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Kaunas University of Technology

Audit Report

Methods, Results and Recommendations

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Authors

Ana Sara Gomes, Claire Furniss, Dalila P. Coelho, Emily Dawson, Heather Wilson, Lizzie Rhoades, Maria Daniel Loureiro, Marika Luostarinen, Marta Sampaio, Natalee Hung, Pedro Assis Cadavez, Raju Ranjan Kumar Paswan, Rebecca Sanderson, Tiago Gonçalves

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Glossary

EHEA - European Higher Education Area.

EQF - European Qualification Framework.

ESSA – European Students Sustainability Auditing.

FP - Fair Practices.

HEI - Higher Education Institution.

KTU – Kaunas University of Technology.

KTU SA - Kaunas University of Technology Students Association.

OER - Open Education Resource.

SRS - Social Responsibility and Sustainability.

USR - University Social Responsibility.

USR Benchmarks – Benchmark Standards for University Social Responsibility across the European Higher Education Area.

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Introduction¹

ESSA project stands for European Students Sustainability Auditing. ESSA project has been launched with the aim to create a more flexible approach to student learning, assessment and certification across Europe's higher education sector. The purpose is to improve levels of student satisfaction by allowing them to engage with real-world issues in a sphere that is of considerable significance to many - social responsibility. The Benchmark Standards for University Social Responsibility across EHEA (hereinafter "USR") is a topic of increasing interest and concern for students, the higher education sector, national governments and international bodies.

The project is oriented to promote knowledge and awareness of USR among higher education students from diverse backgrounds; engaging them to critically analyze USR performance within several institutions. It does so by promoting students' self-reflection on their learning throughout the project, and through their development of auditing skills. These skills, which are initially taught in a classroom, can then be applied in the real-life auditing processes of a European University. In general, the project **aims** to:

- Develop and deliver a facilitator training manual to be included in Open Educational Resource (OER) deliverables from the project, and to incorporate methodological guidance on promoting reflective experiential learning;
- Develop and deliver an auditor training programme (in blended mode) for student auditors of University Social Responsibility, this is to incorporate the application of "action learning sets" (Revens, 1982) that will be certificated with ECTS Credit Certificate in Social Responsibility Auditing (EQF Level 6)²;
- Create a framework for the assessment of the learning outcomes from the training and 'respective experiential learning' associated with the learner's participation in audit activities;
- Following review and annual revision, produce and disseminate the OER outputs from the project and launch these at a transnational European conference in Brussels, hosted by ESU³.

The project is funded by the European Commission, Erasmus+ (KA2 – Cooperation for innovation and the Exchange of Good Practices), for 36 months, between 1 September 2016 and 31 August 2019, in three contexts – Lithuania, United Kingdom and Portugal - by a **consortium** with nine members. This Innovation Strategic Partnership project is led by the UK's National Union of Students, supported by the European Students Union, working with the University of Edinburgh (UK), the University of Porto (Portugal), Kaunas University of Technology and the Students' Associations of these universities (EUSA, AEFPCUEP and KTUSA).

The project makes use of the Benchmark Standards for University Social Responsibility across the European Higher Education Area (EHEA), and strives to effectively engage students as active agents of their own learning. By using a group of trained facilitators, the ESSA project estimates to enroll a cohort of 60 students drawn from the three participating universities to be trained as Social Responsibility Auditors in a student-centered, action-reflection learning based programme, delivered in blended mode. This will culminate in four Audits of different European higher education institutions, carried out by cross-national teams of the students involved. Students will be awarded a Level 6 European Qualification Framework (EQF) Certificate in Social Responsibility Auditing following satisfactory completion of the training, the linked audit and the assessment requirements by means of production of individual e-portfolio of evidence of learning. Besides these results, the project aims to deliver the final product of an innovative Open Education Resource (OER), estimated to include the following documents: a) a Facilitator Training Manual; b) an Auditor Training Scheme; c) an Auditor Manual; and d) an Assessment Manual. The Open Education Resource (OER) will be launched at a trans-national European Conference to be held in Spring 2019. The project will conclude, with the OER being available for use across the territories of the European Higher Education Area from then on.

The project is oriented around four **Benchmarks Standards for USR**: 1) Research, Teaching, Support for Learning and Public Engagement; 2) Governance; 3) Environmental and Societal Sustainability; and 4) Fair Practices. These are described in detail in the *Results* section (pages 10 to 19).

¹The information on this point is mostly based on the content available at ESSA Project main website (<https://www.essaproject.eu/articles/new-erasmus-project-on-university-social-responsibility>, accessed in 19.01.2018), and the Moodle platform of ESSA training course (Portugal). The documents to which it refers were kept as indicated on this source. No formal citation is made visible. The KTU audit team kept the content as in the original sources, with minimum editing.

²Application Form Erasmus + call 2016 KA- Cooperation for Innovation and Exchange of Good Practices. Strategic Partnerships for higher education.

³ Antonescu, Alexandra (2016) "Communication Plan - Certificate in University Social Responsibility Auditing". European Students' Union.

The current **audit process** is the second of four to be performed until the end of the project, joining auditor students from the first and second training cohorts. It makes use of working versions of the above-mentioned documents, as well as research evidence about KTU, collected through diverse research strategies, to be described in the *Research Methods* section. The auditing process performed at KTU was organized into three main stages. The first stage, prior to the field visit to KTU, consisted of setting the ground for the audit process and getting in contact with auditor students from the other universities. Therefore, in this preparatory stage, the following steps were taken: a) getting acquainted with key-documentation about KTU and the university website, as well as a provisional schedule for the week. These documents were made available at ESSA Project auditing tool link⁴; b) joining the Facebook® group "ESSA Project - Kaunas University of Technology Auditors Group"⁵, to get introduced to other members; c) Skype meeting between the team from the University of Edinburgh and University of Porto, to share views on process, how to enhance communication, and to allocate benchmarks according to each student's preference. The allocation of benchmarks was therefore decided before the audit. A second stage consisted of performing the audit at KTU, described in detail in the current report. A third stage concerns the writing and final delivery of this report.

