, although it does also co-operate with University partners as a delivery site for those partners' Masters programmes.

Strategic Management will be considered in more detail in Section III, Strategic Management, but as stated in the SER, WLBC has the following:

### Vision

‘WLBC is a modern institution of higher education striving to be open to the society, integrating into the Lithuanian and European education system, focussing its activity on the needs of Klaipėda and Šiauliai regions, promptly and flexibly responding to changes in labour market in satisfying the needs of the society.’

### Mission

‘To prepare qualified specialists with higher education, awarding a qualification degree of professional bachelor, who are able to socialise in constantly changing environment and engage with various fields of activities, providing conditions for continuous learning, organising professional development, conducting, applied research indispensable for the region.’

### III. STRATEGIC MANAGEMENT

- 1.1 In its SER, WLBC outlined the national legislative framework for its strategic plan, including in 2009 the Law on Higher Education and Research, already commented upon in Section II, Background Information About The Institution, which proposed fundamental changes to Higher Education funding and governance. The SER references its preceding WLBC Strategy 2005-2008 and details its strategic planning responses to that national legislative framework: Strategic Activity Plan 2009-2014 and WLBC Integrated Development Strategy 2010-2015, with the latter document taking account of the merger with Šiauliai Regional College of Management, Law and Languages.

The last document was drawn up using the information derived from WLBC's standard strategic planning processes, chiefly the Strategic Planning Group, but was drafted by external consultants commissioned by WLBC to increase objectivity, proactivity and breadth of scope. The final document was considered within WLBC and approved by the Academic Council.

WLBC advised that its current activities followed that WLBC Integrated Development Strategy 2010-2015 with the aim of creating effective and transparent systems for delivering Higher Education whilst reducing administrative control and strengthening feedback from stakeholders.

In that last regard, WLBC lays great emphasis in the SER upon stakeholders' opinion surveys which show a high rating for perceived compliance with WLBC's stated mission. All categories of respondent (Employers, Graduates, Students and Academic Staff) concur that the cited elements of the mission are being delivered. The SER also explicitly allows for alternative directions and responses, a more emergent strategy, in the context of the dynamic economic background.

The SER cites a number of national programmes and strategies with which it asserts its strategic planning complies. Similarly, it lists a number of national regulatory documents on applied research and academic studies again asserting compliance. The SER similarly asserts compliance, in a general rather than specified manner (although with some specific examples and substantiation offered) with the Bologna Process, European University Association and Lisbon Strategy.

WLBC advised the team that its revision of its strategic plan flowed from state legislation including the changes to the national approach to Higher Education and especially the greater autonomy for institutions financially. The Director described, where necessary, WLBC initiating changes to strategy in response to external events.

Members of Academic Council confirmed that strategic planning was debated in their meetings and other stakeholders confirmed the relevance of the WLBC's strategic planning to the national, regional and even city agendas.

In discussion with the Director, and from sight of WLBC's most recent publicity material, the team learnt of the intention to open a Vilnius campus from September 2013. The avowed purpose was to compensate for declining student numbers in the home regions rather than purely a business expansion. The team was surprised that such a significant development had not been captured within WLBC's strategic planning processes.

The team found that WLBC had provided evidence that its strategic plan complied with its mission, the strategic documents of the national policy on applied research and academic studies, and the principles of the European Higher Education Area and the European Research Area. However, WLBC had not used this evidence to compile a detailed mapping that would have provided better demonstration of compliance.

- 1.2 The SER advised that WLBC's strategic planning was consistent with national requirements for such processes. The SER also cited the sourcing of national planning and regulatory documentation. The SER also advised that the Strategic Planning Group had carried out a Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities

and Threats (SWOT) analysis as part of its preparatory work and had commissioned three sets of research from an external professional consultancy in relation to strategic planning. The team commended WLBC for its preparedness to seek expert external assistance to enhance the breadth of view of its strategic planning.

The SER maps functional strategies to strategic aims which are in turn underpinned by particular objectives. The SER also maps compliance against WLBC's overarching vision and mission.

The SER seeks to prove the validity and interoperability of its strategic planning by a table exemplifying decisions and actions taken by WLBC in the period 2006-2011 as justifications of its strategic aims, offering a final column of 'Results' quantifying the percentage or volume of increased activity. Unfortunately, this does not map directly back onto a target percentage or volume. Nevertheless, it does assist in describing how WLBC has operated within its broad strategy.

In total, WLBC's Integrated Development Strategy 2010-2015 comprises six strategic goals with fifteen aims and sixty-six objectives, which need to be prioritised before suitable actions can then be implemented. Operational implementation decisions are made year per year taking into account the financial situation. Priorities for selecting the concrete projects are not however based on clear criteria and the team found that decisions were not made within a consistent and sustainable planning framework, but rather in what appeared to be an opportunistic way. External programmes (national and international), co-operative projects and the available financial resources naturally had an important impact on planning but these factors were not always systematically integrated into the College's strategic planning process.

WLBC confirmed to the team the structure for assisting the Director in operationalising strategy: principally, the Vice-Director for Studies and the Heads of Study Department and Professional Services Units which supported implementation. There was no Registrar (Chief Operating Officer) or similar senior overarching Professional Services post at WLBC. Strategic Planning Group had Study Department representation as well as statistical information from Professional Services Units. Implementation was similarly achieved via detailed annual operational plans.

The student voice was repeatedly captured at all levels from Academic Council downwards.

The team believed WLBC's strategic goals to be well considered in the context of its vision and mission and WLBC demonstrated some sound practice in how the various components of its strategic planning were validated and made to operate successfully. However, the team also identified certain deficiencies. A minor example would be the failure to capture and integrate key activities such as co-operation and/or competition with comparator colleges or even universities. A more major example would be the lack of financial quantification not only of initiatives but also of potential risks.

The team **recommended** that WLBC systematises and overtly articulates its consideration of market share, profitability and investment efficiency within its strategic planning. In the context of greater competition, a decline in applications and a demographic downturn, its strategic planning should be underpinned by realistic financial information. Similarly, new initiatives and activities should offer individual business cases with cost-benefit analysis. In recent years, WLBC has successfully drawn down project (and, crucially, European Union) funding to drive forward qualitative improvement. However, such monies may become less easy to access and realistic financial information must be factored into WLBC's selection of strategic choices. WLBC has already demonstrated, by its accessing of private finances for the refurbishment of its new premises, that it has the wherewithal and expertise to underpin its strategic planning in this way.

- 1.3 WLBC describes in its SER its detailed, systematic approach to establishing the validity and comprehensiveness of its quantitative and qualitative performance indicators for the implementation of its strategic planning, with particular reference to the document Description of the Strategic Planning Procedure of the College (2011).

