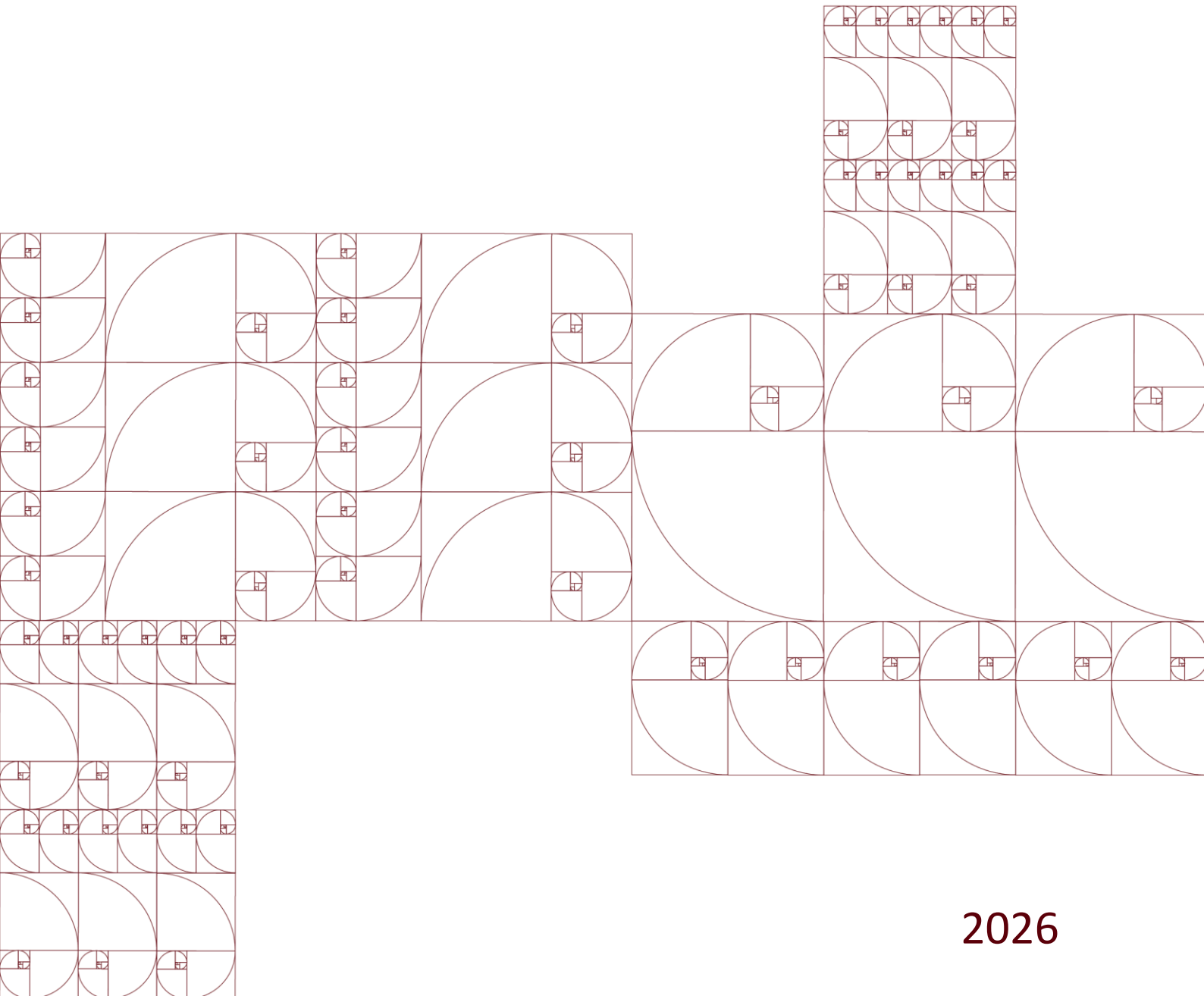


FEEDBACK ON PROGRESS AFTER INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW



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 visits for both colleges that now form LIK took place in May 2022

The decision on accreditation granting a 7-year accreditation came into force on: 10 October 2022

Timeline of the Follow Up

The action plan has been approved on 8 January 2025

The progress report has been approved on 2 February 2026

The external progress visit took place on 20 March 2026

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

- **Prof. Mark Richardson, Professor Emeritus of University College Dublin, Ireland**
- **Göran Melin, Associate Professor, Melin Advisory, Sweden.**

Introduction

The Feedback Panel was informed that Lietuvos Inžinerijos Kolegija (hereinafter – LIK) was formed in 2024 through the merger of Kaunas College of Forestry and Environmental Engineering (KMAIK) and Kaunas Technical College (KTK). The merged college has two faculties: Industrial Engineering and Technology (hereinafter – FIET) and Environmental Engineering (hereinafter – FEE).

The Feedback Panel noted that the Action Plan and Progress Report for LIK represents a response to a combination of the recommendations in both institutional review reports. By way of further preparation for the online meeting the Panel studied both institutional review reports and noted the following data of relevance to the feedback on progress in a new merged College:

Area	Assessment points		Recommendations		
	KMAIK	KTK	KMAIK	KTK	LIK Action Plan
Management	3	2	7	5	Merged to 10
Quality Assurance	3	3	3	4	Merged to 6
Studies and Research (Art)	3	3	6	3	9
Impact on Regional and National Development	4	4	1	2	3
Total number			17	14	28

Given the newly-merged College management structure, which includes two Deans of Engineering – one for each faculty – it was found helpful to review action at College and Faculty level on a recommendation-by-recommendation basis, noting the source of the 31 recommendations originating in the review reports for KMAIK and KTK. These recommendations are addressed in this Feedback Report as 28 recommendations, as presented in the LIK Progress Report and Action Plan. Progress on each recommendation is studied individually, accompanied by an integrated approach in the conclusions under each area, and at the end of this report.