Regarding the **context and time**, the audit took place in the Kaunas University of Technology. Being one of the oldest public universities in Lithuania, established in 1920, the main focus of its higher education degrees is related to technology, especially in engineering-related fields. Even the courses from other subject areas have some contact with the focus on technology and innovation⁶.

The audit lasted for five days, from November 12th to November 17th, 2017. The activities started at 9 am and lasted usually until 5 pm. The work started usually with a small activity, followed by the definition of personal expectations for the day by each participant. The schedule was then divided into presentations, interviews, and focus groups. It also included periods for reviewing documents and evidence gathered not only throughout the day, but by assessing the preparatory documents, and the findings of the audit. Before finishing each day's work, there was also time for a quick debrief, as well as for reflection, personal and in the group.

The **audit team** was composed of 14 students, seven from each university: Claire Furniss, Emily Dawson, Heather Wilson, Lizzie Rhoades, Marika Luostarinen, Natalee Hung, and Rebecca Sanderson from the University of Edinburgh; and Ana Sara Gomes, Dalila P. Coelho, Maria Daniel Loureiro, Marta Sampaio, Pedro Assis Cadavez, Raju Ranjan Kumar Paswan, and Tiago Gonçalves from University of Porto. Each institution established its own methods for selecting the participant student auditors. The University of Edinburgh issued a call for applications, followed by an interview to the candidates. The University of Porto sent out a call for applications for an intensive course on University Social Responsibility, which required a motivation letter, and then selected the participants in the audit from the intensive course participants. Different selection methods resulted in a very diverse audit team. The heterogeneous background can be seen with regard to the field of study of participants, ranging from nursing and medicine, to social responsibility, law, economics, education, behavioral sciences, pharmaceutical sciences and engineering. The levels of study were also different, comprising undergraduate and graduate students (Master and Ph.D. courses).

The auditors had assistance from a group of host students from the Kaunas University of Technology, who also were engaged in the translation of documents from Lithuanian and supporting the field work. The organizing members of the project were also very supportive and always available, providing guidance to the audit team.

After this introduction, the current report follows with the description of the *Research Methods* used. These are followed by a detailed explanation of the *Results*, where the four Benchmarks are analysed by criteria, and sources of evidence used. For a general overview of the main findings and proposals, this section is complemented by overall *Conclusions* and *Recommendations*. Lastly, we indicate the *Bibliography* and *Annexes*.

⁴ Available at <http://www.greenimpact.org.uk/essa/register> (accessed in 19.01.2018).

⁵ Available at <https://www.facebook.com/groups/483015018750917/> (accessed in 19.01.2018).

⁶ Available at <https://2017.ktu.edu/en/> (accessed in 21.01.2018).

Research Methods

The Kaunas Audit was conducted using the following methods: documentary evidence review, 16 interviews, two focus groups, on-site interviews with students, and supplementary documents. The data presented in this report was informed by these methods.

The auditors were organized into four groups, integrating students from the Universities of Edinburgh and Porto. Each group was responsible for one Benchmark and audited KTU against the respective Benchmark's criteria.

The documentary evidence was uploaded to an accessible online platform a week before the Audit week for the auditors to familiarize themselves with the material. In addition, the second day of the audit week was dedicated for the review of all documentary evidence. The purpose of the review was to prepare questions for the following days, when the auditors would conduct interviews and focus groups with various academic staff and students at KTU. All documentary evidence analysed by the auditors was in English. However, it should be noted that there are furthered documentation about several relevant issues regarding the auditing scope available in Lithuanian (e.g. environmental and societal responsibility).

The purpose of the interviews and focus groups was to find out any information that may have been missing from the documentary evidence, and to investigate to what extent KTU met each criteria within the four Benchmarks. During the interviews and focus groups, the auditors made notes and used voice-recorders to ensure the accuracy of their findings. An informed consent form for participation was created and delivered to all interviewees, for ethical compliance. Since some stakeholders held relevant information for more than one Benchmark, the four groups planned ahead jointly the interviews scripts, as to optimize procedures.

Since some interviews were scheduled for the same time, in some groups it was necessary to allocate different tasks, so that auditors working within each Benchmark could be present at several interviews or focus groups. Some auditors also conducted on-site interviews at KTU with a small sample of students to gain a fuller picture of university's practice and explore students' views. The interviews and focus groups resulted in significant findings and deepened the student auditors' understandings of the many different views that staff and students hold about sustainability and social responsibility practices at KTU.

Results

This section provides a general overview, findings, and recommendations for each of the four Benchmarks in the following sequence: *Research, Teaching, Support for Learning and Public Engagement* (Benchmark 1); *Governance* (Benchmark 2); *Environmental and Societal Sustainability* (Benchmark 3); and *Fair Practices* (Benchmark 4). Despite this common organization, the level of detailed dedicated to each criteria varies between Benchmarks, since some criteria within it are very close in terms of content. Therefore, whenever found appropriate, the analysis is merged, in order to avoid repetition and make the content more clear to the reader.

Research, Teaching, Support for Learning and Public Engagement

General overview

Our findings and recommendations for this Benchmark have been divided into four parts: i) Research, ii) Teaching, iii) Support for Learning and iv) Public Engagement. Nevertheless, as mentioned above, it is important to remember that there is overlap between these four parts. This Benchmark also consists of 11 criteria that guided our work as auditors and they are presented after each of the four parts illustrating which criteria is described as being met. We used documentary analysis, focus groups, and interviews as our methods.

Generally, KTU performs well against the USR Standards and there is a lot to commend about its efforts to meet criteria within this Benchmark.

- We found that KTU guarantees academic freedom for its staff and students.
- We discovered that KTU admits its students through a national electronic system, and is not responsible for the transmission of admission results to its applicants.
- We were impressed by both the quality and quantity of projects and volunteering opportunities offered to students.
- We were especially impressed by the plans for the introduction of sustainability modules for all students at KTU.
- We found that the Career and Development Centre successfully offered students and alumni opportunities, advice, and guidance on work-related activities as well as opportunities for scholarships and to partake in the mentorship programme.
- Student feedback and their voice is taken into consideration at KTU and, students can engage in decision-making and the development of the curriculum by participating in roundtables and meetings with staff.
- Actively encouraging participation in the ERASMUS programme for students and academic staff, and international collaboration, is commended. KTU also actively collaborates with other international higher education institutions, and makes a valuable contribution to national political decision-making.