Helpfully, Annex 7 of the SER offers a detailed mapping of strategic aims to objectives to indicators across all aspects of performance. It would have been helpful to the team if the SER had been correlated directly with that mapping, rather than dispersing some of it in the text, as this would have provided a wealth of actual qualitative and quantitative information to corroborate assertions within the SER.

Nevertheless, excepting the recommendation in the previous Section 1.2 on financial information, the team acknowledged that WLBC had in place reasonable and comprehensive qualitative and quantitative indicators.

- 1.4 In its SER, WLBC advised that Strategic Planning Group initiates and coordinates monitoring of strategic planning and also reports to Academic Council on its implementation and on any need for variation. The SER offers a quite detailed description of the treatment of deviation from targets set and consequent consideration of action or of variation. The SER goes on again in detail to identify the locus of responsibility for the input data or generation of performance indicators to be used in monitoring strategic planning.

It was somewhat disappointing, and probably unrealistic, that WLBC's analysis of the results of this intensive monitoring was that 'the main reason for non-achievement of the estimated outcome should be related to negative trends in external environment, negative impact of factors out of the College control...'. WLBC may be failing to pick up important messages from the available quality assurance mechanisms and may be demonstrating a degree of complacency in this regard.

On the other hand, WLBC has articulated appropriate frequencies and levels of monitoring of implementation of its strategic plan and is able to effect transparent monitoring of its strategic planning.

- 1.5 The SER and WLBC staff articulated and exemplified the public dissemination of information to differentiated target groups about implementation of its strategic planning and highlighted the use of lower cost options, including mass-media such as newspapers, its website, press releases and the promotion of WLBC's activities at national and international conferences. The SER also mentioned a valorisation plan. The team did not see this valorisation plan as a primary source document and received no further information on it at formal meetings and was unable to decipher what added value it was supposed to offer to the dissemination of information about implementation of its strategic planning.

The SER also described the internal dissemination of strategic planning information. Overall, staff and students whom the team met seem well enough informed about what WLBC was doing and intending. WLBC monitors both external and internal dissemination via its range of segmented stakeholder surveys and these confirm a high awareness across all constituencies. In later parts of this report, the team will return to the matter of whether business and social partners are adequately aware of the services available from WLBC but, otherwise, the team believed WLBC adequately informed all stakeholders on the implementation of its strategic planning.

- 2.1 The SER offers the legislative and regulatory background to the guidelines and purposes for WLBC's internal academic quality assurance arrangements. These address a State requirement for an internal academic quality assurance system in accord with the principles of the European Higher Education Area. They also set out the locus of responsibility for the various elements at department and institutional levels. The approval and monitoring procedures for internal academic quality assurance are set out in the following documents:

- Quality Assessment Standard (2009)
- Integrated Quality Manual (2012)

which are supplemented for the assistance of students by guidance documents such as:

- Methods for Preparation of Diploma (Final) Theory
- Methods for Preparation of Practice Report
- Methods for Preparation of Course Papers and Self-Study Works



Dissemination of this information falls to the Study Department.

WLBC has implemented the ISO 9001 quality management system.

Programme Approval, Significant Amendment and Review is initiated at study department level and includes market and external stakeholder soundings and the articulation of learning outcomes. Documentation is checked for national and regulatory compliance by the Study Department. It then requires subsequent Academic Council approval before submission for external accreditation by SKVC. Of WLBC's nine study programmes, seven have already been accredited by SKVC (six for the maximum six year period and one for just three years). The other study programmes are awaiting accreditation.

The Lithuanian Government approved a Specification of Qualification Structure in 2010 and further refined it in 2011 for both academic and vocational qualifications. This eight level and three cycle specification was consistent with the European Qualifications Framework. WLBC's Professional Bachelors awards are consistent with that specification. WLBC adopted the European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System (ECTS) in 2011 and issues a Diploma Supplement with its awards certificates.

In relation to improved teaching competence/staff development, the SER highlights the number of WLBC academic staff studying for higher awards and the work of the Centre for Distance Studies to foster IT-enhanced delivery and teaching methodologies. The SER also reports a staff development programme on this and other pedagogical techniques to be available.

WLBC advises that the institution has handled student appeals and complaints since 2003 through its Dispute Settlement Group but also that most, if not all, issues are resolved at local level without recourse to the formal process. The SER also describes a range of study support tools for students, including use of the Virtual Learning Environment, to assist the preparation of individual study plans. However, the SER is silent on Personal Tutoring arrangements and Personal Development Planning. The SER reports a co-operative relationship with the Student Council. However, in such a small institution, student confirmed the friendliness and accessibility of all staff, including the Director herself, to assist on academic and pastoral issues.

The SER is silent on the operation of the Student Information System/data collection but the team was readily provided with general student information.

WLBC staff informed the team that an integrated academic quality assurance system was in place and was informed by European Union practice, such as the overt identification of learning outcomes. However, students showed minimal awareness of the associated quality assurance concepts and mechanisms.

WLBC manages quality assurance at programme level through study department-based programme committees with an internal self-assessment, overseen by Academic Council. The internal process includes student input. WLBC also holds annual quality days where student surveys (held twice a year) are analysed. WLBC staff also acknowledged the individual professional responsibility of all academic staff to safeguard academic standards and quality and reported that this responsibility was often discharged in collaboration with external stakeholders.

A further quality check is provided by WLBC's Internal Audit Committee which includes academic quality assurance within its broader remit.

WLBC staff and students reported systematised feedback on programme elements by students and the use of the information derived not just for the immediate remedy, where possible, of issues but also to inform internal programme self-assessment. Student representatives reported general satisfaction with their involvement in the range of academic quality assurance at both programme and Academic Council level. Student representatives confirmed clear induction arrangements, including explanation of and dissemination of all relevant programme level and general information including learning outcomes, the credit framework and assessment criteria, although again without necessarily recognising those things by

that terminology. WLBC demonstrated a good awareness of the need to engage students in the enhancement of activities, to capture the student voice and to provide a focus of professional development and employability so as to enhance graduates' employment prospects.

WLBC staff reported enhancement of individual programme delivery by contributions from external practitioners and guest university lecturers. However, there was little awareness of any institutional level deliberate steps to promote programme enhancement.

WLBC academic staff reported generally sound support and staff development opportunities, including training via the Centre for Distance Learning. There were opportunities for staff mobility within the European Union development programmes for Higher Education. Staff Personal Development Plans operated at departmental level and offered peer observation and remedial support.

