

Expert group joint opinion

Evaluation Procedure: Assessment of Study Field

Higher Education Institution: RISEBA University of Applied Sciences

Study field: Information and Communication Sciences

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Summary of the Assessment of the Study Field and the Relevant Study Programmes

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RISEBA University of Applied Sciences, an institution deeply rooted in Latvia yet with a global outlook, demonstrates a proactive stance towards education quality and internationalization. The institution's Development Strategy for 2022-2027 emphasizes internationalization, particularly in the field of Information and Communication Sciences (ICS), focusing on digital management, communication, and media. However, weaknesses such as limited scientific activities and recent programme management changes are noted.

Quality assurance procedures are well-established, with effective communication among stakeholders. Future improvements should involve greater student involvement in the quality assurance process. Financial support mechanisms for study programmes need clarification, although infrastructure resources and support for teaching staff are adequate.

Research priorities align with strategic goals, particularly within the Faculty of Business and Economics (FBE), but there's a need to streamline research efforts, especially in ICS. International collaborations show promise but require better alignment with local needs.

RISEBA's strategy aims for international competitiveness, but there's a reliance on attracting students from countries with autocratic political systems, potentially conflicting with strategic goals. While partnerships with communication industry employers are laudable, establishing measurable criteria for partnership selection is recommended for sustainability.

Significant progress has been made in implementing recommendations from previous evaluations, with ongoing efforts needed, particularly in enhancing scientific activities and continuing to implement received recommendations.

The study programme "Public Relations and Advertising Management" at RISEBA University of Applied Sciences comprises two sub-programmes: Public Relations and Advertising. Aligned with the Information and Communication Sciences (ICS) study field, the programme offers both Latvian and English language instruction. It is praised for its industry relevance and modern teaching methods, fostering strong connections with the labor market. However, there's a call for greater emphasis on scientific trends and social responsibility to ensure long-term sustainability. The programme benefits from a diverse team of instructors, blending academic researchers with experienced practitioners, although challenges in programme management have been noted, possibly affecting stability and educational quality. Despite some concerns, the programme demonstrates commitment to academic and professional excellence, integrating interdisciplinary approaches to enhance learning outcomes.

The study programme "Public Relations and Digital Communication" is well organized, corresponds to the needs of industry and labor market as well as national regulations. While its applied nature is definitely a benefit for employers of the alumni, the scientific dimension of it in terms of the quality of Master's thesis level of research can be improved so that the emphasis is switched from a specific organization to a particular communication phenomenon. Since the interest in enrolling in graduate studies was extremely weak, changes in the content of the study programme were necessary. However, the proposed changes are commendable, but the question arises whether they are good enough to attract international students and even the Latvian ones. The number of full academic staff who possess knowledge in the field of digitization and intercultural aspects should certainly be increased.

I - Assessment of the Study Field

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1.1 Management of the Study Field

Analysis

1.1.1. RISEBA University of Applied Sciences is a private university established in 1992 (SAR, p. 4). There are three faculties at RISEBA: Business and Economics (FBE), Media and Creative Technologies, Architecture and Design with five study fields. In 2022, RISEBA adopted the Development Strategy for the period from 2022 to 2027. In the Strategy, emphasis is placed on internationalization, with a strong emphasis on mutual networking and linking of study programmes in the fields of business and art. The study programmes in the Information and Communication Sciences (ICS) field have an important role in the entire University's studies' portfolio. The Strategy emphasizes the role of digital management, communication and media in the development and increase of the number of students. There are only a few HEIs in Latvia offering professional degrees in the field of ICS, and RISEBA's emphasis on associating art with business can be considered as their greatest advantage, and this is particularly important to them because of the projects in which they are involved.

The strategic objective of RISEBA'S ICS study field is to prepare competent, competitive, and socially responsible public relations, advertising, and digital communication professionals (SAR, p. 17). ICS study field includes 2 study programmes: the professional bachelor's study programmes Public Relations and Advertising Management and the professional master's study programme Public Relations and Digital Communication. Both study programmes in the ICS study field are available in Latvian and English part-time or full-time, making them accessible to foreign students, which is one of the key plans of RISEBA.