On the other hand, we found that KTU will be introducing a new strategy that integrates SRS goals in various ways. We think that it may be important to consider a further increase in the allocation of resources towards meeting SRS goals in the new strategy. However it is equally important to remember that not all SRS opportunities and developments require financing but, instead, can be implemented with little to no cost. Generally, diverse and rich events for lifelong learning were present at KTU however, the opportunities to engage in them seemed to be fragmented across different departments. We would like to see a continued increase in diverse opportunities for students to engage in, so they may develop their skills and enhance employability. Lifelong opportunities could be open to alumni and the surrounding community in general. This would allow KTU to play an active role providing lifelong education within the community, through intensive, short courses or workshops, taking the lead from the open language courses that already operate in the described manner. Further encouragement and incentives by the university for its students to conduct in research about SRS is recommended.

Findings

With regard to **teaching**, KTU has a student-centered approach giving opportunities to dynamic learning and giving voice to students through curricula assessment surveys and roundtables. We were impressed by the importance KTU places on ensuring that students have the opportunity to ask for feedback from teaching staff. We also found that study programmes and curriculums may be adjusted each year at KTU, allowing a strong degree of flexibility according to student feedback, for instance, and that academic freedom is thoroughly guaranteed. What is more, we were struck by EDU_Lab, a space which offers teacher's training, such as basic didactics on the delivery of English classes, using virtual learning techniques, designing and redesigning study programmes. We found that the opportunity for teaching staff to develop their pedagogic skills at the EDU_Lab a very good way for KTU to address professional development of staff and acting on student feedback such as in the case where a lecturer's teaching skills could be improved. Different mentorship programmes, and pastoral support are offered to students to support their academic success, employability, and well-being. We were also impressed by the ways in which graduate attributes are embedded within the strategy of KTU, and developed through various degrees and programme components, such as group work and projects, exchange programmes, and extracurricular activities.

Verified criteria: 1.1; 1.2; 1.3; 1.5; 1.6 and 1.9.

Sources of evidence: Interviews with staff and students; Provisional Academic Regulations Kaunas University of Technology, Regulations on Assessment of Study Modules, Regulations of the Foundation of International Scientific Events of KTU 2013, The Statute of Kaunas University Technology, Strategic Plan 2014-2016, Strategic Plan 2012-2010.

Turning to **research**, International mobility is strongly encouraged by KTU, through the open calls that occur four times each year, directed to Academic Staff Mobility, and Administrative Staff Mobility. Regular publication in scientific journals, as well as weekly academic lunches contribute to a more collaborative way of sharing results of investigation. The *National Innovation and Entrepreneurship Centre*, a joint National Centre managed by KTU, actively promotes the match between the research and start-ups generated at KTU and the market. The Centre focuses on finding suitable partners so that the ideas or products developed by students can be turned into functioning business models. Both Academic and Administrative staffs' international mobility is encouraged at KTU. We were also impressed by the research support grants KTU provides, which seemed to receive very good feedback from our interviewees. It was also found that KTU enforces ethical protocols and has anti-plagiarism policies for research activities. KTU has an Ethics Committee, but due to unexpected circumstances during the audit it was not possible to interview them. Unfortunately, the interview could have helped to clarify its role and responsibilities at KTU regarding this Benchmark, which remained unclear. KTU offers financial support to doctoral students who wish to take part in scientific events, purchase materials such as reagents, or to purchase their membership for open access.

Verified criteria: 1.1; 1.4; 1.5; 1.8; 1.9; 1.10 and 1.11.

Sources of evidence: Interviews; KTU website (Ethics Committee); Report of the person who received support from doctoral fund, Decree on Quality of Language of PhD Theses and Summaries of Assurance of Academic Honesty in Thesis Preparation 2015.

With regard to support for **learning**, students are supported generously by KTU in the form of scholarships, offering mentorship programmes, career support, and plans to build more study spaces that facilitate collaborative and peer learning. Students are also encouraged to engage in collaborative and independent learning, through embracing projects in the community. Also, international mobility is encouraged for outgoing and incoming students, through subscription of Erasmus program and setting goals in the strategic plan of KTU for upcoming years. Opportunities for lifelong learning are also offered by many departments, with a distinct example provided by the department of Modern Languages. The department dedicates themed days and events based on the countries of the languages available at the department, exploring the culture of each country. It should also be noted that the department of Modern Languages also offers language courses not only for students, but for the general community. The University's finance department ensures that public funds and student fees are used for the purpose for which they are provided, although documents regarding the use of finances in English were not available at the time of the audit.

Verified criteria: 1.2; 1.4; 1.6; 1.7 and 1.8.

Sources of evidence: Interviews; KTU website (Erasmus); KTU website (International Mobility); KTU website ("KTU – Officially the Best at Implementing ERASMUS+ Mobility Project in the Higher Education Sector").

Lastly, in terms of **public engagement**, KTU engages with the public through open lectures and courses, careers fair, visiting local schools, and involvement with activities which benefit society that also engage with the community. Along with KTU, the *National Innovation and Entrepreneurship Centre* engages with several national and international events, such as Technorama. We were impressed by how KTU works together with the Senior University, providing study materials, access to a venue, and teaching (language courses) with symbolic fees. We also found that students at KTU are encouraged to engage in activities, such as blood donations, a pie day, planting trees, and engaging in many other activities that benefit the local community such as the painting of beautiful murals to transform buildings.

Verified criteria: 1.2; 1.7 and 1.11.

Sources of evidence: Interviews.

Recommendations

Although KTU impresses us with the quality at which it meets this Benchmark, we also recognise some areas for improvement. Firstly, with regard to **teaching**, we recommend the introduction of mid-term surveys, which could be administered as a preventative measure to ensure the successful resolution of any issues students may be experiencing on courses. It is also recommended that the Students' Association would be appointed to initiate events with an SRS theme, appointing student leaders or groups of students from the community whose role would be to help make the Students' Association and KTU greener – leading by example. Although KTU offers many international opportunities, it is recommended that the renovation of Erasmus+ Bilateral Agreements are set to a more sustainable level from the current figures, enabling a better pursuit of KTU's strategic goals.