WLBC staff offered little analysis of the high withdrawal rates of undergraduate students other than possible financial difficulties or unsuitability for their chosen programmes. The graduates and current students whom the team met felt well supported by academic staff and professional services unit support and were generally happy with programme delivery and content and the overall availability of learning resources. Current students commented favourably on the generally smaller class sizes at WLBC compared with other institutions. In one sense, this is an advantage for WLBC. However, WLBC staff also acknowledged in meetings with the team that, in the context of reduced student numbers overall, small class sizes raised issues of financial sustainability for WLBC to address.

The team acknowledged the existence at WLBC of a framework of academic quality assurance arrangements overseen by Academic Council. This was consistent with European and national expectations. The team viewed those arrangements as effective but believed more could be done to promote understanding of the framework amongst students so that they might maximise the opportunities deriving from and their level of involvement in the benefits of that framework.

- 2.2 The SER reports some realignment of study departments in recent years, arising from the increase in study programmes and the absorption of the former Šiauliai Regional College of Management, Law and Languages. WLBC has also addressed particular initiatives or prospects by the creation of some of the cited professional services units. The current organisational structure had been approved by the Director in 2012.

The team felt that WLBC's structure was appropriate to its size and allowed the Director a key managerial oversight of its academic and administrative functions whilst at the same time clearly allocating responsibilities. The fact that the Founders were also Director and Vice-Director for Studies necessarily meant that there was a centralised governance and management structure. The team was advised that the Siauliai campus, at some 175 kilometres from Klaipėda, was permitted a degree of operational discretion but on strategic matters was integrated into WLBC with senior academic staff fully engaged and consulted. Again, the team found this arrangement to be appropriate.

The WLBC gave a coherent and persuasive account of the rationale, implementation and effectiveness of changes in the organisation structure, arguing that the present structure was fit for purpose. The account was necessarily backward looking and could perhaps have been linked to forward planning for change.

The team did detect some overlap or duplication in the support arrangements for Applied Research. Where this was resourced through European Union project monies, both the Department of Applied Research and the Department of International Relations appeared to have some administrative remit whilst the individual academic researcher's supervision in terms of their academic discipline lay within their home study department. The team **recommended** that WLBC look at the integration of the current dispersed academic and administrative support arrangements for its academic staff engaging in Applied Research with a view to these arrangements being made more clear and accessible to those staff.

- 2.3 The SER underplays the crucial position of WLBC's two Founders who also discharge the key executive roles of Director and Vice-Director for Studies in compliance with WLBC's statutes. The two Founders offer WLBC clear leadership but the team was satisfied in discussions with a wide range of WLBC staff

that, through the Academic Council, there operated a broad forum for oversight and consultation which gave appropriate counterbalance to the potentially dominant two key executive roles. Most decisions, in particular about internal issues were made after consensus-oriented discussions and by finding a compromise, if needed. Such decisions were consistent with WLBC's strategic planning which was flexible enough to accommodate emergent issues.

In addition, the SER was supplemented by two tabular annexes which clearly set out responsibilities for process management and the allocation of responsibilities for decision-making between WLBC's governance bodies and its postholders. Again, the team found those responsibilities to be appropriate given the nature of WLBC's ownership and size. Managerial responsibilities and delegated authorities were clearly allocated.

WLBC described its approach to process management as based on the total quality management concept from which stems the already cited clear allocation of responsibilities. The team was satisfied that this form of organisation also permitted all staff, students (especially in the context of an active Student Council) and external partners to understand how they could actively contribute to the success of WLBC.

Through its meetings with WLBC's long-term strategic partners, including the Klaipėda Chamber of Commerce and the City (Municipality) of Klaipėda, the team was able to establish the maturity of those relationships and the mutual interest in each partner deriving benefit from the activities of the other partner. An outstanding example of this would be WLBC's acquisition of new premises from the City of Klaipėda which saw WLBC investing significantly in the refurbishment of the buildings and saw the City of Klaipėda gain the further injection of resource, activity and presence into the revitalised Old Town.

- 2.4 The SER places WLBC's Human Resources in the context of national legislation and collective agreements. This context and perceived restraint was emphasised also by WLBC staff in meetings, although the greater liberalisation of staffing matters was brought about by recent legislative changes. Nevertheless, whether operating to national or to self-imposed constraints, WLBC's Human Resources procedures were clearly articulated in part of its Integrated Quality Manual.

The SER offers narrative on annual changes in academic and professional services staffing establishments, although it took the team some effort in discussion with WLBC staff to determine the balance between permanent and temporary staff and between full-time and fractional appointments. Like many similar institutions, WLBC offers a number of temporary and fractional appointments, partly to secure the services of current practitioners but partly also to permit budgetary flexibility and responsiveness to variations in student numbers.

The SER and meetings with WLBC staff confirmed that academic staff underwent annual appraisal and workload balancing including a review of targets set through that process in the previous year. Account was also taken of student perception of lecturer performance.

WLBC places great emphasis on academic staff development and there was a consensus amongst all staff whom the team met that this was both encouraged and supported. A key mechanism used by WLBC was to draw down, usually European Union funded project income. Academic staff developed through such projects were expected to cascade their learning to WLBC colleagues. Most of the projects cited by WLBC were related to the improvement of pedagogical methods, although such projects had also been sourced to roll out training for all categories of staff, and even Academic Council members, in such areas as Strategic Management and Resource Management.

Staff development was integrated into strategic planning through such strategic objectives and competence development for academic staff, doctoral level studies for academic staff and academic staff placement with local commerce and industry to ensure updating of practitioner competences. WLBC therefore gave a commendable emphasis to the development of existing staff. However, the team noted that there was a less than strategic approach to Human Resources policy in terms of matching staff skill sets to the needs of new strategic developments. As an example, the team was advised of staff development and the acquisition of software through a funded project to develop WLBC's open and distance learning offering. However, such an approach might not be optimum. Many institutions have

underestimated the investment required and the staff skill sets needed to move from standard delivery to open and distance learning delivery of programmes. The team also discussed with WLBC staff the balance between the flexibility and practitioner orientation provided by temporary and part-time staff and the sustainability, continuity and usually higher research orientation of 'core', permanent and full-time staff.

The team therefore **recommended** that WLBC should develop, within the context of its strategic planning, a more overt and articulated Human Resources Policy, identifying and quantifying the staffing needs and costs of the range of strategic initiatives proposed by WLBC and which changes would be needed to the staffing complement to achieve those initiatives.

- 2.5 The SER describes a mostly sound strategic planning process with appropriate use of a Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats (SWOT) analysis at institutional level and quality-oriented Plan, Do, Check and Act (PDCA) circles at local level. Again, this is underpinned with an effective articulation of responsibilities for process management so that changes determined by executive management are resourced, guided by procedural description and monitored. Meetings with WLBC staff confirmed the accuracy of the SER on these aspects.