1.1.2. / 1.1.3. The aims of the study field are clearly defined and attainable. In the SWOT analysis, weak scientific activities compared to other study programmes were recognized as a key weaknesses of the ICS field (SAR, p. 19). The fact that there have been no enrollments for graduate studies in the last two years is also recognized as a weakness, as well as changes in the field management and the positions of programme directors. It is the latter that is currently showing itself as the greatest internal weakness, because both programme directors took up their positions two/three months ago (as of February 2024), and neither of them has a title or professional competence in the field of ICS, which the person in charge of the content of the study programme, the quality of the teachers and scientific activities in that area should definitely have. The role of the programme director is clearly emphasized in the report itself, which states that "the programme director is the most important in the implementation of the study programme, the main responsibilities are related to the development and implementation of study programmes: preparation of the study programme content and study plans, in cooperation with the directors of other programmes and study units to plan joint study courses in joint groups, to ensure quality implementation and organization of the study programme, as well as modernization, popularization, and development" (SAR, p. 23). It is recommended that RISEBA appoint persons with professional qualifications to the position of programme director of both study programmes, as this is a key and necessary prerequisite for ensuring the quality of the study programme. The support provided by the administrative and technical staff is of high quality to ensure the entire study process in accordance with the requirements.

1.1.4. With the aim of mitigating the perceived threats (among other things, decreasing number of students, decreasing number of inhabitants, increasing migrations, the weaker economic power of the population, and increasing competition) RISEBA started talks about a joint study programme with a European partner university, have intensified scientific activities in the field of ICS, and plan to attract international scientists as well as increasing the number of elected faculty members (SAR, p. 20; Development Plan for the Study Direction of Information and Communication Sciences; onsite meetings). It is planned to be done by increasing the number of international students, projects and the possibility of simultaneous work in education and in the business sector (onsite meetings).

1.1.5. RISEBA has developed procedures for the admission of students. The right to study is equal

for Latvian and foreign citizens, although the admission fees are higher for foreign students. Key criteria for study enrollment are listed in the document entitled the Admission Requirements. In the bachelor's programme the selection of applicants is based on the results of two centralized examinations (in Latvian and in English) and the results of the transcript. The attestation results are evaluated based on the most important subjects for the study field such as mother tongue, foreign language, computer science, and history (SAR, p. 25). The master study programme is open to persons who have completed at least a 4-year professional higher education programme, or have obtained a professional or academic bachelor's degree (SAR, p. 25). The ways of recognizing previously completed studies or education are clearly prescribed (SAR, p. 25). Persons with previous non-profiling education or academic education may be equated with the knowledge, skills and competences acquired in professional experience, if the results have been achieved in the field of professional activity which conforms to the thematic field of education of the study programme and the practices provided for in the programme have been included or if the study courses provided for in the introductory module are included (SAR, p. 25)

Methods for assessing achievements of students have been developed. Students' achievements are evaluated in practical classes, seminars, tests, independent study work, discussions, exercises etc. The type of assessment is determined by the lecturer. The variety of methods of students' achievements is visible from the course description. The relevance of assessment methods and procedures for achieving the aims of study programmes and the needs of students is analyzed. Namely, during the reporting period the Evaluation of the Objectivity of Study Assessments was developed, aiming to collect and accumulate information on student performance whereby special attention is paid to those study courses where the average student rating in the group is above 9 or below 5 points (SAR, p. 30; onsite meetings).

1.1.6. RISEBA has established policies to uphold academic integrity, including the Code of Academic Integrity, Regulation on the Control and the Prevention of Plagiarism and Code of Ethics. Since 2013 RISEBA has been using a Unified Computerized Plagiarism Control System where academic staff can check student research papers (SAR, p. 32). In 2021 RISEBA has implemented the anti-plagiarism platform, Ouriginal, which is integrated with RISEBA's e-learning platform, enabling the comparison of student work content against both freely accessible texts and publications available only in scientific publication databases (SAR, p. 31).

