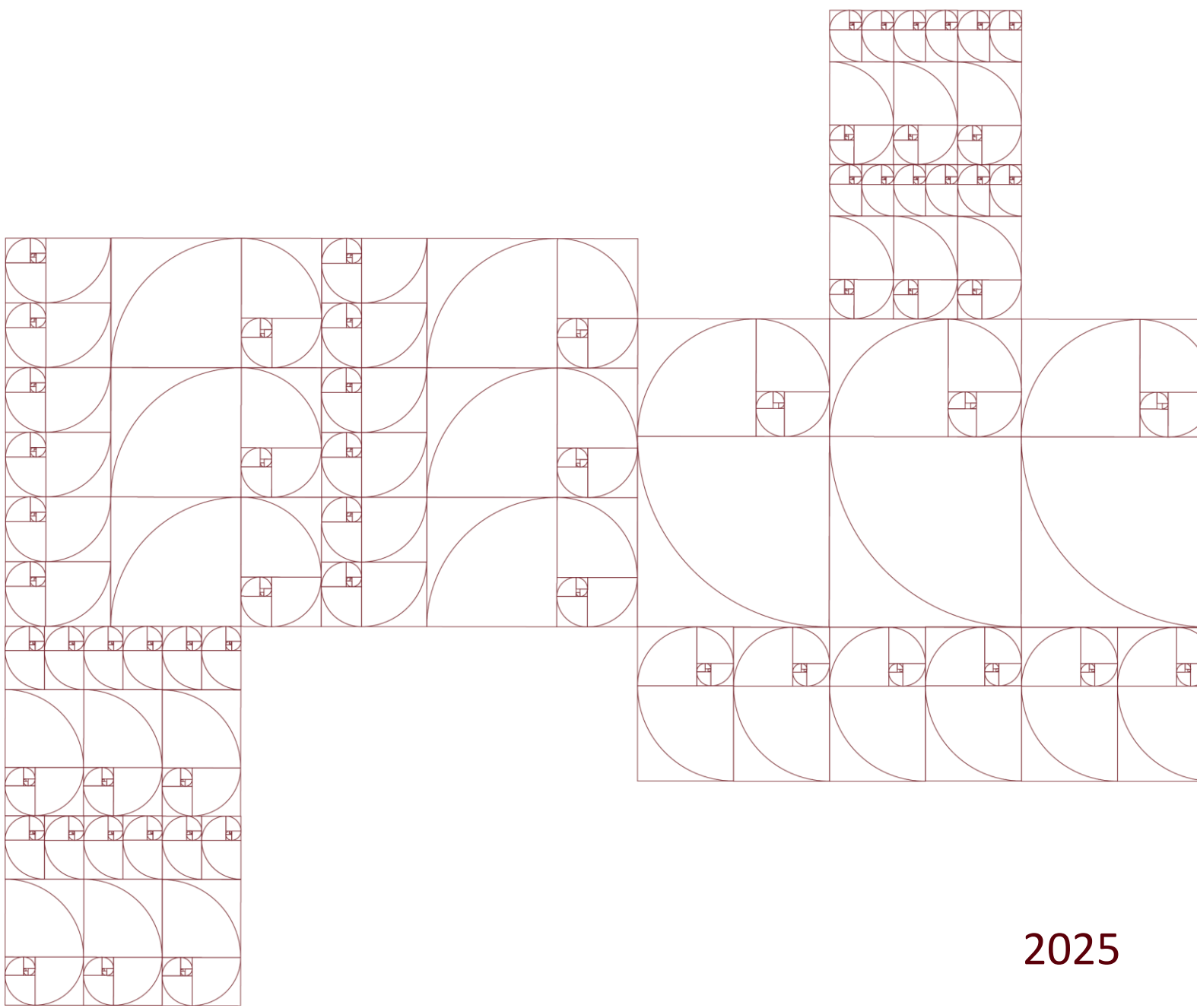




FEEDBACK ON PROGRESS AFTER INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW



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

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

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

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

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

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

Timeline of the Institutional Review

The institutional review visit took place from 22 till 24 November 2022

The decision on accreditation granting a 3-year accreditation came into force on: 7 May 2025

Timeline of the Follow Up

The action plan has been approved in October 2023

The progress report has been approved in August 2025

The external progress visit took place on 3 September 2025

The feedback on the progress report has been prepared in September 2025 by:

- *Colin Raban, Emeritus Professor, University of Derby (United Kingdom), academic reviewer and independent consultant*
- *Lex Stomp, Head of the Consultants and Educational Advisors Group, Senior Lecturer in Internationalisation, University of Applied Sciences Windesheim (the Netherlands)*

Introduction

The institutional review of St Ignatius of Loyola College (ILK) took place in November 2022. The review report concluded that the College should receive a negative judgement with three of the Evaluation Areas deemed 'satisfactory', and one (Studies and Research) being assessed as 'unsatisfactory'. The report offered a total of 34 recommendations and identified two examples of good practice.