Next, with regard to **research**, we recommend encouraging student involvement and supporting students in engaging with social enterprises. KTU could further encourage collaboration between students and teaching staff at undergraduate level, fostering interest about conducting research about SRS, innovations, and informing students about conference opportunities, or of similar learning opportunities. An annual meeting about research undertaken by the undergraduate students' could be a good motivational start point (The University of Porto takes this kind of activity annually). The meeting would provide students with a stage for discussing research, development of soft skills, and encourage collaboration between students and staff at KTU.

Turning to recommendations on support for **learning**, we recommend that in addition to generous financial support to students, introducing non-monetary award schemes could motivate students to initiate SRS projects, get involved, and bring further sustainable practices to KTU. Widening the services of the Career Centre to all students and diversifying its services to develop soft skills is recommended.

Finally, our recommendations for **public engagement** are the widening and diversification of access to lifelong learning could be less fragmented across departments and, instead, more centralised. It is also recommended that the *National Innovation and Entrepreneurship Centre* should consider forming business partnerships with a stronger focus on sustainability and social responsibility in mind, such as with social enterprises. It is also recommended that KTU should develop a means to check that their business partnerships reflect their values regarding sustainability and social responsibility and record this, along with the current focus on other types of business as well. In addition, encouraging sustainable living in student accommodation is recommended since it is an extension of KTU. Sustainability could be encouraged in student accommodation by encouraging students to save energy (heat and light), recycling, buying second-hand items, and giving away items they no longer use to other students, for example. With regard to extracurricular activities, KTU could acknowledge students' volunteering and involvement in societies in the diploma supplement as an encouragement. KTU could also support the creation of a students' workgroup for SRS-related activities. Finally, KTU could further develop their relationship with key stakeholders within the community to enhance public engagement, and positively impact the local community. It is recommended that an internal SRS report is written, listing the partnerships, activities and achievements of SRS which would be a useful tool to monitor the public engagement of KTU with the community that surrounds it in. It is also recommended that the report be made easy to access for staff, students and the public as this could increase awareness of the many different approaches KTU uses to engage with the community and successfully meeting new strategic goals regarding sustainable practices.

Governance

Findings

Principles of governance are concerned with the permeation of social responsibility and sustainability (SRS) initiatives throughout the institutional framework of the higher education institution and whether these initiatives are visible in practice. The audit has revealed commendable steps KTU has taken to engage with SRS practices. However, there is a lack of awareness about the range of these initiatives. For example, when asked about how KTU is a green university or about SRS more broadly people only mention the university's recycling initiatives. With the vast amount of good practice that KTU is undertaking it would be important for this to be known and associated with the KTU green slogan.

KTU recognises the importance of relevant social responsibility networks. This concern is reflected in the Institutional Review Report and KTU supports the global goals for sustainable development with five main commitments: people, planet, prosperity, peace, partnership. From the documents analysed, it is possible to confirm that KTU is involved in several social responsibility networks. However, regarding "the network of partners, carried out projects that are important for the city, region and the country's economy" that is mentioned on the KTU Social Responsibility Report, there seems to be a lack of knowledge about it amongst the KTU community. The examples given are focused on voluntary work. Nevertheless, KTU seems to be fully committed to the spread of information about social responsibility and sustainability procedures that mostly involve students. In addition, the interviews showed that KTU is thinking about ways of putting this in action. For example, scientists of the leading academic institutions are working in groups, ensuring the direction of the institutional level and reaching the synergy effect.

Verified criteria: 2.1 and 2.3.

Sources of evidence: KTU Institutional Review Report; KTU Social Responsibility Report - 2013/14; Interviews.

The institution is visibly recognised as bringing together researchers and industries. The Institutional Review Report of KTU found numerous collaborative partnerships between KTU, business companies, and industrial organisations. At the time of reporting, the institution was involved with more than 600 projects with external organisations. As evidenced by their National Innovation and Entrepreneurship Centre, KTU is a key player in supporting many local initiatives. There are also many social and cultural projects that are facilitated through KTU, for example, celebratory events that highlight different cultures and languages throughout the year, organised by the Department of Modern Languages and Intercultural Communication. The institution also emphasises student engagement with the local community, providing a range of volunteering opportunities through different departments, depending on the disciplinary interest of the student.

Verified criteria: 2.5, 2.6, 2.8, 2.9 and 2.10.

Sources of evidence: KTU Institutional Review Report; Interviews.

KTU recognises its staff and student social responsibility initiatives through an internal reward schemes and this concern is present in the KTU institutional review report. For students, there are different scholarships and different mobility scholarship regulations and programmes. For teaching staff, there is the KTU regulations for awarding Honorary Degrees. Similar recognition schemes are awarded to students focused on excellence on research and innovation (mostly financial reward). For non-teaching staff KTU also have motivation schemes, for example, some goals are established and if the employee achieve it some financial rewards is given.

Verified criteria: 2.7.

Sources of evidence: KTU Institutional Review Report; Interviews; KTU webpage

The University provides institutional mechanisms for students to voice their opinions such as student questionnaires issued at the end of each semester, student council, and regular round table discussions. KTU not only gather student feedback and opinions but take action to address any concerns raised; for example, by replacing lecturers which students seem to appreciate. The Students Union appears to be very influential within KTU and members believe that they are listened and their voice is heard by the university. However, due to the hierarchical structure of the students association this raises concern for how much of voice students who are not members of the students association have.

Verified criteria: 2.2.

Sources of evidence: Interviews; Field observations.

It is evident that there is a strong commitment to provide employees with safe and healthy working conditions at KTU. Staff are required to undergo work safety training annually, and detailed protocols are also provided to give guidance about appropriate responses to risks. A range of risks are covered, including health and safety of employees, civil protection, and fire protection. Similar precautions are also taken with students with safety information made available in the information packets for those in the first year of study. While KTU provides comprehensive guidelines that clearly show their diligence of establishing high safety standards at the institution, the auditors were unable to find monitoring evidence that confirms successful communication of these guidelines to the faculty and student body.