Conclusions on this set of criteria, by specifying strengths and weaknesses

RISEBA is an established Latvian University of Applied Sciences with deep local roots and broad international perspectives. The institution appears to be proactive in its approach to education quality, internationalization, and addressing challenges. RISEBA emphasizes internationalization in its Development Strategy for 2022-2027. This includes networking, linking study programmes in business and art, and offering programmes in English to attract foreign students. The ICS field is highlighted for its role in the university's portfolio, emphasizing digital management, communication, and media. However, weaknesses such as weak scientific activities and recent changes in programme management are identified. RISEBA is proactive in ensuring the quality of its programmes, including developing procedures for student admission, varied assessment methods, and policies to uphold academic integrity. RISEBA is taking steps to address weaknesses and mitigate threats, such as low enrollment in graduate studies and external factors like decreasing student numbers and increasing competition. Efforts include intensifying scientific activities, attracting international scientists, and considering joint programmes with European partners.

Strengths:

1. RISEBA's emphasis on internationalization, including offering programmes in English and seeking partnerships with European universities, demonstrates its commitment to attracting a diverse

student body and promoting global perspectives.

2. The university's use of varied assessment methods, what suggests a commitment to evaluating students' achievements comprehensively and catering to diverse learning styles.

3. RISEBA's establishment of policies to uphold academic integrity, including a Code of Academic Integrity and Regulation on Plagiarism, indicates a commitment to maintaining high ethical standards within its academic community.

Weaknesses:

1. Weak scientific activities in the field ICS.

2. Changes in programme management: the appointed programme directors lack professional qualifications and experience in the field of ICS, which potentially can have an impact on the quality and development of study programmes.

3. The absence of enrollments in graduate studies for the past two years signals a challenge in attracting students to advanced programmes within the ICS field, which could be indicative of broader issues such as programme appeal or market demand.

1.2. Efficiency of the Internal Quality Assurance System

Analysis

1.2.1. Quality assurance system is established and systematic work is being done to improve it in accordance with the guidelines obtained as part of the previous reaccreditation process. RISEBA has established a quality policy, which is publicly available on their official website, both in English and in Latvian. The quality policy is disseminated and explained for all employees (SAR, p. 32). Along with the quality policy, the manual is a key document within the quality assurance system. The quality manual contains defined processes, regulatory acts (regulations, procedures, rules, methodological instructions, and manuals), and responsibilities (SAR, p. 14).

1.2.2. The procedures for the development and review of the relevant study programmes of the study field have been well defined. There are detailed procedures for all internal processes of creating and changing study programmes, and the obligations and responsibilities of all individuals involved in the processes are clear (Regulations for the Development, Approval, and Supervision of the Study Programme; Study Regulations, Process of Updating the Course/Module Specification). With the aim of improving the quality assurance system of study programmes, a self-evaluation report is prepared every year (SAR, p. 37). In 2022 a procedure for assessing the objectivity of study evaluations was developed with special attention given to those courses where the average student rating within the group is above 9 or below 5 points (SAR, p. 15). As a result, the assessment methods and criteria for those courses are reviewed (SAR, p. 15). The Experts commends the introduction of the mentioned practice and encourages its further application. However, since there are many courses with an average grade 8.5-8.9 experts encourage the RISEBA to consider lowering the criteria to 8.5. In the past two years, numerous workshops were held with the aim of raising the quality of the RISEBA. It is recommended that such workshops be held in greater numbers for students in the future. In general, it is recommended to involve students much more in the quality assurance system, where it is important that they are independent and objective students who will fully represent the rights of students. Furthermore, the head of the quality assurance system pointed out during the meeting that students are introduced to the quality system at Info days for students, which takes place at the beginning of the first semester of the first year. However, with the aim of involving students as much as possible in the quality assurance system, it is necessary to hold workshops or other activities at least once a year, with the aim of making students aware of activities in this area.