In general, WLBC's operational processes are regularly screened in the course of internal audit and comply with the overarching aims of environmental protection, occupational health and safety, social responsibility and quality. Different activities are regulated in specifically formulated regulations and are approved by the relevant and responsible governance bodies and/or management.

However, the SER offered a very limited analysis of strategic risk in what is an extremely volatile financial and educational environment. Even in areas where the SWOT analysis has addressed potential risks, the pace of change warrants continued monitoring of the position. The team has already recommended in Section 1.2 the better underpinning of WLBC's strategic planning with financial information. The team now also **recommended** that WLBC systematises a regular Sustainability Analysis (perhaps a more purposeful description than a Risk Register) within its strategic planning. This would allow WLBC to address not just the implications of success but also the worst case scenarios of possibly adverse external and internal factors resulting in only partial achievement of strategic objectives.

As a prime example, the team would cite the proposed additional campus in Vilnius. As already mentioned, this was not placed within the context of WLBC's strategic planning, even as merely a potential option. Had it been so placed and had that strategic planning been supported by the recommended Sustainability Analysis, this would have helped WLBC in a structural manner to address the main challenges inherent in the achievement of such a significant initiative.

- 2.6 The SER provides both the national legislative context and some description of the management of infrastructure including learning resources, other than the internal framework for resource accountability and certain accounting and financial practices and requirements. Some trend information is offered on relative levels of investment in estate, IT and other facilities but this is given no overall budgetary context.

The separate State process for 'Evaluating Learning Resources and Associated Infrastructure' is described in Part I, Introduction. This Evaluation was of minimal use to the team as it covered the period when the Klaipėda campus was in its previous premises. From its tours of facilities at both campuses, the team was duly impressed by the standard of accommodation and infrastructure.

WLBC's Library and IT staff explained the operational approach to matching discipline and programme learning resource needs to WLBC's budget allocation process. The students who met the team had individual minor issues with Library and IT access. WLBC staff were fully aware of the varied range of information needs of students, including e-access and e-journals.

The team were particularly impressed by the dedicated Practical Education Centre which allowed the simulation of practice placement. This resource was not only fully in accord with WLBC's mission but reflected a thorough appreciation of the realities of the economic situation where it was not always

possible to secure practice placements with employers for all students. The team commends the Practical Education Centre as good practice.

The team found that WLBC had basic operational processes for matching learning resource requirements to budget allocation and duly managed its learning resources. The team also acknowledged WLBC's past and recent successes in securing external funding, including European Union funds, to enhance University resources and facilities. However, the team anticipated that such external sources might become increasingly difficult to access and would require WLBC to finesse its processes to allow prioritisation of learning resource improvements of strategic importance.

- 2.7 The SER reports in a general way upon WLBC's revenue sources. In discussion with the Director, the team learnt of the high proportion of income from student recruitment and the significant benefit to WLBC of project income, especially that funded by the European Union.

The team saw little scope for WLBC to resource the full range of its strategic initiatives unless the decline in student recruitment were addressed. Additionally, the team considered it doubtful that great reliance could be placed on the continued success of WLBC in drawing down project, and especially European Union funded, income. The team wondered whether WLBC fully appreciated that these project monies were subsidised investments in driving up the quality of the services delivered by WLBC, thereby providing a base for the future generation of income. To secure further development monies to invest in strategic initiatives, WLBC might have to look in future more to the generation of income from commercial sources or by co-developing initiatives with other partners.

In terms of internal budgeting, the model was relatively simple with financial allocation basically flowing to the local level where the particular activity was delivered. With the above caveat on the requirement for some mechanism to secure institutional level development funding, the team is satisfied that effective and appropriate budgetary mechanisms are in place at WLBC.

- 2.8 For Academic Ethics, the SER emphasised the professional responsibilities of academic staff in discharging their duties. In discussions with WLBC staff, the team learnt that matters relating to ethical approval would be considered by the institution's Dispute Settlement Group. The team acknowledges that procedures to ensure adherence to academic ethics are in place.

*Judgement on the area: Strategic Management is given positive evaluation.*

## IV. ACADEMIC STUDIES AND LIFE-LONG LEARNING

- 1.1 The SER places WLBC's Professional Bachelor provision in the context of national legislation and the Lithuanian National Qualifications Framework (2010). The team found WLBC's provision to be fully consistent with and responsive to its mission, preparing qualified specialists with Higher Education for the changing labour market. Its study programmes include work-related practice placements as at least one third of the programme of study and the programme's final thesis topics are selected to be relevant to regional and national commerce and industry.

During meetings with WLBC staff, the team was advised that a proposed and partly developed joint programme with a European Union educational partner had been discontinued as that partner had been unable to achieve accreditation.

- 1.2 The SER is silent in Section 1.1 on Lifelong Learning but in this Section goes on to explain the key aspects of WLBC's approach. At admissions stage, WLBC co-operates with secondary schools for progression into the Professional Bachelor study programmes. On programme, WLBC repeats that those programmes are updated in consultation with commercial and industry partners, for example, the Administration of Computer Networks module on the Computer Programming study programme, developed in co-operation with the Swedish and Lithuanian Labour Exchanges, and are delivered by lecturers with current practitioner experience. WLBC has also sought to develop open and distance learning so that non-traditional entrants, such as parents with child care responsibilities and students with

disabilities may access study programmes. To support this, WLBC had introduced a Virtual Learning Environment and, in discussion with WLBC staff, the team learnt of the intention to look at blended learning being made available more widely across all study programmes. WLBC had successfully drawn down European Union project funds in this area and was ambitiously proposing that existing staff might use recently acquired specialist software to adapt traditional learning materials for open and distance learning delivery. A possible target clientele for this provision would be expatriate Lithuanians after emigration.

The SER describes how WLBC strives to meet regional and national labour market needs, working, for example, with the Lithuanian Labour Exchange on bespoke commercial courses. The SER cites particular past successful examples such as Insurance Consultant and Attendant Care courses targeted at the long-term unemployed. However, the team was concerned to learn of poor uptake on nineteen such commercial courses lodged with the Lithuanian Labour Exchange

WLBC was also working towards, again through European Union project monies, the systemisation of accreditation of prior and experiential learning further to open up access to its study programmes to a wide clientele. However the current level of activity in this area was minimal. This is termed in the SER ‘system for formalising competences acquired by non-formal method.’

Overall, the team felt WLBC, necessarily as a vocational provider, was aware of the broad Lifelong Learning Agenda and was addressing it. As mentioned in Part III, Strategic Management, WLBC might wish to think through further the cost and benefit of appropriate investment in initiatives to broaden accessibility to its study programme and commercial provision and, in the latter regard, WLBC might want to reflect on whether the poor uptake of its commercial provision (and, consequently, a missed income stream) resulted from its offer not being perceived as relevant to its social and business partners.