Verified criteria: 2.4.

Sources of evidence: Collective Agreement; Description of Communication During Crisis; Introductory Instruction to Civil Protection; Introductory Instruction for Fire Safety; Introductory Instruction for Safety and Health of Employees.

Recommendations

KTU's commitment to social responsibility and sustainability is strong. It is clear from KTU's 2012-2020 Strategy that SRS is an area of priority for the university. There are a lot of strategies and aims around SRS but little publicly available information on progress. It would be beneficial for transparency reasons as well as for staff and student commitment and moral to be able to see how the high standards defined by KTU have been enforced and implemented.

In summary, our recommendations are as follows:

- More information on the progress towards KTU's strong SRS aims and values;
- Regular progress reports. It is recommended that KTU produces these annually or biannually;
- The reward information for staff is not available on the documents and online, so it is important to integrate this information in the KTU documents and in the webpage;
- Implementation of training and evaluation sessions about social responsibility and sustainability for all KTU community.

Environmental and Societal Sustainability

Findings

KTU has a commitment to fostering a deeper understanding of sustainability throughout the university and the community. This works to ensure individuals understand the necessity of sustainable actions, so that actions will be continued in the future. This can be seen in the promotion of sustainable education programmes, volunteering initiatives, local partnerships, and business-research partnerships. When a new sustainable initiative is started, these programmes and partnerships serve to create an understanding of the purpose while also ensuring continuity of the initiative.

It has been very encouraging to see the ways that the university is moving towards incorporating sustainability and social responsibility into the curriculum, and further education opportunities. This has been shown in the horizontal learning scheme, elective courses, and having lectures based on these topics open to the community. The Human Development elective is one example of the move towards the horizontal level of learning, and it was very encouraging to hear about the further electives currently being discussed that would see 1st year students having an obligatory introduction to elements of sustainability.

The work that KTU and the students' union are doing to push local volunteering is a great step to encourage closer connections with the community. Requiring volunteering time for some classes is a fantastic initiative to create socially responsible students, along with providing opportunities for students to volunteer outside of their classes. Projects to plant trees or clean up waste lead students to have deeper connections with the world around them, whether natural or built, and encourages them to be more sustainable in their daily lives.

Verified criteria: 3.1, 3.2 and 3.3.

Sources of Evidence: KTU Student Union President's talk; Interviews.

Besides developing a project for Green Waste Composting at the University, KTUGreen also established partnerships with local companies to promote waste paper recycling, as well as electronic waste collection and waste separation initiatives both in the University Departments, and in the Dorms. KTU also partnered with the Kaunas Municipality in a Christmas Tree power initiative, and with some local organizations to promote volunteering and community work. Data shows that these initiatives were successful both by collecting several tonnes of waste and raising awareness among students, staff, and the Kaunas community of the importance of environmental sustainability and waste management.

Verified criteria: 3.2, 3.7 and 3.8.

Sources of Evidence: KTU SR Report 13_14; Institute of Environmental Engineering - SR Report 2013; Interview and Presentation provided by Head of Institute of Environmental Engineering.

As a Technology University, we found that it is actually aligning scientific research with industry. We could see, for example, in the new *National Innovation and Entrepreneurship Centre* that there are projects on business-driven scientific research that could contribute to the development of sustainable and socially responsible businesses and the implementation of this ideology among others as well. KTU also encourages scientific staff to be involved in scientific congresses and organizations that are related with environmental sustainability, so that many of the research projects occurring are focused on applying new knowledge into everyday life.

Verified criteria: 3.2, 3.3 and 3.5.

Sources of Evidence: KTU SR Report 13_14; Institute of Environmental Engineering - SR Report 2013; Research & Innovation 2015 Document; Interviews.

Recommendations

Despite the great work that KTU has done to encourage a deeper understanding of sustainability, there are things that could be improved or pushed further to create a truly green and sustainable university.

It has been very interesting to see the scale and influence the university seems to have in the city, and that there are some very positive outcomes from this. However, we feel that this influence could also be used to put pressure on the municipality in order to move towards laws and sustainability goals, which could be backed up by evidence from research taking place. For example, working towards encouraging food waste collection, so that this can be separated at the university, similar to the separation of paper currently occurring. Laws could also be pushed for procurement/supply chain practices and for building materials for new infrastructure that are

more sustainable - as we became aware that these improvement areas we identified are not necessarily possible for the university without wider societal changes.

Along with economical concerns, it is important to ally economy and social responsibility to actually produce sustainable decisions. It could be, for example, part of the KTU's principles on "how to make decisions", as a parameter of a decision support tool. Now, more than ever, it is important to incorporate social responsibility on the University's daily routine. Sometimes it is not about the best conditions to work, it is about doing the best work possible with the conditions that there are.

Some departments at KTU are already doing some very detailed reporting on social responsibility. However, we feel that having a staff member in each faculty responsible for coordinating and reporting its activities, from a social responsibility standpoint, would provide important information on the sustainability of their work. This would also ensure that new ideas on social responsibility projects from both staff and students are heard and supported, and that sustainability is being practiced as an university policy (such as making sure environmentally friendly tech and materials are being used). We also suggest incorporating sustainability into more job remits, so that it is not perceived as only the responsibility of a few people, but as a goal for everyone at KTU.

Verified criteria: 3.4 and 3.6.

Sources of Evidence: Institute for Environmental Engineering Social Responsibility Report

Conflicting information was abundant during the audit and should be limited as much as possible. The lack of public reports on surveys and projects works against KTU's public image of sustainability and confuses staff. When asked what they would improve about the university's sustainability, many staff members suggested changes that were already occurring in the university. By encouraging information dissemination among the staff there would be greater unity on sustainable projects within the university.

Verified criteria: 3.6, 3.7 and 3.8.

Sources of Evidence: KTU website; Interviews.