1.2.3. The mechanism developed for submission of student complaints and suggestions is effective, students are informed about such opportunities and receive feedback. In the observed period, 18 complaints from students were received, two of which related to complaints from students from the ICS area (SAR, p. 44). In case of problems, individually the support is identified and offered. During the visit, the Experts were informed that due to the good relationship between the programme director and the students, most complaints are resolved in such a way that the students address the Programme Directors directly, which is commendable and shows the relationship of trust between the Programme Directors and students, however, the recommendation of the Experts is to keep official notes/ minutes from such meetings as well, which is currently not the case, because the data obtained in this way can and should be used for the purpose of improving the quality of the study programme, and information about which must be available to everyone, not just one person. All the more so as there have been frequent changes in the position of programme director in the past two years. There must be traces of conversations between the students and the programme directors, so that those who will take over that function next will be familiar with the problems that existed in the past years and about which the students mostly approached the programme directors.

1.2.4. RISEBA continuously collects statistical data on study programmes from all stakeholders, with the aim of raising the quality of studies and universities. Among teachers and students, such surveys are conducted regularly during the academic year. The quality assurance system cooperates intensively and closely with programme directors in the form of providing support with statistical data; larger studies at the level of study programmes are conducted once every two years. Furthermore, at the meeting, information was received from the Head of the Quality Office that, with the aim of increasing students' response to participation in evaluation procedures, surveys have been set as mandatory on the digital platform, and without completing the survey, students cannot access the materials. It is recommended that such a form of evaluation must exclusively be on a voluntary student basis, and with the aim of increasing student response, such evaluations are carried as part of the live classes themselves, and at the end of the semester. Given the problem of low student response to teacher evaluations, it is recommended that students be given feedback on the results of teacher evaluations, at least at the level of individual studies, and not at the level of the entire university, and highlight, for example, the best rated teachers. It is also useful to show them what specific changes were made according to the evaluation results. All this will additionally motivate students to participate in evaluation procedures.

1.2.5. Key information about study programmes is published on the website, both in Latvian and in English. However, the recommendation is to provide more data from the quality assurance system on the official website, especially those that can be useful to current and especially future students, such as, for example, data on the percentage of completion of studies, employment opportunities, data on how long, on average, students are employed in the profession after obtaining the diploma because this can be very useful information for future students.

Conclusions on this set of criteria, by specifying strengths and weaknesses

The quality assurance system is well established. There are clearly prescribed procedures for all important processes of the internal quality assurance system, and based on the SAR and meetings with key stakeholders, it can be concluded that there is important synergy and communication between the members of the quality assurance system and all persons inside the university – from the management to the study programme director, administration employees and teachers. In the future, it is recommended to pay more attention to the students themselves and to their stronger involvement in the quality assurance system, both on the level of greater awareness of everything that the quality assurance process includes, and on their greater engagement in procedures that are

important for raising the quality of study programmes, and thus the entire university.

Strengths:

1. Clearly prescribed procedures and responsibilities for all processes of the quality assurance system.
2. Quality assurance workshops for teaching and administrative staff.

Weaknesses:

1. Insufficient involvement and familiarity of students with the quality assurance system.
2. Implementation of the evaluation of teachers' work through mandatory surveys on the platform.
3. Insufficient number of publicly available data on the website from the domain of quality assurance.

Assessment of the requirement [1]

- 1 R1 - Pursuant to Section 5, Paragraph 2.1 of the Law on Higher Education Institutions, the higher education institution/ college shall ensure continuous improvement, development, and efficient performance of the study field whilst implementing its internal quality assurance system:

Assessment of compliance: Partially compliant

The quality assurance system is continuously improved with the aim of raising the quality of the study programme. However, considering the weaknesses mentioned, there is room for improvement, especially in terms of data collection, which is an important part of the quality assurance system; as well as insufficient involvement and familiarity of students with the quality assurance system.

- 2 1.1 - The higher education institution/ college has established a policy and procedures for assuring the quality of higher education.