- 1.3 The SER details the various mechanisms WLBC employs to monitor graduate employability and career progression including liaison with the Lithuanian Labour Exchange, the Alumni Club and, again, its frequent graduate opinion surveys. WLBC staff, graduates and alumni, in their meetings with the team, confirmed WLBC’s keenness to foster a continuing relationship with its graduates to mutual benefit, including an involvement in curricular updating. WLBC is also co-operating with comparator institutions on a national project on the long-term monitoring of graduate careers.

The team is satisfied WLBC actively and appropriately monitors graduate employability and career progression and makes active use of those monitoring outcomes.

- 1.4 Co-operation with Business and Social Partners in programme development and programme review is also considered by the team in the Institutional Review Report under Part VI, Impact on Regional and National Development. The SER offers examples of innovative and partner-relevant study programme development, such as increasing the proportion of on placement self-study on the Recreation and Tourism Management study programme on the advice of cited industry partners.

The SER details the range of formal agreements with social and business partners for practice placements and through those placements the selection of final thesis topics of relevance to those partners.

The SER also details the range of formal agreements with academic partners from progression from regional secondary schools into study programmes to delivery at WLBC of Masters programmes validated by partner universities.

Meetings with WLBC staff and with social and business partners confirmed that WLBC was engaging appropriately with them on updating its study programmes. The team’s reservations with regard to commercial courses have already been articulated in Section 1.2.

The team did not directly meet academic partners to corroborate the SER’s description of how WLBC cooperated with academic partners on the Life Long Learning Agenda. The team did meet collaborators from Klaipėda University in relation to WLBC’s Applied Research and did learn of WLBC project-based

collaboration with European academic partners. From that evidence, the team is satisfied that WLBC also engages appropriately with academic partners.

2.1 In the SER, WLBC cites its Strategic Activity Plan 2009-14 as embedding evidence of compliance of the provisions of the European Higher Education Area and European Union documents concerning Higher Education in such manifestation as:

- operation of the European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System (ECTS)
- production of Diploma Supplements
- individual study plans
- progression from other educational institutions
- progression from (Professional) Bachelors to Taught Masters
- recognition of accredited prior learning in the form of advanced standing
- use of learning outcomes

The team has already referred to these matters (and the general lack of student awareness of them) in Section 2.1 of Part III, Strategic Management, of this report. To reiterate, based on the evidence of the documentation appended to and cited in the SER and discussion with WLBC staff, the team found broad compliance with the provisions of the European Higher Education Area and European Union Higher Education documents.

2.2 Staff and student mobility is also considered by the team in this Institutional Review report under Part V, Research and Art. In its SER, WLBC offers tabular analysis and trends in outgoing staff and student mobility and incoming staff and student mobility. The small size of WLBC limits the significance of the trend information. WLBC attempts to make full use of the available European Union funded programmes available in this area. WLBC staff reported that there had been recent successes in improving incoming mobility, previously something of a challenge to WLBC.

WLBC staff demonstrated great enthusiasm in meetings with the team on the benefits to them of staff mobility, especially in areas such as exchange of pedagogical practice, implementation of new teaching methods and updating of curricula.

Individual WLBC students in meetings with the team were even more enthusiastic about the benefits deriving from the opportunities of mobility available to them, especially where these opportunities had related to practice placements from which they believed that enhanced employability would ensue. The team was also fortunate to meet a small incoming cohort of Turkish students who were appreciative of the opportunity afforded them by WLBC.

The team acknowledges the importance accorded staff and student mobility by WLBC and its intention to engage as much as possible in this area. WLBC offered evidence that exemplary use had been made of European Union project funding (such as the Leonardo Da Vinci innovation transfer project, SMEs, e-Learning to e-Working Efficiently) to make demonstrable impact through beneficial outcomes.

The team also welcomed WLBC's incremental approach to increased delivery of study programmes and some component modules in the English Language

*Judgement on the area: Academic Studies and Life-Long Learning is given positive evaluation*

## V. RESEARCH

1.1 WLBC's SER highlights WLBC's key strategic objectives for Research as:

- to develop applied research in pursuance with the provision that research and (academic ) studies should make an integral whole
- to develop applied scientific activities and research required by the region, to render counselling (consultancy) services to local authorities and economic entities.

This is further detailed in the WLBC Integrated Development Strategy 2010-2015 where the strategic aim is to create an 'effective and transparent system for rendering services of Higher Education studies and research'. WLBC therefore sets the following priorities for this area:

- to publish academic works, textbooks, teaching materials and research articles
- to develop competences in research
- to build a motivational system and implement performance measures
- to involve local partners in teaching and research
- to participate in international projects and networks

At WLBC, academic staff's Applied Research is coordinated by the Department of Applied Research. This Professional Services unit is responsible for gathering and analysing information and data related to WLBC research activities. The team was briefed by the Head of Department of Applied Research, who gave details about her work which was mainly administrative and which overlapped on the management of running project funded research with another unit, the Department of International Relations. The disciplinary content of academic staff's research is supervised in their home study department. The team has already made a recommendation on the better integration of these arrangements in Section 2.2 of Part III, Strategic Management, of this report.

Academic staff must submit an annual work plan to their home study department indicating an estimated outcome of their research and teaching activity. The completion of the work plans is overseen by Heads of the Departments. A points system is in operations, scoring research and other performance. The team sought and received a sample of approved annual work plans including research activities of individual academic staff.

The team found that research was a compulsory part of the workload for all academic staff carrying a 10% weighting in the WLBC incentive system. The SER also offered a detailed list of Applied Research activities already approved as annual individual research activities. Academic staff at both campuses confirmed the availability of opportunities for research.

Nevertheless, the team **recommended** that, if it wishes to develop Applied Research beyond the minimum required by national regulation, WLBC consider a more comprehensive (for example, taking account of alignment with institutional priorities and of the evaluation of output quality) and a more rewarding incentive system so as to motivate academic staff to participate in Applied Research more intensively.

The SER provided detailed data on research support, including Library materials, databases and other web-based e-materials. The team noted a decline in investment in acquisition of texts and the number of copies of texts (with the 2011 spend at one third of the 2006 level). At the same time, database licence fees and consortium membership fees have been increased. During the visit, the team asked WLBC senior staff about the availability of recent scientific literature and databases. The team shared the view of those senior staff that the recent trend was a shift from paper-based versions to the electronic availability of study materials, books and journals justifying, at least in part, a decrease in the proportion of funds spent on traditional Library acquisitions.

The SER offered some limited information on academic staff's research publications and outputs, including conference participation. This is not at a high level but is consistent with the scale and standing of WLBC.