Fair Practices

Findings

Overall, KTU has a positive performance regarding the implementation of the FP criteria that auditors were able to verify. This appears to be connected with the compliance with relevant national and international laws applicable. Nevertheless, there is room for improvement, and for a more contextualized devising of USR policies. Considering the evidence gathered regarding several FP's criteria, the following general **strength areas** are highlighted:

- The culture in place at KTU seems to allow for the accommodation of international and individual needs, through language, infrastructure and a code of ethics.
- Staff seem to have opportunities for career and professional development fostered through education, policies, and training.

General areas for **improvement** identified by the auditors include the following:

- There seems to be a limited structure for addressing sensitive issues among the academic community. This is exemplified by the following examples: i) inexistence of disclosure of additional needs; ii) inexistence of complaint procedures that guarantee anonymity of the person affected by a given sensitive issue.
- There seems to be limitations in the current structures for representing the academic community. For example: i) the inclusion and representation of the entire student body, through KTU student union, is limited and the access of members upon annual written examination can be understood as restrictive; ii) there appear to be unclear levels of awareness regarding the existent staff union (Professional Employees Union).

The findings and recommendations devised are based on documentary evidence, field investigation, and evidence included formal and informal interviews with stakeholders, such as academic and non-academic staff members and students.

Generally, KTU is acknowledged as fostering **pluralism and diversity**, encouraging respect and condemning every form of discrimination (cf. Code of Academic Ethics). Students and staff from other countries/nationalities are welcomed, and the internationalization/attractiveness is a strategic goal of the university well defined in its policy (cf. KTU Strategic Plan 2012-2020). There is a good distribution of women in leadership positions as well. However, there appears to be different levels of appropriation and understanding of what pluralism and diversity means. For instance, at the official level there is a concern with guaranteeing that public communication/documents avoid discrimination, it is acknowledged by interviewees that the day-by-day reality at the level of community has its challenges. On another example, although no concrete incidents were reported during field collection about discrimination due to sexuality in KTU, it is acknowledged that there are cultural challenges regarding this issue. Moreover, a specific issue was raised regarding age inequality, due to the existent restriction regarding those under 70 years, as it is not allowed to continue a contract and remain with the previous functions, although collaboration is still possible if the person "brings their own money". This issue was raised as problematic by several interviewees as being of common discomfort among teachers, with concrete examples of teachers that could still be teaching now if it wasn't for this rule. The rule is inherited from the previous KTU rectors team; there is no legal obligation on this. As a **recommendation**, it might be important to discuss the advantages and disadvantages of this rule and consider its revision, namely promoting open discussions in departments, and/or survey consultation among teaching, non-teaching staff as well as students.

Verified criteria: 4.1.

Sources of evidence: KTU statute; KTU strategic plan 2012-2010; Code of academic ethics; Interviews.

Staff **recruitment** is operated according to the law. University teaching/research positions are internationally disseminated. Although foreigners are also eligible for non-teaching staff positions, it is mandatory to speak Lithuanian, decreasing the possibilities to attract international staff. It is also not clear whether these positions are actually disseminated internationally. As for **staff promotion/development** KTU is considered to provide real and fairly meritocratic career progression. KTU was described as a good employer, where teaching and non-teaching staff have opportunities for professional growth, and a good place to work, with friendly open environment. However, during field work, it was often acknowledged by interviewees that, as often happens in Lithuanian Universities, employees frequently work more hours than university guidelines, since many members

of staff hold multiple positions for income reasons. This is recognized as causing serious challenges to employees' work-life balance.

KTU also offers the possibility of training programmes for teaching and non-teaching staff. Staff can suggest training offers (formally, surveyed once a year; and informally, by e-mail at any time). There are open classes that anyone can attend for free (including in issues connected with ethics...). KTU staff can attend KTU graduate/undergraduate courses for free, without paying fees. The information on these offers is disseminated in several channels (e-mail; newsletter; TV screens,...). Despite these multiple opportunities, the perspective of staff development in strategic documents seems to be focused on developing skills in a more instrumental way, i.e., with emphasis being placed on training that is directly connected to the working field and KTU Strategic Plan (eg. English classes for increasing international attractiveness). As a **recommendation**, it can be useful to understand how staff are using such training opportunities: is it common, considering factors like the staff workload? Who attends what, and why? How are classes on SR issues organized, and who attends them?

Verified criteria: 4.2 and 4.5.

Sources of evidence: KTU statute; KTU strategic plan 2012-2020; Interviews.

There is an association for **staff representation** – the “Professional Employees Union” – although it is not clear from the information available whether it represents teaching and/or non-teaching staff. In several interviews conducted, this union was never mentioned, for instance, regarding how staff's potential problems are solved or their rights/voice represented. Although indirectly, these evidences can open up the discussion about the level of staff awareness regarding this union and its mission. The representation of teaching and non-teaching staff is an important instrument to guarantee relevant issues are given voice to and workers' rights are guaranteed in a democratic and representative way. It can be **recommended** to collect information on the level of knowledge of staff about this Union, and stimulate its action.

Considering **employee communication** within KTU, there are consultation and communication systems with staff in place, mostly internet digital platforms (where staff can make suggestions, recommendations or requests) and e-mail. Interviewees emphasised that interpersonal contact is the privileged vehicle for addressing potential issues and problems. There are no pre-established procedures to do so, and no anonymous way to solve them. The culture in place is to handle potential issues politely and on an interpersonal basis. Although this is not negative per se, challenges can arise, namely, how to guarantee that decisions currently made on a case-by-case basis do not become arbitrary. Considering this, we **recommend** discussing the implementation of standard procedures on how to act to address potential issues and problems, in order to allow the anonymous consultation of how to proceed and to report such situations, as a preventive measure. This is considered particularly useful to discuss bearing in mind: i) the potential benefits for criteria 4.8; ii) KTU's intention to attract foreign staff and students, meaning a diversity of understandings about situations can increase; iii) the possibility of merge between different HEIs in the next years.

Verified criteria: 4.3.

Sources of evidence: KTU website; Collective agreement; Interviews.