The Feedback Panel was supplied with comprehensive documentation in advance of the online meeting, which allowed a clear understanding of the Institutional Review Panels' findings on KMAIK and KTK; the merged College's response to these recommendations; and progress to date on addressing the recommendations.

The online meeting with LIK representatives included informative presentations on current management structures; the impact of the new Strategy and Management Centre; recent academic developments; and further strengthening of collaborations with external stakeholders, nationally and internationally. Ten senior members of staff and a student representative joined the online meeting and all contributed to an open discussion on progressing the recommendations in the context of LIK's Strategy 2026–2030. Staff participants included the Director, Deputy Director for Academic Development, deans of both faculties, and the heads of strategically-important centres and administrative units.

1. Evaluation Area: Management

The institutional review panels made 12 recommendations (KMAIK 7 and KTK 5) under the evaluation area of 'Management', which have been combined into ten recommendations for LIK. Each of the ten recommendations and the implemented or planned actions according to the Progress Report are reviewed in the following, preceded by a restatement of each recommendation.

1. In order to achieve its ambitions more effectively, the HEI should review its Strategy and:

- replace the emphasis on flexibility and a reactive approach to regional needs and opportunities with a more proactive approach, supported by a high-level strategic plan with key long-term objectives, on the basis of which the leaders responsible for the development of studies, research and internationalisation could be mandated to ensure year-on-year progress towards the overarching goal of becoming an internationally recognised HEI;*
- reorient process management towards the achievement of long-term objectives;*
- expand risk management in order to identify threats arising from the globalisation of higher education;*
- define strategic objectives related to graduate competences, grounded in strong technical abilities and well-developed interpersonal skills, a more international study environment and increased emphasis on research-based learning.*

This recommendation is an edited version of a recommendation from the KTK report. The final point includes a possible misinterpretation. The Institutional Review Panel recommended a "greater emphasis on research-led teaching" (i.e. management and lecturers' responsibility) and not "research-based learning" (i.e. student responsibility) as stated in the Progress Report. Although directed to KTK (now FIET) it has relevance across the College at management level. "Research-led teaching" has important strategic consequences for the research-based criteria used in career development and future staff recruitment.

In order to meet this recommendation and in line with the planned measures described in the Action Plan from January 2025, a new strategy has been developed for the period 2026–2030. The Strategy sets out the framework through which LIK shall respond to fundamental national and international changes in higher education, technological development, the labour market, and regional development during the period 2026–2030. The Strategy focuses on the development of practical engineering competencies, the implementation of applied solutions, and the generation of measurable economic and societal impact in Lithuania. The Strategy also contains a Risk Management Plan. Together with the Strategy, a Strategy Implementation and Indicator Plan is also developed, with performance indicators.

The Progress report lists several proactive actions or events that have taken place up until 2026, the more prominent ones being the establishment of the ACE²-EU university alliance where LIK is one of nine institutions from around Europe, and the organisation of – and active participation in – an international engineering conference.

In sum, LIK has taken important steps to address the various points given in this recommendation and its sub-recommendations. Pointers for the future would include not only to focus on the ACE²-EU alliance, but also actively develop other international collaborations wherever there are opportunities. The nearby Baltic and Nordic region contains several institutions whose academic profiles are highly relevant for LIK to establish cooperation with.

2. The current objectives, tasks, indicators and aggregation algorithm of the monitoring system should be reassessed and, where necessary, supplemented with more informative indicators.

This recommendation is from the KMAIK report. Although directed to KMAIK (now FEE) it has relevance at College management level.

The Strategy and the Strategy Implementation and Indicator Plan form a clear system of indicators that enables monitoring of progress towards strategic objectives. Furthermore a Strategy and Quality Management Centre has been established and mandated to monitor the implementation of the Strategy. According to the Progress Report, an effective indicator monitoring system shall be developed, enabling timely and data-driven decision-making. LIK is commended for these measures.

The Feedback Panel wish to remark on some parts of the Strategy Implementation and Indicator Plan. In some places, the “task” (what is planned to be achieved) is the same as the “measure” (what is needed to do in order to fulfil the task or achieve the task’s goal). For example, under Strategic direction “Internationalisation and global reach”, the third “task” is “Updating internationalisation and communication strategies”, and the “measure” to do so is also updating of the internationalisation and the communication strategy. Similar almost identical wordings between the “task” and the “measure” are found in Strategic direction “Organisational excellence, sustainability and governance”.

LIK is advised to revisit the document and review the tasks and their corresponding measures.

3. In developing the next strategy, greater efforts should be made to enhance the internationalisation of the Faculty of Environmental Engineering

This recommendation is from the KMAIK report. Although directed to KMAIK (and specifically to FEE in the above statement) it has relevance at College management level, since ‘internationalisation’ is about much more than the attraction of incoming students to one faculty or another and needs to be strategically driven across all College activities at management level.

The Progress Report lists a range of measures taken with respect to increased internationalisation. Many of them relate to cooperation within the ACE²-EU alliance. The planned actions for the future target internationalisation of students/study programmes, and student mobility. Less is mentioned about research collaboration, which needs to be another pillar of the international strategy.

While the various actions taken that relate to students are commended, LIK is advised to also pay sufficient attention to internationalisation of the research at the institution, within ACE²-EU as well as beyond the alliance. This advice is not primarily quantitative; the Strategy Implementation and Indicator Plan sets ambitious quantitative targets related to the number of international partners (UAS, universities, networks) with real cooperation activities (at least 2 activities per year): from 25 in 2026 to 60 in 2030. This increase in number of active international partners appears overly ambitious and perhaps not necessary. The quality and character of the collaboration is equally important – or more important. LIK should consider deepening and intensifying the already existing collaboration and approach a well-selected smaller number of new potential partners, rather than focus solely on developing low-intensive collaboration with a large number of new partners.