The most prestigious periodical of the College is the three-language scientific journal "Vadyba" (Management) published twice a year in English, Russian and Lithuanian. The journal has an international editorial board and it is indexed in some international databases. The Lithuanian editor in chief, from Klaipėda University, introduced the team to its editorial policy. The journal has a strong reviewing process. Foreign reviewers have also been involved. The team can confirm that "Vadyba" is an asset to WLBC and, in the context of WLBC's size and standing, represents good practice.



However, the team sees potential for WLBC to develop a higher research profile and **recommended** that academic staff be charged to publish more papers in English and to contribute to and participate more frequently at international scientific conferences.

Academic staff sought to foster the involvement of the students in research activities through annual student conferences. It was an important aim of the conference series to give an opportunity for the most outstanding students to demonstrate the results of their individual works, to stimulate interest in research and innovation and to develop analytical and research competences. WLBC exemplified the impact of Applied Research on teaching by again citing the development of pedagogical method and curricular material from certain European Union funded projects.

Overall, the team found that WLBC's research was broadly compliant with its mission and strategy.

- 1.2 In the SER, WLBC places its research activity in the context of the National Education programme and the Long-Term Development Strategy of the State and the regional development of Klaipėda and Šiauliai. As evidence, the SER cites participation in particular international research conferences and key research outputs published in the in-house journal, Vadyba. The SER also offers particular examples of academic staff focussing their doctoral studies upon relevant national and regional social development topics. The SER had already detailed the direct correlation between student final thesis topics and the national and regional research agendas. The SER offers examples of Applied Research with regional social, industrial and business partners ranging from commercial companies, public health providers and local municipal authorities. In meetings with the team, representatives of the City of Klaipėda were especially complimentary about the mutually beneficial long-term engagement with WLBC in Applied Research.

The team acknowledged the compliance of WLBC's research with national and regional priorities. In effect, those priorities were so integral to WLBC's research strategy that compliance was anyway the equivalent of compliance with those priorities.

- 1.3 In the SER, WLBC cross-references the information already offered on match of national Research priorities to the demands and needs of its social and business partners and its significant engagement with these partners. The cross-reference research activities cover mainly areas of Business and Management and some in Engineering. Annexes within the SER list the research areas of the study departments and contain a list of the most important research projects between 2006 and 2010. The research areas are in correspondence with the profiles of the study departments. As reported in Section 1.1, most of the research results and outputs are incorporated into pedagogical materials or have a theoretical character. Results were presented in conferences and in research publications.

The SER particularly highlighted the increasing number of joint international research projects, citing above a specific international conference on Sustainable Regional Development but also tabulating overall international conference contributions.

WLBC has, for its size, been involved in a lot of international projects. Some of the projects had either an Applied Research or knowledge-based curriculum development focus. The European Union funded projects (Leonardo, Erasmus) and other projects (Nord Plus, Lithuanian-Polish co-operation) have significantly contributed to the budget of WLBC from the European Union Structural Funds and other international sources. WLBC's international co-operations, including participation in various projects, are based chiefly on co-operation agreements and personal contacts.

Again, however, if WLBC wishes to develop Applied Research, beyond the minimum required by national regulation, and to achieve greater impact with academic, social and business partners, the team **recommended** that WLBC establishes targets to measure an expansion in the number of business and social partners sponsoring Applied Research, perhaps by being more responsive to practical, regional Applied Research needs rather than offering Applied Research services of a more general nature. Again, WLBC should look to what potential sponsors might demand rather than what it might supply in relation to Applied Research. Similarly, the team **recommends** that WLBC establishes targets to measure an

expansion of academic staff and student numbers in research activities, including international research activities, with a view to more joint publications of research outcomes in Vadyba or elsewhere.

The SER also offered a view on its international links and the character of WLBC's research. In fact, there was no requirement on WLBC so to do for this review as only universities are required to respond in those areas. Nevertheless, the team considered the information offered by WLBC and has factored it into this report as appropriate.

*Judgement on the area: Research and Art is given positive evaluation.*

## VI. IMPACT ON REGIONAL AND NATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

- 1./2. WLBC's research agenda and study programme portfolio are so overtly informed by national and regional priorities that there is inevitably some overlap in the two related parts of this report.

In its SER, WLBC concentrates more upon how its strategy can be mapped consistently and closely against strategic plans of the State, the Klaipėda and Šiauliai regions and the Cities of Klaipėda and Šiauliai. The SER offers a tabular presentation of those two regional development plans and claims that its study programmes contribute to the implementation of those regional development plans. It also claims that WLBC is an active participant in the life of Klaipėda and Šiauliai. It is certainly true that both at Klaipėda and Šiauliai, the student communities reported a high level of engagement with the lives of those two cities.

The SER advised how business and social partners inform the updating of existing and creation of new study programmes and how national and regional development benefit from WLBC's Applied Research. The SER goes on to list case studies, demonstrating the impact of specific initiatives. At meetings with WLBC staff and with social and business partners that impact was corroborated. The SER also sets out mechanisms for the public dissemination of WLBC's activities.

Though many of the case studies described and discussed were commendable and clearly productive in their own right, neither in the SER nor in meetings with the team was it articulated what measures of impact were used within its strategic planning and therefore there was no analysis of effectiveness of implementation without those impact measures. The SER did offer one exception to this general statement by measuring integration of socially excluded groups in WLBC, by counting the number of students by such groups offered a reduction in tuition fee and supplementing this with trend information. WLBC has through this one exception identified that it can develop impact measures to monitor its national and regional engagement with business and social partners.

The team is not critical of WLBC's arguably deep and direct impact on regional and national development, say, in terms of generating and retaining employment. However, WLBC has done little to measure that impact even though it is certainly significant and is recognised and commended by its business and social partners.

The team **recommended** that WLBC develop institutional level measures of impact, specific to regional and national development, within the context of its overall strategic planning. The purpose would be to permit comparison of relative performance, for example, in terms of volume of outreach and widening participation activities to promote student recruitment, to attract further involvement of external partners and stakeholders and to allow advertise of WLBC's achievements in this area. These performance indicators could also be benchmarked against competitor regional institutions allowing WLBC to compare its own performance against them. The team suggests that WLBC may wish to develop some form of information 'dashboard' for this purpose to assist the Director and the Academic Council.

3. In the SER, WLBC concentrates upon commendations and testimonials received from major social and business partners in the Klaipėda and Šiauliai regions and also provides detail on the range of such partnerships. In discussion with WLBC staff and its social and business partners, the team received

mixed messages as to which strategic priorities WLBC believed itself to be addressing and which strategic priorities were most appropriate for it to address.