The College's progress report responds to each of the recommendations of the institutional review panel. Whilst ILK has striven to define the actions it has taken, or is intending to take, the nature and relevance of its responses was not always clear. In several cases the progress report only addressed an aspect of the recommendation or supplied information that was not directly related to the issue at hand. There were also some instances in which there was an apparent delay in ILK taking action on the report's recommendations.

These shortcomings should not detract from the numerous cases in which ILK has acted appropriately, and in which it has established the infrastructure or setting conditions that will enable longer term improvements in the College's performance.

This report draws upon the findings of the 2023 institutional review, the College's progress report and the experts' discussions with ten ILK staff and a student representative during an online progress visit held on the 3rd September. The progress report was useful as a basis for the experts' preparations for the online progress visit, and in ensuring an open and productive dialogue with college staff. The visit was particularly helpful in providing insights into the College's commitment to action and the progress it has made in responding to the recommendations of the 2023 review. The experts are mindful, however, of the fact that the indirect nature of the evidence provided by the progress report and visit does not enable us to verify the accounts provided by the College or to make final judgements on the effectiveness of the actions that it has taken.

The 2023 review report is a complex document, offering a very large number of recommendations, many of which relate to several of the Evaluation Areas. In the interests of accessibility and coherence, it was decided that the contents of this report should be organised thematically rather than in strict accordance with the order in which the recommendations had been presented.

This report is structured according to the following themes: management, quality assurance, internationalisation, marketing and research. Where relevant, reference to individual recommendations and to the College's responses is made by citing the number they were assigned in ILK's progress report, prefaced by the evaluation area in which they appear. The designation for each of the Evaluation Areas is 'M' for Management, 'Q' for Quality Assurance, 'S+R' for Studies and Research and 'RND' for Impact on Regional and National Development.

1. Management

The Institutional Review report urges the College to develop strategies for internationalisation and research (recommendations M1 and M2). The College has responded by developing and approving strategies for these two areas of activity during the 2024/25 academic year, and at the progress visit staff confirmed that internationalisation and research are ILK priorities. The actions listed in the 'change achieved or expected' column are, in experts view, appropriate.

Several of the recommendations relate to the College's management structure (Q5, Q6, M3). ILK responded promptly to the recommendation (Q5) that it develops 'a clear organogram', with key decisions having been taken in 2023. The response to this recommendation lists the various senior bodies and posts within ILK's

management structure, and the College also reported that a Head of the Quality Assurance Department had been appointed (Q6) and a senior management team has been created (M3). At the progress visit it was suggested that the College might consider whether there is a risk that its management structure could be over-complex for such a small institution.

ILK's management culture is also the subject of several recommendations (Q3, Q7, Q9 and M5). In experts view, the progress report's description (in Q9) of the Ignatian Paradigm (Q9), emphasising 'servant leadership' and the creation of 'an open, inclusive and ethically based institution', could emerge as a feature of good practice. The College might also wish to consider whether there is a link between this and the action that it has taken (in response to M5) to 'develop further its capacity for effective self-analysis.

With respect to the College's financial affairs, recommendation M7 concerns the 'streamlining' of the Director's budgetary proposals, whilst paragraph 71 of the institutional review report disclaims any intention to impugn the Director or College Council. The action taken by the College is appropriate.

Whilst the institutional review report commented in generally favourable terms on the ILK's learning and teaching infrastructure, it recommended that the College creates 'favourable financial conditions for (its) long-term sustainability' (M9). At the progress visit the experts learned that over the past twelve months there has been a marked increase in the number of staff and students, giving added significance to this recommendation. ILK has responded by introducing a strategic planning process, with the intention *inter alia* of enhancing its financial independence and the diversification of funding sources. The progress report provides strong evidence of ILK's success in this area.

2. Quality assurance

The review panel had recommended that the College's quality assurance procedures be made 'publicly' available in both Lithuanian and English (Q1). Whilst the progress report states that it has complied with this recommendation, providing a long and detailed catalogue of the documents concerned, an inspection of ILK's website revealed only limited evidence to support the College's assertion. It was also apparent that the English language documents that do now appear on the website had only been uploaded within the last few months.

Adherence to the European Standards and Guidelines (ESG) is a work in progress (Q2), with key documents having been approved as late as May and June of this year. At the progress visit the experts were told that responsibility for each of the ESG standards had been assigned to a manager or some other senior body (including Academic Council) within the College. It was suggested that the Academic Council should be designated as the ultimate authority, with responsibility for the coordination and approval of the College's quality assurance policies and procedures.