Assessment of compliance: Fully compliant

The higher education institution/ college has established a policy and procedures for assuring the quality of higher education.

- 3 1.2 - A mechanism for the development and internal approval of the study programmes of the higher education institution/ college, as well as the supervision of their performance and periodic inspection thereof has been developed.

Assessment of compliance: Fully compliant

The procedures for the development and review of the relevant study programmes of the study field have been well defined. There are detailed procedures for all internal processes of creating and changing study programmes, and the obligations and responsibilities of all individuals involved in the said processes are clear.

- 4 1.3 - The criteria, conditions, and procedures for the evaluation of students' results, which enable reassurance of the achievement of the intended learning outcomes, have been developed and published.

Assessment of compliance: Fully compliant

In 2022 a procedure for assessing the objectivity of study evaluations was developed with special attention given to those courses where the average student rating within the group is above 9 or below 5 points (SAR, p. 15). As a result, the assessment methods and criteria for those courses are reviewed (SAR, p. 15).

- 5 1.4 - Internal procedures and mechanisms for assuring the qualifications of the academic staff and the work quality have been developed.

Assessment of compliance: Fully compliant

Systematic work is being done on the process of evaluating the work of teachers, whereby the regular implementation of the teacher peer-review process is particularly praised.

- 6 1.5 - The higher education institution/ college ensures the collection and analysis of the information on the study achievements of the students, employment of the graduates, satisfaction of the students with the study programme, efficiency of the work of the academic staff, the study funds available and the disbursements thereof, as well as the key performance indicators of the higher education institution/ college.

Assessment of compliance: Partially compliant

The quality assurance department regularly carries out all the aforementioned evaluations. However, there is room for improvement, especially in terms of data collection (especially with regard to the greater response of students as well as the fact that it is important to ensure voluntary participation in such researches).

- 7 1.6 - The higher education institution/ college ensures continuous improvement, development, and efficient performance of the study field whilst implementing its quality assurance systems.

Assessment of compliance: Partially compliant

The above shows the significant changes made within the quality assurance system in the last two years. However, there is still room for improvement in terms of greater involvement of students and graduates in the quality assurance process.

1.3. Resources and Provision of the Study Field

Analysis

1.3.1. 70% of RISEBA's revenue stems from tuition fees (SAR, p. 50). Given the fact that the number of students at RISEBA and Latvia, in general, is decreasing, and considering RISEBA's plans to attract more international academic staff and staff with PhD degrees, RISEBA's financial sustainability is of concern. RISEBA's management plans to tackle the issue by attracting more international students from third countries, especially for master's and doctoral studies. RISEBA has developed a marketing strategy to attract these students, primarily from their partnering universities abroad (onsite meetings information). Furthermore, the system for determining and redistributing the financial support required for the implementation of the study field and the corresponding study programmes is unclear (no documentation was provided during the evaluation process), thus cannot be thoroughly evaluated.

1.3.2. RISEBA's premises are well equipped with infrastructure resources and material and technical support necessary for the implementation of the study field, including opportunities for cross-field collaborations. The study process takes place in Meza street, where 3 computer classes (85 seats), 18 study rooms (668 seats) and the main library, and a room for creating video lectures are located. The students have access to premises in Durbes street as well, where a media lab, audio and video recording studios, and various professional equipment are available for study, personal and professional use (SAR, p. 55). Both students and teaching staff are satisfied with the resources available and are informed about the established procedure for purchase or request for additional material, methodological, informative, etc. provisions if needed (onsite meetings information). Meanwhile, none of RISEBA's premises provide meals with no animal products and vegetarian options are strictly limited, despite the growing numbers of alternative diets in Europe. That can be seen as an obstacle for uninterrupted study process at the campus for a growing number of students

and teaching staff. The student kitchen in Durbes street is poorly equipped (onsite visit).