The first dimension to this was whether WLBC should primarily address regional or national strategic priorities. As advised above, in this Section of the SER, the concentration was on the regional but, in discussion, WLBC staff spoke to a larger remit for WLBC (exemplified by the intention to develop a third campus in the capital city). WLBC argued that the regional could be regarded as subsumed within the national and, in the context of the aspiration for broader international partnerships, a 'South Baltic' remit was proposed by WLBC staff. In the same vein, the team could not detect, with some significant exceptions such as WLBC's collaboration with partners in Regional Tourism, an especially regional flavour to WLBC's contact with local employers. These were broad and effective as contacts (again including practice placements, curricular updating, topics of final thesis and consultancy) but they tended to be generalist, as likely to have taken place with any comparator Business College in any part of Lithuania or beyond.

The second dimension to this was divergent views on the future development of industry and commerce in the regions served by WLBC and especially Klaipėda. WLBC staff saw Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs) as increasingly significant and likely to become the more significant employer in the coming years. WLBC staff advised that this had influenced the formation of WLBC's overall offer, for example, in the development of virtual modes of attendance and the inclusion of entrepreneurial skills in the curriculum. However, the team was advised by senior representatives of business partners that the larger, sometimes multinational, industrial companies based in the region were best placed to weather the current economic downturn and would remain the more significant employers in the region.

Taking this divergent view, together with the poor uptake of commercial courses and the relatively low volume of consultancy commissioned from WLBC by commercial and industrial partners, the team wondered whether these were symptoms of something of a disconnect with regional business partners. WLBC staff advised that greater impetus was to be given to marketing WLBC's services. The team wondered whether this marketing effort might best be concentrated on establishing what services WLBC's business partners wanted rather than improving WLBC's processes for advertising its services to business partners. WLBC may wish to address this not just in its continued use of stakeholder surveys to business and social partners but also by integrating key social and business partners into WLBC's internal deliberations and strategic decision making.

On the other hand, the team was again quite satisfied that WLBC, through its close social partnership, was having a mutually beneficial impact upon its public sector social partners at regional and City level.

4. The SER confirms that practice placement is compulsory on Professional Bachelors study programmes and WLBC claims a systematic approach to the organisation of practice placements and the selection of final thesis topics. This claim was corroborated by graduates, students and social and business partners in meetings with the team. Graduates also acknowledged the benefit to them of this experience in enhancing their employability. Graduates in particular reported their studies to have been relevant to the subsequent professional careers. They especially referred to a feeling of being advantaged and made more confident in application because of the professional relevance of their programmes of study and the specific and general competences they had gained.

The SER offers some examples of thesis topics and produces a tabular representation of the relevance of final theses topics to regional and national development and asserts a focus upon the resolution of real life actual problems occurring in social and business partners. Again, testimonials are presented in evidence of this and by an analysis of thesis assessment which cites unsolicited references to actual application of the problem analysed and resolved within the thesis in around a quarter of all final theses. The SER also quantifies nearly two thirds of final theses as being directly related to problems relevant to the Klaipėda and Šiauliai regions.

The team especially welcomes the engagement of practitioners, employed in the social and business partners where practice placements and final theses are located, in their assessment. The SER suggests that such practitioner engagement occurs in around 60% of all final theses.

The team did not establish whether the SER's quantifications of impact of final theses were, as it seemed, calculated for the SER itself or were drawn down from information regularly monitored by WLBC. The recommended development of institutional level measures of impact will allow a greater and more consistent standardization of the appropriateness and relevance of work placement opportunities and thesis topics.

5. The SER also describes the range of inputs WLBC's academic and professional services staff make to the national, regional and City agendas. This was evidenced by appended information on the number of such inputs (by types of input) and on specific higher level inputs ranging from external committee and commission/council memberships, to involvement in the development of strategic documentation and diverse professional and cultural associations. Graduates and students were aware of the opportunity for students to volunteer to assist in cultural and social opportunities in Klaipėda and Šiauliai, especially a number of commendable charitable initiatives.

Graduates and employers were aware of, and respondents to, WLBC's regular perception surveys. Graduates welcomed WLBC's staff efforts to engage them in a variety of roles, including practice placement sponsors and commenting upon curricular development, as alumni.

Business, and especially social, partners described how WLBC staff and student had readily become involved in research-based consultancies such as local traffic surveys and reported how in many other ways WLBC staff and students enhanced the life of the two cities.

The team acknowledged the significant role that WLBC played in a range of engagements at national, and especially regional and City, level.

*Judgement on the area: Impact on Regional and National Development is given positive evaluation.*

## VII. BEST PRACTICE EXAMPLES AND RECOMMENDATIONS

### Recommendations

- III. 1.2 The team **recommended** that WLBC systematises and overtly articulates its consideration of market share, profitability and investment efficiency within its strategic planning. In the context of greater competition, a decline in applications and a demographic downturn its strategic planning should be underpinned by realistic financial information. Similarly, new initiatives and activities should offer individual business cases with cost-benefit analysis. In recent years, WLBC has successfully drawn down project (and, crucially, European Union) funding to drive forward qualitative improvement. However, such monies may become less easy to access and realistic financial information must be factored into WLBC's selection of strategic choices. WLBC has already demonstrated, by its accessing of private finances for the refurbishment of its new premises, that it has the wherewithal and expertise to underpin its strategic planning in this way.
- III. 2.2 The team did detect some overlap or duplication in the support arrangements for Applied Research. Where this was resourced through European Union project monies, both the Department of Applied Research and the Department of International Relations appeared to have some administrative remit whilst the individual academic researcher's supervision in terms of their academic discipline lay within their home study department. The team **recommended** that WLBC look at the integration of the current dispersed academic and administrative support arrangements for its academic staff engaging in Applied Research with a view to these arrangements being made more clear and accessible to those staff.
- III. 2.4 The team therefore **recommended** that WLBC should develop, within the context of its strategic planning, a more overt and articulated Human Resources Policy, identifying and quantifying the staffing needs and costs of the range of strategic initiatives proposed by WLBC and which changes would be needed to the staffing complement to achieve those initiatives.