Recommendation Q3 raises three loosely connected issues: the need to improve ILK's strategy by involving its internal and external stakeholders, develop appropriate action plans, and develop relevant data collection measures. Whilst ILK's response does not address the first issue, it is apparent from the response to Q4 that in May 2025 the College approved a procedure for obtaining feedback from social stakeholders. As far as internal stakeholders (staff and students) are concerned, the response to Q7 confirms that meetings have taken place, and the response to Q4 indicates that methods for obtaining student feedback were approved recently.

The College's responses to several of the recommendations (Q3, Q4, RND1) suggest that ILK is still in the process of developing its arrangements for data collection, monitoring and feedback, and that ILK's approach relies quite heavily on the use of survey methods. This, it seems, is complemented by the College's commitment to further develop its capacity for self-analysis (M5), having introduced 'clear self-assessment methodologies and standardised evaluation criteria' as part of its internal quality assurance processes. The experts note that the effectiveness of these self-assessment procedures will depend on whether the institution's management culture is conducive to constructive (self) criticism. It is also noted that the College is taking appropriate action to support students who are identified (through ILK's monitoring procedures) as being at risk of under-performing or dropping out of their courses (S+R1-2).

Overall, the experts conclude that the progress report and visit indicate that the College has laid the foundation for what should be an effective approach to quality assurance. The potential strengths of its current arrangements include the development of a quality assurance manual and a set of instruments to monitor and assess quality at various levels supported by the appointment of the Head of the Quality Assurance Department. The impression gained from the progress report is that the development of ILK's quality assurance system has not yet reached the stage at which it can evaluate the effectiveness of the measures it has taken. Thus, at the progress visit it was suggested that in accordance with the Plan-Do-Check-Act-Cycle (PDCA) the College should be actively engaging with the 'Check' stage and considering what actions it might need to take to enhance and embed the various components of its quality assurance system.

3. Internationalisation

The College's Internationalisation Strategy and various related documents were approved earlier this year (M1), leading to the creation of an International Department and the development of a procedure that is designed to enhance staff engagement with such international activities as applied research and staff/student mobility.

The College has responded to the recommendation that it expands its international partner network (RND3) by listing the various 'cooperation links' it has developed since 2019. Whilst the nature and significance of these links is not clear, the progress report does refer to a 'strategic focus on Jesuit partnerships' – an approach that is commended in paragraphs 53 and 157-8 of the Institutional Review report. In discussions with staff during the progress visit it was suggested that the College might consider the benefits of complementing this focus by developing partnerships with a wider and more diverse range of institutions.

It was recommended that the College increases the international mobility of both staff and students (S+R8). Thus, one feature of ILK's international strategy is the ambitious aim 'to attract as many foreign students as possible' (RND4), and to internationalise the curriculum and research. The progress report documents the various measures taken by ILK to promote international mobility and claims that since 2022 there have been significant increases in staff and student mobility. It is noted, however, that this upward trend is expressed in percentage terms with no indication of the actual numbers of staff and students involved. It is also noted that the progress report does not indicate the nature and duration of staff and student exchanges.

Enhancing the English language proficiency of staff and students, and delivering programmes in English, is a precondition for the successful implementation of ILK's internationalisation strategy. This is the subject of a number of the Institutional Review report's recommendations (Q1, M6, S+R 7-8, RND 2). This report has noted already the delayed publication on its website of English language versions of the College's procedural documents, and that the response to M6 does not offer details of ILK's staff development for 'language acquisition (especially English for Specific Purposes)'. It is, however, apparent from the response to S+R7 that

appropriate action is being taken to develop English language competence and library resources. The response to RND2 also provides credible evidence that the College is taking 'deliberate steps to improve the English Language skills' of staff and students. It was evident from discussions during the progress visit that applicants for admission are required to be proficient in English at the upper intermediate level (B2) of the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR).

4. Marketing and the development of study programmes

Paragraph 51 of the review report states that 'more attention now needs to be given to a structured approach to establish growing and changing market needs and how the College might best respond to these as a vehicle for limited but focused expansion'. This is followed by several recommendations advocating, in effect, the development of a marketing strategy and the conduct of market research (M4, Q4, RND 1, 5). Whilst there is an appropriate response to the key recommendation (M4), information is not provided on when these actions were taken; it is also noted that the College's procedure for obtaining feedback from social stakeholders was only approved in May 2025 (Q4). There is, however, a commendably frank response to the recommendation that ILK 'establish a more systematic way of measuring (the) implementation of its goals and current demands' (RND1): having registered the partial implementation of this recommendation, the College acknowledges that the measures it had adopted 'remain insufficient' and concludes that an alternative 'methodology or tool' will need to be developed.