4. In order to ensure effective implementation of strategic development and flexibility in responding to emerging national and international challenges, it is recommended that the strategic monitoring system be reviewed and, where necessary, simplified and improved. This should also include the planning and development of a funding attraction strategy and an investment plan, in parallel with a research plan. A defined proportion of the budget should be allocated to support the financing of strategic actions.

This recommendation is from the KMAIK report. Although originally directed to KMAIK (now FEE) it has relevance across all College activities and has been addressed accordingly.

A Strategy and Quality Management Centre has been established and tasked with developing a strategic monitoring system. The Strategy includes the aim of attracting external funds from the industrial sector, and the Strategy Implementation and Indicator Plan has set a target of doubling the financial volume from 2026 to 2030, although from a rather low level (from €0.4M to €0.8M). Certain strategic priorities will be set and funded.

5. The HEI should review the roles and responsibilities of the senior management team in order to ensure that oversight and authority for key strategic areas are appropriate and enable successful outcomes. To ensure maximum effectiveness, it may be necessary to centralise the budget instead of the currently applied decentralised model.

This recommendation is from the KTK report. The reference to a “decentralised model” referred to the situation pertaining in KTK in 2022.

The Progress Report lists a number of measures taken in response to this recommendation, but they do not relate directly to the senior management team’s roles and responsibilities, with the exception of the establishment of a position as Deputy Director for Academic Activities, including redistributed responsibilities among the Director, Deputy Director for Academic Activities and the Head of Administration.

The management of education and research as well as the administrative and academic operations, including budget management, is centralised in the new merged institution. LIK is advised to continue the ongoing process of strengthening the senior management team and making the operations increasingly efficient and effective.

6. The HEI should take action to establish and support a more professional and genuinely representative Student Representative Council. To achieve this objective, the funding arrangements should be reviewed.

This recommendation is from the KTK report. This recommendation relates to weaknesses that the Institutional Review Panel had witnessed at the KTK institution, where the student organisation was not applying any type of proper democratic election process, was dependent on funding from the institution partly on an *ad hoc*-basis, and was not member of the Lithuanian National Union of Students.

The Progress Report lists a number of points that LIK claims will address the unsatisfactory circumstances noted. However, the response in the Progress Report is a bit confusing. It is difficult to see how organisation of student events like Career Day, Leisure Fair, Student Day (Grill Party, Pizza Day), Sports Day, and Pie Day will lead to “a more professional and genuinely representative Student Representative Council”. It is also said that active cooperation is *maintained* with the Lithuanian National Union of Students.

It is not clear if concrete measures have been undertaken in order to 1) shift student representation from a rather random structure to a real representative one, 2) make the funding arrangement more independent, and 3) make sure that the LIK student union becomes member of the Lithuanian National Union of Students.

While the listed events and activities in the Progress Report are most positive, LIK is advised to revisit the Institutional Review Report for KTK and to take concrete action in order to address the recommendation from the Institutional Review Panel.

7. *The HEI should review its staff recruitment and retention policies and procedures in order to:*

- *ensure that only best practice is applied, particularly with regard to equality, diversity and inclusion, thereby supporting transparency in the decision-making of staff appointment committees;*
- *achieve an optimal balance between part-time staff with strong engagement in industry and full-time staff involved in applied research and research activities.*
- *In order to attract young specialists and academic staff from abroad, it is recommended to undertake thorough planning of academic and research staff turnover.*
- *It is further recommended to review the academic and non-academic staff evaluation system of the Faculty of Environmental Engineering, linking it to remuneration and incentive systems, in order to ensure regular, fair and structured evaluation of staff members.*

This recommendation is an edited version of recommendations which have been combined from both the KMAIK and KTK reports. Although the final point in the recommendation refers specifically to one of the faculties (FEE), the Feedback Panel believe that it applies equally to both faculties (FEE and FIET) in the merged institution LIK. This ensures adherence to the Institutional Review Panel's original recommendation regarding a "*fair and structured*" evaluation system across the whole institution.

A Gender Equality Plan has been established and implemented since a few years. The Plan includes measures to ensure gender balance in institutional governance bodies, working groups, academic staff attestation committees and other decision-making bodies. The balance between men and women on various key positions as reported in the Progress Report, is fully satisfactory, not least given the circumstance that there is often a majority of men working at a technical institution.

It is a little bit less clear how the institution has responded to the Panel's second and third sub-recommendations, as listed above. A Research and Development Centre as well as a Science and Business Cooperation Centre have been established, aiming to strengthen the role of the institution within the regional and national innovation ecosystem by increasing the effectiveness of applied research and experimental development, expanding commissioned research activities and creating added value for sustainable regional development, and identify new commissioned research opportunities from industry. While reaching the goals in this respect would be commendable, these measures appear not to directly address the Panel's referred recommendations.

Little is similarly said in the Progress Report about the Panel's fourth sub-recommendation as listed above, but it should be noted that the Strategy Implementation and Indicator Plan contains several indicators that target staff competence development, proportion of full-time staff, and staff with industrial engagement.

8. *In order for the HEI to be able to implement its international ambitions, it is recommended to continue efforts to support:*

- *all staff, by strengthening confidence in their English language skills and further developing these competences;*
- *early-career academic staff, enabling them to develop applied research activities that are recognised and valued at international level.*

This recommendation is from the KTK report. Although originally directed to KTK (now FIET) it has wider relevance as it applies to all staff across the College.

It is clear that LIK takes internationalisation seriously. It is a section of its own in the Strategy 2026–2030 and there are performance indicators set in the Strategy Implementation and Indicator Plan, which as mentioned under Recommendation 3 above, sometimes are even overly ambitious. A set of undertaken and planned actions are listed in the Progress report, for example related to improved English language level among staff, and cooperation within the ACE²-EU alliance.