- III. 2.5 However, the SER offered a very limited analysis of strategic risk in what is an extremely volatile financial and educational environment. Even in areas where the SWOT analysis has addressed potential risks, the pace of change warrants continued monitoring of the position. The team has already recommended in Section 1.2 the better underpinning of WLBC's strategic planning with financial information. The team now also **recommended** that WLBC systematises a regular Sustainability Analysis (perhaps a more purposeful description that a Risk Register) within its strategic planning. This would allow WLBC to address not just the implications of success but also the worst case scenarios of possibly adverse external and internal factors resulting in only partial achievement of strategic objectives.
- V. 1.1 Nevertheless, the team **recommended** that, if it wishes to develop Applied Research beyond the minimum required by national regulation, WLBC consider a more comprehensive and a more rewarding incentive system so as to motivate academic staff to participate in Applied Research more intensively.
- V. 1.1 However, the team sees potential for WLBC to develop a higher research profile and **recommended** that academic staff be charged to publish more papers in English and to contribute to and participate more frequently at international scientific conferences.
- V. 1.3 Again, however, if WLBC wishes to develop Applied Research, beyond the minimum required by national regulation, and to achieve greater impact with academic, social and business partners, the team **recommended** that WLBC establishes targets to measure an expansion in the number of business and social partners sponsoring Applied Research, perhaps by being more responsive to practical, regional Applied Research needs rather than offering Applied Research services of a more general nature. Again, WLBC should look to what potential sponsors might demand rather than what it might supply in relation to Applied Research. Similarly, the team **recommended** that WLBC establishes targets to measure an expansion of academic staff and student numbers in research activities, including international research activities, with a view to more joint publications of research outcomes in Vadyba or elsewhere.
- VI. 1./2. The team **recommended** that WLBC develop institutional level measures of impact, specific to regional and national development, within the context of its overall strategic planning. The purpose would be to permit comparison of relative performance, for example, in terms of volume of outreach and widening participation activities to promote student recruitment, to attract further involvement of external partners and stakeholders and to allow advertise of WLBC's achievements in this area. These performance indicators could also be benchmarked against competitor regional institutions allowing WLBC to compare its own performance against them. The team suggests that WLBC may wish to develop some form of information 'dashboard' for this purpose to assist the Director and the Academic Council.

### **Good Practice**

- III. 1.2 The SER advised that WLBC's strategic planning was consistent with national requirements for such processes. The SER also cited the sourcing of national planning and regulatory documentation. The SER also advised that the Strategic Planning Group had carried out a Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats (SWOT) analysis as part of its preparatory work and had commissioned three sets of research from an external professional consultancy in relation to strategic planning. The team commended WLBC for its preparedness to seek expert external assistance to enhance the breadth of view of its strategic planning.
- III. 2.3 Through its meetings with WLBC's long-term strategic partners, including the Klaipėda Chamber of Commerce and the City of Klaipėda, the team was able to establish the maturity of those relationships and the mutual interest in each partner deriving benefit from the activities of the other partner. An outstanding example of this would be WLBC's acquisition of new premises from the City of Klaipėda which saw WLBC investing significantly in the refurbishment of the buildings and saw the City of Klaipėda gain the further injection of resource, activity and presence into the revitalised Old Town.
- III. 2.6 The team were particularly impressed by the dedicated Practical Education Centre which allowed the simulation of practice placement. This resource was not only fully in accord with WLBC's mission but reflected a thorough appreciation of the realities of the economic situation where it was not always

possible to secure practice placements with employers for all students. The team commends the Practical Education Centre as good practice.

- V. 1.1 The most prestigious periodical of the College is the three-language scientific journal “Vadyba” (Management) published twice a year in English, Russian and Lithuanian. The journal has an international editorial board and it is indexed in some international databases. The Lithuanian editor in chief, from Klaipėda University, introduced the team to its editorial policy. The journal has a strong reviewing process. Foreign reviewers have also been involved. The team can confirm that “Vadyba” is an asset to WLBC and, in the context of WLBC’s size and standing, represents good practice.
- VI. 4. The team especially welcomes the engagement of practitioners, employed in the social and business partners where practice placements and final theses are located, in their assessment. The SER suggests that such practitioner engagement occurs in around 60% of all final theses.

## VIII. JUDGEMENT

*WLBC* is given **positive** evaluation.

Grupės vadovas:  
Team leader:

Prof Dr Johann Schneider

Grupės nariai:  
Team members:

Prof Tiit Roosmaa  
Prof Jozsef Temesi  
Mr Stasys Svagzdys  
Ms Natalija Musinskaja

Vertinimo sekretorius:  
Review secretary:

Mr Gregory Clark

## ANNEX. HIGHER EDUCATION INSTITUTION RESPONSE TO REVIEW REPORT

Having familiarised with the preliminary report on institutional review of Lithuania Business University of Applied Sciences (former name – WLBC) prepared by external experts, the College in principle agrees with the presented conclusions, appreciates the expressed comments and recommendations of the experts and is grateful for commended good practice of the College. However, we would like to clarify some information.

In par. 7 art. 1.2 the experts indicated that the College failed “*to capture and integrate key activities such as co-operation and/or competition with comparator colleges or even universities. A more major example would be the lack of financial quantification not only of initiatives but also of potential risks*”. We would like to clarify that collaboration with other schools of higher education takes place through participation in activities of various associations, such as Association of college directors of Lithuania (LKDK), Association of non-governmental colleges, where collective decisions are made in respect of all colleges; and cooperation with universities is especially active in implementation of continuing Master degree study programmes.

In par. 6 art. 1.4, the experts mentioned inability of WLBC to see changes in the market. We would like to emphasize that responding to significant changes in the market (emigration, highly competitive environment, etc.) the College takes active measures, such as: development of new, attractive study programmes relevant to the market needs (*Business information system, Joint study programme*), implementation of various study modes (*distance, individual studies*), opening of new sub-divisions (Vilnius) would allow the College to mitigate the impact of market changes.

In par. 6 of art. 2.5 the experts noted, that the proposed additional campus in Vilnius had not even been mentioned in the *Integrated development strategy for 2010-2015*. We would like to emphasise that *Integrated development strategy for 2010-2015 was prepared in January 2010*, while establishment of Vilnius campus, taking into account the significant changes in the market, was approved in April 2012.

Art. 2.7 of the conclusions indicates that the College might have not sufficient financial resources (in view of decreasing number of students) to finance its activities. We would like to draw your attention to the fact that adopting reviewed annual strategic decisions and estimating potential risk, the College is exactly diversifying its activity that allows for optimisation of financial resources and their effective use.

Presenting their conclusions the experts also wondered whether WLBC should primarily address regional or national strategic priorities. Responding to this question, we would like to stress that the College having its presence in almost all regions of Lithuania: Klaipėda, Šiauliai, Vilnius, first of all strives for strengthening its regional impact and focuses its activity on the regional strategic priorities, which make an integral part of the national priorities. To enhance its regional impact, the College puts a lot of efforts to strengthen close cooperation with its social partners – business companies, both Small and Medium business and the major business companies such as TEO, AB Klaipėdos vandenys, AB Klaipėdos kartonas, AB Klaipėdos mediena, AB Philips Moris, SE Klaipėda State Seaport Authority, AB Vakarų laivų gamykla, etc.

We suppose that our additional information will be taken into consideration.

Sincerely,  
Director

assoc. prof. dr. Angelė Lileikienė