KTU has several **mechanisms** in place that promote health, safety, physical social and mental well-being of academic community. For instance, university buildings are equipped with visual safety measures (ex. fire extinguishers/escapes/evacuation plans), and there are infrastructures for reduced mobility (ex. access for wheelchairs). Though, there is room for improvement, namely, promoting evacuation practices as this is common procedure in schools (a desire expressed by students), and diversify inclusion measures, as to promote autonomy, as **recommendations**. We also note that students aren't asked to disclose information on additional needs during the application/admission process to university. We consider that a greater disclosure of disabilities among staff and students could result in more support and adjustment, especially for students who plan to go abroad, and recommend encouraging the collection of such information.

Verified criteria: 4.4

Sources of evidence: Field observation; Interviews.

Freedom of association is manifested through the right to join a union, to engage in free speech, or to participate in debating societies, political parties, or any other club or association, including religious denominations and organizations, fraternities, and sports clubs (International Labour Organisation). Preliminary analysis of KTU documents reveals that university allows the formation of union or association and recognises the participation of an interested person in such groups. KTU employees' interests are represented by KTU Professional Employees Union, early mentioned; the head of this union also leads employee conference to take crucial decisions, organized at KTU. KTU has societies for Veterans Club “Emeritus” and for Alumni or alma

matters. The university also has KTU Ph.D. students' society, gathering students from different fields of science for a strong voice in academic issues. There is also students' association - KTU SA - represented by elected student members. These findings show that university respects the basic rights of freedom of association of its stakeholders to unite or to form a society or club. However, there is restricted inclusion and representation of the entire student body through KTU SA. Despite polls and interviews to understand and gauge student opinion on particular issues there was an acknowledgment (by the President) that the Union is limited in representing the voices of all students. We also believe that the 44-page test that must be completed and passed to become a member of the Union may discourage participation. Therefore, we would **recommend** that the SA considers the simplification and accessibility of the Union itself to ensure that all voices can be heard. We found the structure of the student Union to be hierarchical and rigid and would recommend a restructuring so that it becomes more inclusive and informal. We would also recommend that the university promotes awareness of staff unions. When asked about how to deal with complaints and/or specific needs, staff never mentioned the Professional Employee Union. Therefore, we believe that an increased awareness of the staff union would promote the representation of staff's rights and needs and would also provide them with additional support, should they need it.

Verified criteria: 4.7.

Sources of evidence: International Labour Organisation website; KTU website; Collective agreement; Interviews.

KTU's policies have provision of transparent, fair and equitable **complaints and disciplinary procedures** and ensure that complaints and disciplinary matters are addressed swiftly and fairly (cf. Collective agreement; Code of ethics and compliance). Should the applicant be dissatisfied with the Rector's or the authorised person's response to a given request, complaint or report, or in the case of the absence of the response, the applicant has the right to apply to the "Redress Committee" for a final decision (cf. KTU Statute). The document also states following disciplinary measures in case of found guilty such as notice, reprimand or dismissal from work. To discourage any offenses or immoral activity the university has written ethical code of conduct that describes any disciplinary penalties or legal action to those who violate the norms of the university and do damage to university property. Field investigation suggests that mechanisms regarding complaint and redressal are not well known among students and employees. Some non-academic staff described they never heard or had any such situation where they need to complain. However, some interviewees described that if such situation occurs then the victim can complain to their supervisor and legal action can be taken if needed or it can be also transferred to another department; though, how to act if a problem occurs with their supervisor remains unclear, suggesting the need to a better communication between KTU and its stakeholders.

Similar rules are applied to students too, if formal complaining is required. A student can report to the authority and same legal or other necessary procedure supposed to be followed by authority. Considering the complex hierarchy of students' association early mentioned, common students can find difficulties in voicing their issues. In sum, although there are formal measures that ensure fair practices and to deal with any complaints and redress issues, there is a lack of detailed information on what to do and where to complain if a situation arises. We did not find any pieces of evidence, documental or other, regarding the protection of identity of a whistleblower or the guaranteed anonymity.

We **recommend** KTU perhaps can invest in making their services such as complaint and redressal system more accessible to their stakeholders. The creation of a user-friendly online e-complaint and redressal page in university website could be a way to ensure that every voice is heard and it will also protect whistleblowers identity and anonymity. KTU can also invest on organising ethics and compliance training among their stakeholder (reported as inexistent), encouraging a knowledge about rights, duties, and responsibilities towards the university and society.

Verified criteria: 4.8 and 4.9.

Sources of evidence: KTU website; Collective agreement; Code of ethics and compliance; KTU Statute.

KTU demonstrated an abundance of support services to meet the specific **additional needs** of staff and students. For individuals with a physical disability for example, each faculty ensures infrastructure and accessibility is there for staff and students in relation to their specific needs. Furthermore, KTU is proactive in making necessary changes to buildings, as demonstrated by student's personal experience which was discussed in group interviews. There are also several support mechanisms for both staff and students. Examples of such departments include the on-campus psychologist that is available for all. In regard to academic support, there is a mentorship programme accessible for all. The Erasmus+ programme is hospitable to all staff and students, evidenced through discussions with the Erasmus+ coordinator for KTU. She gave examples of the programmes efforts to include all, mentioning the facilitation of a sign language translator for one student. Overall, the

professional support services for individuals at KTU was widely evidenced within interviews and further information was also available on the KTU website, in English and Lithuanian. With this in mind, the **recommendations** from this audit can only be to encourage KTU's diversification and promotion of support. We would recommend increased visual signage around all campus and the installation of a hearing loop for those with a hearing impairment. Finally, we would recommend KTU lobbies for wider change, such as accessible transport between campuses.

Verified criteria: 4.10.

Sources of evidence: Field observation; KTU website; KTU Statute; Interviews.

KTU communicates with suppliers regarding **procurement**, but criteria are limited to cost effectiveness and timings. At present, KTU does not appear to have its own specific procurement policy, but rather adheres to Lithuanian wide legislation regarding procurement and the supply chain (issue further explored in the Environmental and Societal Sustainability Benchmark). Through documentation review and on-site interviews, it was clear that this area is not a current priority for KTU. Considering the ethos of FP however, one would **recommend** the development and implementation of KTU specific procurement legislation to ensure ethical and fair practice when acting as a consumer and engaging suppliers.