In its response to recommendation RND5, it is stated that the College has developed a strategic marketing plan for the purpose of identifying 'priority target groups'. ILK has also formulated a Training Services Plan to 'monitor and analyse' the need for lifelong learning provision (RND6). It would appear that the College has sought to identify these target groups and their training needs by means of surveys of its own students and graduates rather than by extending the scope of its enquiries to assess the needs of those that it does not currently serve. ILK's responses to these two recommendations also seem to indicate that it is catering for these needs by offering an expanded range of short, vocational and non credit-bearing courses. At the progress visit, however, the experts were assured that there is provision for online study and for varying the pace of study to accommodate students' personal needs and circumstances.

The progress report lists a series of measures taken in response to the recommendation that it should develop 'a comprehensive publicity plan' to 'enlarge ILK's visibility and attract more students and social partners' (RND4). The report also states that information is published in Lithuanian and English with the aim of attracting foreign students. An inspection of the website confirmed that this is the case and that applicants for admission are required to be proficient in English at the upper intermediate level of the CEFR. However, the experts were not able to determine whether and to what extent ILK's study programmes are taught and assessed in English.

5. Research

Whilst acknowledging that colleges are not subject to the same requirements as universities, the Institutional Review report states (in paragraph 170) that 'research remains a fundamental weakness of the College'. The main analysis of this issue is provided in paragraphs 140-153 of the report, commenting on ILK's reliance on the work of 'several highly productive individuals'.

In response to recommendation M2, in 2024/25 the College developed a research and development strategy, and the progress report states that its next step will be to prepare an implementation plan for the engagement of social and business partners in ILK's research and development activities within the region.

The strategy is supported by the creation of the post of Head of Science and Research (Q5), and by the approval of criteria for the evaluation of lecturers' research and development activities.

Several of the recommendations deal with the issue of research-related staff development and incentives (M6, S+R 4-5). The progress report provides a non-specific reference to research-related staff development (M6), and to various recent actions to motivate research activity (S+R4) and to set research publication targets (S+R5). M6 also refers to staff development in pedagogic, language and administrative skills. The evidence on research outputs is, at this stage, understandably limited: two applications for research and development funding have been made to the Lithuanian Research Council (M9), and whilst the response to S+R5 states that in 2022/2023 there has been a 63% increase in the number of scientific publications it is impossible to attach a value to this increase because the report does not provide the actual number of publications.

The Review report recommended that the College 'remove or reformulate provision V. 17 from its Code of Academic Ethics' (Q8). The clause in question states that 'ILK students violate academic ethics when they publicly express hostility to the Christian tenets of ILK, violate the dignity of each person and respect for authority in a variety of environments. Whilst the issue has an obvious bearing on the conduct of research activity, it has wider implications for the College's character as an institution of higher education and, in particular, for its management culture.

The progress report seems to indicate that the resolution of the issue has been deferred to 'the fourth quarter of 2025' for consideration by the Academic Council. Whilst there appeared (at the progress visit) to be some disagreement with the recommendation, it was suggested that the College should ensure that Clause V.17 is consistent with the broad definition of academic freedom that appears in Article 53(2) of the Law on Higher Education and Research.

In summary, the experts find that the College has worked with its social and business partners, and with its own staff, to develop a research and development strategy and to create the infrastructure necessary for the implementation of that strategy. It is now beginning to forge research-focused relationships with international partners, building on its established networks, and providing support for staff to enable them to realise ILK's research objectives. It is expected that the College's recent and current efforts in this field to result, in the short to medium term, in increases in the volume and quality of ILK's research activity.

General Commentary and Reflections

This report is based on the findings of the 2023 Institutional Review, ILK's progress report and an online progress visit to the College. The online visit was particularly helpful in resolving issues that were unclear in the progress report. Experts' comments on ILK's response to the recommendations of the 2023 review are tentative since the experts did not have access to evidence that would enable us to verify the College's accounts of the actions that it has taken.

In the experts' view, ILK has made notable progress, at least in laying the groundwork for a complete response to the recommendations of the 2023 review. Of particular importance are the actions taken by the College to internationalise its provision, develop its quality assurance system and engage in applied research. These actions are supported by a strengthening of the management structure and by the introduction of staff development programmes.

This report has noted the apparent delay in responding to some of the recommendations of the 2023 review, and that it will take some time for some of the College's actions to bear fruit. This applies especially to the

implementation of its strategies for research and internationalisation. It is for this reason that it is suggested that the next step in the development of ILK's strategies and systems would be to evaluate their effectiveness and then to undertake any enhancement or corrective actions that might prove necessary.

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A. Goštauto g. 12, 01108 Vilnius, Lithuania

tel.: +370 5 205 3323

ivs@skvc.lt

skvc.lrv.lt