LIK should continue to monitor its various activities aiming to increase the level of internationalisation at the institution.

9. The person responsible for increasing the internationalisation of the Faculty of Environmental Engineering should occupy a more prominent position within the organisational structure of the HEI.

This recommendation is an edited version of a recommendation from the KMAIK report. The original version was stated in a College context as follows: “The person responsible for internationalization affairs should be placed in a more prominent position within the College structure.” By specifically mentioning FEE but not FIET in the edited version it implies a federal arrangement, rather than a merger, whereby each faculty would have separate leaders for championing internationalisation. However that would not be the most effective from a strategic viewpoint and LIK has addressed this accordingly with the creation of a centralised International Relations Office. This solution is closer to meeting the intention of the original recommendation from the Institutional Review Panel.

The recommendation from the Institutional Review Panel has recently been addressed at College level. Until September 2025, LIK had an international relations coordinator within each faculty. On 1 September 2025, the International Relations Office commenced operations. The Office is led by the Head of International Relations. A legal adviser has also been employed to manage legal matters related to international cooperation.

10. In order to further promote the internationalisation of the Faculty of Environmental Engineering and strengthen the international orientation of the HEI, it is recommended to include relevant foreign experts in the governance and/or advisory bodies of the HEI.

This recommendation is an edited version of a recommendation from the KMAIK report. The original version was stated in a whole-of institution context but the edited version implies that promoting the internationalisation of the FEE is needed more than that of FIET. As already stated the Feedback Panel regards ‘internationalisation’ as strategically important across all aspects of LIK’s student and staff experience.

The edited version of the Institutional Review Panel’s recommendation, by specifically targeting FEE, suggests that the level of internationalisation is somewhat more challenging there than at FIET. The actions that the Progress Report lists in order to address this recommendation do however not primarily relate to FEE. The Feedback Panel advises LIK to continue the work with increasing internationalisation at the whole institution, while paying particular attention to supportive actions at FEE.

Conclusion

Under evaluation area ‘Management’ there were ten recommendations, and some of them contained several sub-recommendations. There is thus a comprehensive body of advisory material for LIK to consider under this evaluation area alone.

LIK has responded with a range of measures: An Action plan, a Strategy for the period 2026–2030, and a Strategy Implementation and Indicator Plan with performance indicators. A Progress report summarises the actions already undertaken and planned. All recommendations are addressed and as an overall observation, LIK has come a long way. With respect to a remaining few of the ten recommendations and sub-recommendations, there is still some work to do and some way to go before results start to yield evidence of fully satisfying the recommendations. In these cases, the details have been given for each recommendation above; the main areas for further investigation and improvement include student representation, internationalisation and staff management.

The actions are with few exceptions linked to clear desired outcomes and they are well communicated through the set of documents referred to above. These outcomes are measurable either through hard quantitative data or through more qualitative organisational changes and development. Advice of sharpened focus or further actions have been given above, as well as commendation.

In terms of management challenges for the future, perhaps the dominating challenge is that the new merged institution has high ambitions and wants to do very much at the same time. It is not likely that all strategic goals will be reached by 2030, nor the specific performance targets. The high ambitions are still commendable and LIK is advised to continue on the path it has started, with the aim to develop into a nationally leading and internationally recognised university of applied sciences. Obviously, with respect to management, continued modernisation, wise decision-making and organisational transparency continue to be the guiding keywords.

2. Evaluation Area: Quality Assurance

The institutional review panels made seven recommendations (KMAIK 3 and KTK 4) under the evaluation area of 'Quality Assurance', which have been combined into six recommendations for LIK. Each of the six recommendations and the implemented or planned actions according to the Progress Report are reviewed in the following, preceded by a restatement of each recommendation.

11. Governance procedures should be more comprehensively integrated into the quality assurance system. While quality assurance at the level of Study Programmes functions effectively, the current quality system and its procedures do not sufficiently support the implementation, monitoring and continuous improvement of strategic institutional objectives.

This recommendation is from the KTK report. LIK are active participants in an Alliance Quality Assurance Board at national level. LIK has two representatives on this Board. The principles and foundations of a new quality system have been identified, mindful of national reforms of external quality evaluation.

Following an initial integration of both institutions quality assurance processes into the LIK Quality Manual, the College is now taking significant steps to move their quality system to one which promotes a quality culture. A 'Strategy and Management Centre' has been established with an assigned professional team. The LIK Strategic Plan includes performance indicators that enable monitoring of strategic institutional objectives quantitatively and qualitatively. The Action Plan calls for the establishment of a systematic performance indicator monitoring framework.

12. Instead of preparing quality assurance reports manually and on an ad hoc basis, the HEI would benefit from implementing an integrated quality evaluation information system. Such a system would improve resource efficiency and facilitate better sharing of quality-related information with the academic community and external stakeholders.

This recommendation is from the KTK report. As noted under the previous recommendation, LIK have and are taking significant steps across the whole institution to implement changes which fully addresses this recommendation. The newly-formed 'Strategy and Management Centre' professional team are tasked with developing a sustainable, user-friendly monitoring framework. This will include tools for collecting feedback from students and social partners. Discussions are advancing with the College's internal I.T. section and with external suppliers to develop or procure such a system.

13. More information should be provided in English in both internal and external communication. LIK should offer more effective support to staff and students in developing competences required in an international environment, enabling them to become active members of the international academic community, and supporting graduates in integrating into international business and industry and securing employment therein.

This recommendation is from the KTK report but is equally applicable to any HEI seeking to internationalise its culture and it has been fully acted on in the context of the formation of LIK. A bilingual organisational culture is reported to be in development "in a systematic and targeted manner". This is a work-in-progress with an initial focus on institutional documents, methodological materials, and information for staff and students being available in Lithuanian and English. The next phase includes a fresh look at the LIK website.