1.3.3. The RISEBA library has more than 23000 sources of information. 60% of library books and other information units are in English, 15% in Latvian and 25% in Russian. There are 1091 information sources specifically related to the information and communication science field available (SAR, p. 57). There are various scientific databases available for on-site and remote use (EBSCO, Web of Science, Emerald, Greenleaf Publishing PRMEC), as well as multiple paid information sources such as Leta.lv, Nozare.lv and iŽurnāli. For the ICS study field, 1100 EUR is provided for the purchase of new books every year, (SAR, p. 51) with the overall library budget being 3% of RISEBA's total expenses. (SAR, p. 56) Both students and teaching staff are satisfied with the resources available and are informed about the established procedure for purchase or request for additional material, methodological, informative, etc. provisions if needed (onsite meetings information).

1.3.4. RISEBA has integrated mandatory use of Moodle e-learning system e-riseba.lv for the teaching staff, providing students with all the necessary study content digitally in real-time, and students are requested to fill out course evaluation forms. Each year the Quality Centre conducts an audit of Moodle sites under Minimum Requirements for Study Course Development, eventually providing individual or group consultations for faculty members to maximize the utilization of Moodle's capabilities in facilitating the study process. (SAR, p. 37) The efforts made can be seen through structured and well-designed individual e-courses, yet the overall course catalog requires significant improvements to avoid overlapping and multiplication of courses with similar or identical content. Additionally, students use the platform my.riseba.lv to upload assignments, see grades, payments, etc., while teaching staff use UNIMETIS as a server for other e-platforms of RISEBA. Meanwhile, studies are organized almost exclusively offline, with less than 10% being online, raising questions about availability and the study fields' long-term competitiveness in the digital era. Furthermore, there are fully equipped rooms for creating video lectures and hosting online classes, with no or very little use of it, thus creating waste of resources. It is advised to consider implementation of more hybrid teaching methods, thus utilizing the resources RISEBA has, including already trained teaching staff via dozens of methodical seminars on digital learning and digital tools (Annex 51). Hybrid study models could also foster accessibility and increase the study field's competitiveness, including more opportunities for international collaborations.

1.3.5. In the ICS study field, 49 faculty members are involved. Among them, 21 (43%) have a doctoral degree, 19 (39%) visiting lecturers are from the business environment, and 5 are international representatives. RISEBA has recently started to implement a new payment system, with fixed monthly payments for lecturing, assignment evaluation, exam grading, and supervising student work, thus creating a more stable and appealing work environment and to attract more qualified teaching staff. Other academic activities will still be compensated based on the principle of work performance, for example, scientific work is remunerated by the publication of scientific articles and participation in scientific projects, thus motivating academic staff to implement more scientific research in their work. Yet, it is also planned to transition to a fixed monthly payment system for scientific work as well.

1.3.6. Between 2020 and 2023, RISEBA organized 36 methodical seminars for faculty qualification enhancement, mainly focusing on digital learning and digital tools. As part of DIGITEKA project, an additional 24 online courses for digital skills were made for lecturers, now available for students as well (Annex 51). Faculty members must attend at least 50% of annual methodical seminars or substituting courses, seminars, etc. to receive extra points in their annual faculty evaluation (SAR, p. 65).

1.3.7. The workload of elected academic staff and a significant portion of the academic workload, is recorded and compensated based on the actual achieved work results. The administrative workload of the staff significantly varies, making it challenging to precisely evaluate the work proportions for each type of workload, (SAR, p. 67) thus the overall monitoring of the workload balance is not precise and could be improved.

1.3.8. Regarding students, 16 different types of tuition fee discounts are available, based on different variables, such as new programmes, achievements, good grades, relatives, cooperation partners, graduates, social support, and others (SAR, p. 51). Yet, during the interviews with students, it was recorded that the deadline for application for discounts is before the end of the semester, thus some students are unavailable to apply for discounts due to lack of grade records available for them in due time. Moreover, even exceptionally good grades (GPA 9+), in some cases are not enough for study fee discounts or scholarships. Students find it unfair to have the same requirements to receive scholarships as for study fee discounts (onsite meetings information). There are multiple procedures for how to proceed with the study fee payments, according to the needs of the students. Students can receive a wide range of additional support, for example, Psychological support, Career counseling, Supervisor counseling, Assistance in case of difficulties with studies, become a mentee in Mentors` Club (SAR, p. 69). Studies are organized full-time, part-time, in Latvian and in English to meet the needs of various local and foreign students.