Verified criteria: 4.11.

Sources of evidence: Field observation; KTU website; KTU Statute; Interviews.

Recommendations

From the analysis of FP evidence, in sum, auditors make the following general **recommendations**:

- Continue to diversify and promote autonomy through varied methods of inclusion, such as braille and infrastructural changes;
- To investigate staff opportunities and the impact of using those opportunities on work-life balance, considering the acknowledgment of intensive workload in place;
- Invest on mechanism to address sensitive information, such as, tools for standardised additional needs disclosure on students' admission, and protocols for anonymous, discrete complaints;
- Improve current structures for representing academic community, such as, considering the simplification and accessibility of Students' Union, to ensure all voices are heard, and promote awareness about Staff Union.

Conclusions

General observations

Overall, we found that KTU has been working well to incorporate SRS throughout the institution. This was especially notable through study programmes, activities within the University, and activities encouraging community involvement and engagement. KTU has also been providing and supporting teaching and research in compliance with academic freedom, student-centered approaches and Professors requalification. Also, the community has been given increasing importance through the *National Innovation and Entrepreneurship Centre* and activities open to the community. The governance structure at KTU allows students and faculty members to be engaged with SRS initiatives in the University. KTU's culture is positive, welcoming and accommodating, though there is room for improvement on handling sensitive issues.

Experience of audit week

All student auditors extremely valued the opportunity to work as part of an international team to investigate and reflect upon KTU's USR performance. Overall, we found that the training we received before the visit prepared us well for assuming the role of student auditors in an unfamiliar institution, and we are grateful to the members of the Project Board who helped us through this process and answered any and all questions that arose.

The main ways that this process could have been further streamlined to aid us during the audit would be the provision of more context into how different roles within KTU fit together. For example, there was still confusion regarding the functionings and structure of the Students' Association, which could have been further clarified through text or an illustration to promote an understanding within the auditing team. We would have also appreciated more time to review all the evidence, both within our individual Benchmark teams, as well as a whole group - although we understand that this is constrained by the overall length of the visit fitting into one working week. The possibility of being heard in the ESSA project board meeting during the experience was rather valuable and made the connection between the projects intents and its actual implementation by a particular group of auditors, in a particular auditing experience. On another hand, it should be highlighted the efforts made by the hosting team to accommodate our suggestions during the week.

Overall, we are extremely grateful for the opportunity to work on the ESSA project. All the stakeholders we came into contact with were extremely helpful, and allowed us to gain vital insights into the level to which KTU complies with, and works towards the USR Benchmarks. This project has allowed us to gain and develop skills that we know will be extremely useful in our futures, and has also allowed us to build friendships with people through a shared desire to learn about and work towards Social Responsibility.

Comments on USR Benchmark Standards

The USR Benchmarks incorporate a wide range of aspects relating to social responsibility, which can be very useful for viewing SRS topics from a variety of angles. The activities during our training which revolved around familiarising ourselves with the different criteria, and working with these, were incredibly valuable for allowing us to view the whole framework, before focusing on one Benchmark per group during the audit week.

The level of overlap between criteria was beneficial in some instances - for example to illustrate the importance of a given element of social responsibility across Benchmarks, in order for focus on these areas to be more holistic. However, the overlap in criteria within Benchmarks was addressed to be problematic, as it could become the difference between an institution fulfilling the majority or criteria in a given Benchmark, to almost none. It would therefore be beneficial for the student auditors if these criteria were further split, in order to provide greater clarity to the specific element of USR performance which should be the focus, which could therefore benefit the audited institution by providing a more succinct overview of the areas needing most attention.

Finally, some more information to ground the national context of the audited University could provide useful, as it would allow the student auditors to understand any potential limitations that the University has from a higher level, which could affect their USR progress. This would therefore help to shape the recommendations provided by the auditors, in order to better reflect reality and true possibilities for the institution.

Overall Recommendations

Generally, it could be said that KTU is performing well in terms of University Social Responsibility however, there are several measures that the University could implement in order to improve the quality of the work that is being already done. Here is some things that need to be improved:

- Encourage student involvement in the University's activities, especially with regard to SRS related activities. Widening and diversifying access to KTU community and increasing public engagement. Although it was possible to realize that KTU has indeed several offers in terms of student organizations and/or initiatives, the auditors could realize that, somehow, there is lack of participation of students and/or members of the community on the events that are organized. Perhaps, it would be interesting to diversify the type and quantity of activities that are offered to the students.
- More publications on information about the progress on plans and initiatives. This University has indeed a lot of programs and events. The auditors believe that they should invest a new management of internal and external communication so, the community could be be even more involved. Here the key recommendation is not invest in new things, is to change the paradigm.
- Focus on sustainable-driven research and incorporate SRS considerations on institutional policies. By the end of the audit, the auditors realised that the University is very focused on creating new scientific knowledge and to transfer it to business. The auditors also realised that is absolutely important to focus and to act on behalf of sustainable-driven research as well as implementing good and sustainable management practises that could improve efficiency with the available resources, since we found that they are not used to their maximum power.
- Investment on strategies on supply chain and procurement policy (to include USR criteria) and on new approaches in terms of associations of students and/or staff. Now, after the audit process, it is important to take into account that, from now on, all the investments should be done whilst considering practises and protocols that respect the sake of University Social Responsibility.

Regarding the audit process in Kaunas, the Auditors Team must congratulate the hosting team for all the efforts done to welcome the auditing team in the University, the city, and the country. Taking into account all the time constraints and all the amount of the work that was there to be done, there was indeed a fair organization and management that kept the auditors always working and moving and interacting with each other. Regarding the extra activities and team building events, the auditors must thank for everything that was done in order to give the best stay and experience possible. Finally, it is important to thank all the people that participated in the focus groups, interviews, and those who were always doing their best to provide the auditors with the best conditions to work.

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Annexes

All of the documents used in this report can be found in this online folder:

https://drive.google.com/drive/folders/1RKTd_hgIFbD8_seZJXV7Ca-egfOmAdg?usp=sharing