The initial website for LIK has been setup in Lithuanian and in English. It is planned to implement a new highly-functioning website in 2027. In the interim, the Feedback Panel found the current website adequate in respect of the extent of its English language material for an external visitor, including prospective international students. It is clear that the direction of travel is positive.

Regarding staff competence development, the involvement of LIK in the ACE²-EU university alliance, with currently eight other institutions from around Europe, is providing staff with the opportunities they need to develop their international profiles.

The Progress Report is somewhat weaker on addressing actions for its students to develop their internationally-focused graduate attributes and skills. However during the online meeting the Feedback Panel learned more about LIK's wider vision of 'internationalisation' and how awareness of this is being developed through appointed staff nominees for each study programme. The Quality KPI System has six domains including internationalisation. The LIK International Relations Office could benefit from increased collaboration with the LIK Strategy and Management Centre in framing KPI's for internationally-focused graduate attributes and monitoring how successfully these are developing by surveys of relevant national and international employers.

14. The HEI would benefit from developing closer and more systematic cooperation with the Student Representative Council, with a view to continuously improving and developing institutional activities. As an organisation closely related to studies yet institutionally independent, the Student Representative Council may have additional opportunities to collect feedback from the student community, which could subsequently contribute to the HEI's quality monitoring and review processes. It is recommended to strengthen feedback mechanisms operated by the Student Representative Council, ensuring that students receive appropriate and timely information on survey outcomes and follow-up actions.

The first paragraph of this recommendation is from the KTK report. This second paragraph of this recommendation is from the KMAIK report. It is informative that both Institutional Review Panels seemingly detected that the quality loop with the student body was not being adequately closed. Hence the suggestion of closer cooperation with the Student Representative Council, and more systematically to continuously improve and develop institutional activities. Essentially, in the period as two separate institutions, it seems that both were seeking engagement by students in many quality surveys but the lack of feedback afterwards was leading to a significant drop-off in survey participation by the students.

The issue is being addressed in a new context through the newly-formed 'Strategy and Management Centre' and the creation of a new position of Student Wellbeing Coordinator. The new context is the development of an enhanced quality system, development of a new website with greater functionality, and the addition of a valuable feedback mechanism through any systematic issues raised by students with the Student Wellbeing Coordinator. It may well be the case that the intentions of the recommendation will be achieved without requiring the introduction of a new layer of formal feedback requirements through the Student Representative Council. In particular, LIK have identified the need to introduce new student motivation and engagement models.

The Feedback Panel welcome these developments and encourage LIK to review this recommendation after putting in place the new quality system and reviewing its effectiveness in respect of the percentage of students participating in student surveys, the low level of which underpinned the Institutional Review Panels' recommendations. In the interim, the continued involvement of engaging the Student Representative

Council in the design of new systems might help in promoting 'buy-in' from the student body. However this will likely be of limited effectiveness if action under Recommendation No. 6 under the 'Management' evaluation area is unsuccessful in growing a genuinely representative Student Representative Council.

15. Further analysis should be undertaken within the Faculty of Environmental Engineering to identify the reasons for student withdrawal from studies, with the objective of reducing the number of students who discontinue their studies.

This recommendation is from the KMAIK report, but should not be seen as uniquely applying to the FEE, given its relevance to the entire merged institution because some reasons for student withdrawal might be systematic, irrespective of which faculty students are in.

Analysis to date indicates that the most vulnerable groups for attrition are the part time students and the international students. Action has been taken to address underlying causes of student withdrawal in each group. The study organization model for part time students has been revised to facilitate a more effective balance between employment and studies. There is an ongoing move to a greater proportion of distance, blended and hybrid learning for these students and the option of individual study schedules have been extended to part time students. In respect of international students, the admission procedures have been revised to strengthen selection criteria and conditions for admission.

Importantly, the measures taken are being supported by new positions and systems. The appointment of a Psychologist and a Student Wellbeing Coordinator has strengthened support to students. A digitised student progress monitoring system is planned. It is intended that these developments, in collaboration with academic advisers will allow more timely intervention in helping students to continue their studies to completion.

16. The academic community should continue to be systematically informed about the importance of respect for academic integrity and academic values.

This recommendation is an edited version from the KMAIK report. The original recommendation included the words "...by engaging the Ethics Committee in communication activities and promotion of academic values". The Feedback Panel learned that the composition of the Ethics Committee has been updated, including student and trade union representatives. A working group with academic staff and student representation has been set up to review and revise where necessary the documentation that accompanies an updated Code of Academic Ethics.

Respect for academic integrity and academic values can only exist in a sustained ethical environment. There is an increasingly important societal role for HEI's in educating future generations of graduates, not least in the context of Artificial Intelligence. Growing a strong research culture at LIK will help contribute to meeting this recommendation. The Quality KPI System has six domains including research and development. In addition to quantitative and qualitative monitoring of research outputs, the LIK Centre for Applied Research and Experimental Development and the LIK Strategy and Management Centre could explore KPI's for helping to address this recommendation in the context of strengthening the overarching research culture at LIK.

Conclusion

Under the evaluation area 'Quality Assurance' there were six recommendations. Many of these were inter-related and stemmed from a concern by the Institutional Review Panels that existing quality feedback loops

were not being closed. The knock-on effect of this was evident in many facets of College operations in the former institutions prior to the merger. There was a disconnect between the wealth of data being collected and its ready availability to inform strategic monitoring and decision-making. The former quality systems failed to contribute to student welfare in respect of identifying systematic trends that influence high dropout rates. Lack of a complete feedback loop had a negative influence on motivating students to participate in surveys and the Student Representative Council was not an agent promoting engagement in quality surveys. Finally, there was a weak connection between quality assurance policies and the fostering of a strong culture of academic integrity.