Conclusions on this set of criteria, by specifying strengths and weaknesses

The system for determining and redistributing the financial support required for the implementation of the study field and the corresponding study programmes is unclear. A system for funding scientific and/or applied research and/or artistic creation is defined, implemented and it is effective. RISEBA has good infrastructure resources and the material and technical support necessary for the implementation of the study field. Resources are available to students and teaching staff. A unified system and procedures have been established for the improvement and purchase of material, methodological, informative, etc. provisions. Library resources and databases are available to students and meet the needs of the study field. The information and communication technology solutions used to ensure the study process are appropriate, yet their effectiveness could be improved. RISEBA is implementing procedures for attracting qualified teaching staff, including a significant number of practicing professionals. The needs of professional and didactic development of the teaching staff are determined, and regular seminars are being organized. The academic, research and administrative workload of the teaching staff is unclearly monitored, therefore, the balance is not measurable. RISEBA provides a wide range of support for students, yet some improvements can be concluded.

Strengths:

1. Well equipped premises, including lots of greenery and comfortable rest areas outside classrooms;
2. Motivating payment system for scientific research;
3. Many possibilities for the teaching staff to enhance their methodological, didactic, professional development;
4. Vast support system for students.

Weaknesses:

1. Only 15% of library resources are in Latvian, although English or Russian proficiency is not part of admission criteria;
2. Many courses on Moodle are duplicated or overlapping, the course catalog being disordered;
3. Less than 10% of classes are held online, despite fully equipped classrooms for distance learning. Almost fully offline classes might be an obstacle for attracting, especially, masters students for the study field;
4. None of RISEBA's premises provide meals with no animal products and vegetarian options are strictly limited. The student kitchen in Durbes street is poorly equipped.

1.4. Scientific Research and Artistic Creation

Analysis

1.4.1. The research activities of RISEBA University of Applied Sciences are clearly identified in the institution's strategic documents and consistently align with the regulations of both the Republic of Latvia and the European Union. The SAR underscores the institution's commitment to achieving scientific excellence in research endeavors, upholding academic integrity and ethics, and furnishing meaningful research outcomes to benefit Latvian society and policy making.

1.4.2. Within the field of ICS, these ambitious objectives are primarily concentrated within the FBE. A recent revision in 2023 has led to the establishment of a new research direction titled "Communication, Digital Technology, and Innovation." Under the leadership of Associate Professor Dr. Valters Kaže, this new direction is expected to play a significant role in advancing RISEBA's research activities and catalyzing progress within the ICS domain. The SAR (p. 71) also acknowledges that research topics relevant to ICS can be found across the other two scientific directions within the FBE, including human resource management; psychology and business supervision.

However, the dispersion of communication-related research across multiple directions poses a challenge, potentially relegating communication to a secondary concern within each field. The formulation of aims for the new "Communication, Digital Technology, and Innovation" direction suggests a focus on the application and development of innovations, digital tools, and artificial intelligence, with communication serving as a supporting backdrop (SAR, p. 71).

RISEBA has established strong traditions in business and marketing research, which have somewhat overshadowed the ICS field. While initiatives targeting contemporary topics such as digitalization and artificial intelligence aim to highlight the unique features of the ICS domain, integration with the Faculty of Media and Creative Technologies could potentially yield valuable synergies. Although ICS topics are present within the Media Arts and Creative Technologies direction, their full potential remains underutilized.

1.4.3. International cooperation in ICS research shows promise, with RISEBA attracting international experts and integrating their expertise into the teaching process. However, there is room for improvement in aligning the research focus of foreign experts with local realities to better serve the strategic goals of the University. Furthermore, sustaining the integration of foreign researchers into the institution beyond their initial engagement remains a challenge (SAR, p. 75-76).