LIK has responded strongly to the set of recommendations with a range of measures that address this evaluation area on a holistic basis. This is being achieved both internally at the level of the institution and externally at the national level, as LIK participates in advancing reform of external quality evaluation in Lithuania. LIK is represented on an Alliance Quality Assurance Board which has identified the principles and foundations of a new quality system. This is influencing the direction of internal changes in the positions and systems being created and developed in LIK, including a completely new quality monitoring system and a highly functional website. This is a work-in-progress and the Feedback Panel commend LIK management in their investment of time and financial resources to foster a quality culture as the bedrock of its quality assurance.

The actions are linked to clear desired outcomes and align with the strategic objectives. The forward-looking approach to harnessing specific new positions, a new quality monitoring system and a highly functional website has the capacity to collectively meet or exceed the intent of the Institutional Review Panels' recommendations. The actions and their intended results are well communicated in the Progress Report. Measurable-outcomes – especially qualitative changes – will take time to yield results. LIK management are commended for progress to date and are advised to continue close engagement with staff and students to ensure the 'buy-in' required of all stakeholders to ensure that developing quality systems achieve their full potential in strengthening a quality culture.

The newly-created Strategy and Quality Management Centre is contributing strongly to LIK's significant progress in successfully meeting the recommendations from the Institutional Review Reports of KTK and KMAIK in the merged college LIK. The next stage will be to see how much capacity is available to further drive change at grassroots level during the current strategic cycle. Recurring themes in the recommendations from the two Institutional Review Reports were the strengthening of research activity and the international experience of staff and students. LIK should continually exploit its developing strategic, quality assurance, and quality enhancement resources to collaborate with management leaders of research and internationalisation, respectively, in planned actions to enhance the research culture and international perspective of LIK.

The potential role of a professional and genuinely representative Student Representative Council as an active promoter of quality enhancement at LIK should not be overlooked. However this requires more concrete action at management and student leadership level. The Feedback Panel acknowledge that strengthening the Student Representative Council was not detected as a priority by the students, due to their other day-to-day commitments.

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

The institutional review panels made nine recommendations (KMAIK 6 and KTK 3) under the evaluation area of 'Studies and Research (Artistic Activity)', which have been combined into the nine recommendations for LIK. Each of the nine recommendations and the implemented or planned actions according to the Progress Report are reviewed in the following, preceded by restatement of each recommendation.

17. In order to achieve greater scale and quality in research activities, it is recommended that the HEI review the balance between part-time lecturers who are also employed in industry and full-time lecturers and researchers.

This recommendation is from the KTK report. A review of staffing structure and workloads has been conducted, the results of which were shared with the Feedback Panel. Further to this, a 'Research, Applied Activities and Experimental Development (R&D) Centre' was established in 2025. Research groups have been formed around four thematic areas. It is planned to expand the scope of the R&D centre as joint projects and international initiatives gain momentum. These combined actions are supporting the strategy of motivating more full-time academic staff to actively engage in research, quantitatively monitored by output in research publications and grant applications. A strategy for the attraction and retention of research active academic staff is being prepared. Already three early-career researchers are in PhD studies as part of the systematic strategy for attracting research-active academics.

18. In order to increase the internationalisation of studies and research activities, it is recommended that LIK should:

- increase support for staff preparing applications for national and EU funding calls, with such support to be directly coordinated by a designated member of the senior management team, ensuring authority and accountability in pursuing the HEI's objective that 25% of total income should derive from research activities.*
- seek opportunities to participate in joint research and research projects with international partners;*
- prepare a strategy for increasing internationalisation, to be led and managed by a designated member of the senior management team, including a clear direction for marketing and promotion.*

This recommendation is from the KTK report. The LIK Strategy 2026-2030 is built on five strategic directions, including 'Applied Research, Innovation and Industry Engagement' and 'Internationalisation and Global Reach'. Clear and relevant growth targets have been set, supported by the incorporation of internationalisation activities in annual staff appraisal and incentive indicators.

Dedicated administrative support is now in place for staff preparing applications and conducting research projects or industry engagement commissions. This is in the form of the 'Science and Business Cooperation Centre'. Financial performance to date indicates year-on-year growth and it may be expected that such external funding will exceed 30% of total income in the period of the Strategy. The trend in respect of joint publications with international partners is positive. The Feedback Panel noted that research groups have been formed around four thematic areas to date but that the Strategy has a target of ten actively operating R&D competence centres/research groups. It might be advisable to concentrate efforts in these early years of the merged institution on building strong international reputations around the four groups with significant critical mass before attempting expansion to ten.

The internationalisation strategy is currently being updated in response to recent recommendations from the Migration Department, the State Security Department, and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. The Feedback

Panel noted that most references to 'internationalisation' activities in the Progress Report related to the recruitment of international students, targeted at a 20% share in the Strategic Plan. Less evident were actions to otherwise internationalise the campus environment and culture. Nevertheless a much wider view of internationalisation was articulated by several LIK representatives during the online meeting and this should trickle down over time into a wider range of LIK areas of staff and student experience. LIK are encouraged to strongly support those entrusted with leadership in the area of internationalisation to ensure that the wider vision is achieved by facilitating overlap with other areas of strategic development. A 'silo mentality' must not be allowed to develop in goal-setting for centres, academic departments, and support units.

19. LIK has made significant efforts to help staff recognise student mental health challenges and support the most vulnerable individuals by directing them towards specialised assistance. In cases where counselling is provided within the HEI, it has been recommended to ensure that services are delivered by an independent and specially trained professional.

This recommendation is from the KTK report and has been fully implemented. Dedicated counselling offices have been set up in both faculties, and a professional psychologist has been employed. A student well-being model is being developed to encourage a more open culture of seeking help, underpinned by systemic supports.

20. To take further action in developing international scientific cooperation and research activities in collaboration with foreign institutions.

This recommendation is from the KMAIK report. It somewhat overlaps with part of Recommendation No. 18 in this evaluation area, which was from the KTK report. The recommendation is being appropriately addressed at College level, of benefit to both faculties. A sustained effort is being made to submit research proposals in collaboration with international partners, especially through membership of the ACE²-EU European University Alliance. The Feedback Panel heard during the online meeting of the support and encouragement being given to staff to sustain their efforts on this learning curve and are confident that eventual success will form a solid foundation from which to consolidate a growing applied research reputation internationally.

21. To analyse opportunities for cooperation with other international Study Programmes across Europe in order to develop joint study programmes.

This recommendation is from the KMAIK report. It is being actively pursued through the ACE²-EU Alliance. To date there have been joint learning activities such as ABC modules, summer schools, MOOCs etc. This should allow a natural progression to the exploration of joint study programmes in instances where it is beneficial and sustainable for both parties.

22. To explore opportunities to attract a greater number of international students to Environmental Engineering Study Programmes.

This recommendation is from the KMAIK report and is being addressed at a whole-of-institution level in the merged institution, LIK. Particularly noteworthy is that a digital admissions portal has been created; all Level IV programmes are now delivered in English; recognition of prior learning has been made more accessible for international students; and Lithuanian language courses are available in LIK. International visibility of LIK has been strengthened through a network of recruitment agents, engagement in international fairs, and a

presence on the Study. eu searchable website. These actions are already contributing strongly to growth in LIK's international visibility which will benefit all study programmes.

23. To develop and implement a strategy that encourages and supports mobility of part-time students.

This recommendation is from the KMAIK report. Opportunities for part-time students to internationalise their study experience have typically been limited by their need to remain in employment while completing their studies. Recently LIK have detected a significant uptake of participation in BIP's by students, including those studying part-time. Such new opportunities point to a fresh direction for addressing this recommendation. LIK are encouraged to further pursue innovative opportunities that may help part-time students internationalise their learning experience while constrained by personal domestic responsibilities.

24. To develop study programmes that are more strongly oriented towards an international context while also taking into account the interests of Lithuanian students

This recommendation is from the KMAIK report. The planned action is to make all study programmes more attractive to national and international students by restructuring based on the Work-Based Learning (WBL) model. In addition, action has already been taken in renaming programmes to make their content more recognisable in an international context, for example "Mechanical Engineering". Attractive short cycle programmes have been developed and accredited.

25. The policy for maintaining and expanding international academic staff cooperation should continue to be developed and analysed as a means of strengthening institutional internationalisation.

This recommendation is from the KMAIK report. Engagement with ACE²-EU Alliance working groups by academic staff is yielding positive results in strengthening institutional internationalisation on a sustainable basis. Funding is available to academic staff who are actively involved in Alliance-related activities or who participate in targeted pedagogical and subject-specific professional development. Motivation is enhanced by the incorporation of internationalisation activities into the annual staff appraisal and incentive indicators. Very significant year-on-year increase in the number of Erasmus+ mobility visits is evidence of the success in meeting this recommendation.

Conclusion

Under the evaluation area 'Studies and Research (Artistic Activity)' there were nine recommendations. Overall, a common theme was evident in these recommendations, irrespective of which institutional review they originated from. This theme was one of increasing the international profile of academic staff and the attractiveness of the College as a destination for international staff and students. It is evident that the twin approaches of providing more opportunities and enhancing staff motivation to internationalise is yielding results. The dedicated support of two new centres is contributing to this growth in activity. These are the 'Research, Applied Activities and Experimental Development (R&D) Centre' and the 'Science and Business Cooperation Centre'.

An interesting wider development has been the increased use of technology to share educational modules internationally between institutions. This may provide a partial solution to the difficulties experienced by part-time students in internationalising their study experience if they are constrained by employment commitments domestically from engaging in mobility opportunities. in taking time to programmes.

The active engagement of LIK in the ACE²-EU Alliance is commended. This has yielded promising results to date on a number of fronts that were of concern to the Institutional Review Panels for KTK and KMAIK, including the research culture and internationalisation. The Feedback Panel note that LIK has achieved a lot of progress in a short space of time and are encouraged from discussions at the online meeting that momentum is being maintained.

4. Evaluation Area: Impact on Regional and National Development

The institutional review panels made three recommendations (KMAIK, 1 and KTK, 2) under the evaluation area of 'Impact on Regional and National Development', which have been combined into the three recommendations for LIK. The constituent parts of the merged institution, KMAIK and KTK, were both assessed in their respective Institutional Reviews as 'very good without any drawbacks' in this evaluation area. Each of the three recommendations and the implemented or planned actions according to the Progress Report are reviewed in the following, preceded by a restatement of each recommendation. Additionally the Feedback Panel were interested to learn how the strong regional reputations of KMAIK and KTK were being preserved under the new 'LIK' brand, consequent on the merger which occurred after the Institutional Reviews.

26. The institution should continue to strengthen its close cooperation with the network of social partners and seek new forms of collaboration and initiatives to attract strong national and international companies. This is essential for achieving the strategic goal of positioning Lietuvos Inžinerijos Kolegija among the top five technical higher education institutions in the Baltic region.

This recommendation is from the KTK report and transfers to the new institution of LIK the goal of the former KTK to be "among the top five technical higher education institutions in the Baltic region".

Cooperation with external stakeholders in the region continues to strengthen, not least through non-formal adult education services – training, upskilling, and reskilling services – in response to business needs. A quantitative measure of institutional trust is reflected in a doubling of income from training services from 2023 to 2025. High value-added non-formal adult education programmes were developed under initiatives of the Employment Service under the Ministry of Social Security and Labour, and also a programme was developed in direct response to Kaunas regional needs. Prototyping services are being further expanded.

Looking to the future, it is intended to establish an R&D Activity Research Centre in the ALEX Innovation Park Kaunas, supported by a modernised client-centred sales system to ensure clarity and accessibility. Financial targets have been set such that income generated from non-formal adult education and from R&D activities would rise to 8% and 33% of the total institutional budget, respectively.

The strategy is clear and commendable regarding regional impact on national enterprises. Less evident is a strategy to proactively collaborate with state agencies in attracting new foreign direct investment to the region. Nevertheless LIK has a clear strategy of becoming by 2030 an acknowledged leading centre of engineering competences in Lithuania, based on a demonstrated capacity to create practical, economic and technological value. In the longer term this is planned to increase its international visibility and attractiveness, which will enable it to successfully compete for international applied sciences research and education contracts.

27. It is also envisaged to expand promotional activities at both regional and national levels in order to increase awareness of lifelong learning opportunities offered by LIK, including modular vocational training programmes accessible to individuals who have discontinued studies and seek to obtain a qualification.

This recommendation is from the KTK report.

Building on its existing strengths, LIK is further developing its services in the field of lifelong learning and modular training programmes. For example, opportunities to study under individual study plans have been

expanded and procedures for the assessment and recognition of competences acquired through non-formal and informal learning have been updated. The portfolio of lifelong learning opportunities now include three Level IV vocational education and training programmes; four Level V short-cycle programmes; and Level VI Study Programmes which are also delivered in English. Future growth is planned through partnerships and an even more comprehensive communication plan.

The Feedback Panel learned in the online meeting that the branding of the new institution was strong. This was confirmed by both staff and student representatives. The proposed R&D Activity Research Centre in the Innovation Park provides another opportunity to raise the visibility of LIK as a partner in regional development. It will be important to guard against the Centre becoming isolated from the other parts of LIK. Perhaps involvement of the Centre in the delivery of lifelong learning opportunities could assist in helping to connect its operations with the wider LIK community on a sustained basis, if this can be achieved without compromising its ability to meet LIK's goals for the Centre.

28. Strategic planning further recommends the inclusion of a broader range of qualitative indicators to ensure not only quantitative but also qualitative evaluation of lifelong learning activities.

This recommendation is from the KMAIK report. It is intended that successful implementation of a wide range of the strategic development measures will strengthen the national and international visibility of LIK. This should help to further its attractiveness to lifelong learners. In anticipation of this demand, LIK has put together structured engineering qualification opportunities to accommodate learners at any stage of their career development. In common with other aspects of LIK operations, the quality monitoring system is being designed to include quantitative and qualitative evaluation of lifelong learning activities. In this context the qualitative measures of institutional reputation and public recognition will play a role in informing LIK of its ongoing performance in meeting employers expectations and the ability to anticipate changing labour markets needs.

Conclusion

Under the evaluation area "Impact on Regional and National Development" there were three recommendations. The strategic goals in this area are both ambitious and realistic. Future plans are built on an existing strong reputation in the region and the future development of an R&D Centre in an innovation park. The merged institution has achieved significant progress since the Institutional Review of KTK in 2022 and has set out realistic targets for 2030. Assuming these infrastructure plans and growth targets are met by 2030, LIK will be in a strong position to partner in international applied research and grow its reputation with ACE² and beyond. Structured engineering qualification opportunities to accommodate learners at any stage of their career development will ensure ongoing connection with the regional needs of employers and lifelong learners.

General Commentary and Reflections

Much has changed since the institutional reviews of KMAIK and KTK in 2022. The institutions have merged to Lietuvos Inžinerijos Kolegija (LIK) in 2024, and the new entity has inherited the recommendations from both institutional reviews. Although this led to a high number of individual recommendations, the combined set contains key overlapping factors which underly many of the recommendations. These principally include strengthening the role of the quality system in strategic management; building a stronger research culture; and internationalising the staff and student outlook. The fact that significant progress has been made in these key areas in a short time is evidence of ‘joined-up thinking’ by management, whereby progress on one particular recommendation is having a positive influence on addressing another. For example, active participation in a European university alliance is helping to internationalise LIK on several fronts, while also motivating staff to expand their research horizons.

A comprehensive action plan is in place to address the recommendations from the Institutional Reviews. Measurable and commendable progress has already been achieved. It was clear from the LIK Progress Report and the online meeting with staff and student representatives that the outcomes of action to date has put LIK on a good trajectory to meet the objectives of its Strategic Plan 2026–2030. These objectives have clear links with specific outputs aimed at addressing the recommendations.

A commendable resource has already been put in place to integrate the management of strategy and quality. Growth of research capacity is being approached on two fronts, international and regional. Regarding the former, the alliance membership is exposing staff to the challenge of winning international competitive grants. Regarding the latter, LIK is not resting on the laurels of the strong regional reputation of KMAIK and KTK. Plans are in train to have high visibility in an innovation park and this is being supported by a science and business cooperation centre. While it is too early to measure additional successes from these initiatives, the Feedback Panel is impressed by the actions taken and those planned.

The Feedback Panel would caution LIK management against being too ambitious on too many fronts until it secures some firm ‘wins’ from its current initiatives. For example, strength in quality of research output will ultimately prove more valuable in meeting strategic objectives than breadth and quantity. Also, while the Feedback Panel’s brief did not include assessing the degree of ‘buy-in’ from staff and students to the opportunities being created by management in a newly merged institution, the importance of bringing all stakeholders on the journey together cannot be overstated. LIK management may have to move forward on its ambitious strategy at a rate and pace that ensure support across all staff groupings, some of whom may be geographically remote from LIK’s leadership hub.

Overall, the Feedback Panel commends the pathway taken by this merged entity to both implement recommendations which originated from its previous constituent parts and to go further in enhancing the reputation of the region as a centre of excellence in engineering education and impactful applied research.

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