The fact that the largest part of all international cooperation is developed in the field of management influences institutional and individual memberships in international professional organizations. No members of the staff are involved in the European Communication Research and Education Association (ECREA), European Public Relations Education and Research Association (EUPRERA) or any other international ICS organization (SAR, Annex 21).

1.4.4. The efficient management and coordination of research activities are overseen by the RISEBA Scientific Council, which facilitates quick and effective decision-making. The RISEBA encourages the involvement of teaching staff in research through methodological support, financial incentives, seminars, and opportunities to participate in scientific conferences (SAR, p. 79-82).

On a methodological level different seminars and discussions are promoted. The practice of discussions on research activities and scientific papers are not only encouraged, but also held on a regular basis. It is important to stress that the RISEBA provides consultations for statistical analysis and proofreading of English texts. RISEBA creates opportunities for the staff to participate in different scientific conferences.

RISEBA's scientific journals ("Journal of Business Management" and "ADAM Arts") play a crucial role in catalyzing research, though there is room for improvement in bridging the divide between communication and media research (SAR, p. 72). In certain cases ("ADAM Arts" special issue dedicated to the 6th gathering of the European Narratology Network (ENN)) it goes much further

and deeper than could be expected. Such good practice shows how even a small institution can make a great impact on certain fields. However, this reveals the artificial divide between communication and media research, which is reflected in the administrative structure of the university as well.

The idea of the special issue of "Journal of Business Management" dedicated to communication, digital technologies and innovation deserves support. However, the experts have reservations, if such an endeavor will help to solve the lack of research in the field of communication. The accent of the special issue of the journal corresponds to the principal direction of the research field. Nevertheless, its impact on the broadening of the field could be rather dubious. While the publication support system is lauded for its fairness and efficiency, additional instruments may be necessary to bolster research in specific fields like ICS.

Concerns arise regarding the attribution of research work, particularly for staff affiliated with other research institutions. Clarification is needed regarding whether the same research output can be attributed to multiple Latvian research institutions simultaneously, impacting institutional competition and overall evaluation of research activities.

1.4.5. Efforts to promote student research activities receive ongoing support from the University administration, with regular student scientific conferences serving as platforms for student engagement. Recognizing exemplary student research through awards incentivizes student involvement in research endeavors.

1.4.6. The slogan of the University, which states that RISEBA is a place where business meets art, presupposes that the search for innovative solutions is in the DNR of the institution. The commitment to innovation is underscored by its promotion of Design Thinking methods, educational games, and interdisciplinary approaches. Emphasizing innovation remains a core aspect of the institution's identity, although challenges persist in effectively implementing innovative solutions.

Conclusions on this set of criteria, by specifying strengths and weaknesses

RISEBA University of Applied Sciences prioritizes research aligned with strategic goals and regulatory standards. While emphasizing scientific excellence and societal impact, there's a particular focus on ICS within the FBE. However, dispersion across various research directions poses challenges, with business and marketing research overshadowing ICS. Integration with the Faculty of Media and Creative Technologies could address this. International collaboration holds promise but needs alignment with local needs. Efficient management is ensured by the Scientific Council, though concerns about attribution persist. Student research is encouraged, and the institution remains committed to innovation despite challenges in implementation and prioritization.

Strengths:

1. RISEBA demonstrates a clear strategic direction for its research activities, as outlined in institutional documents. This provides a framework for guiding research efforts and ensuring alignment with national and EU regulations.
2. The institution has developed deep traditions in business and marketing research, which serve as a strong foundation for its academic endeavors.
3. RISEBA has been successful in attracting international experts and integrating their expertise into the teaching process, showcasing a commitment to international collaboration and knowledge exchange.
4. The RISEBA administration provides ongoing support for student research activities, including organizing student scientific conferences and recognizing exemplary student research through awards.
5. The RISEBA Scientific Council plays a crucial role in facilitating efficient management and coordination of research activities, enabling quick and effective decision-making.

Weaknesses:

1. The dispersion of communication-related research across multiple directions within the FBE may dilute the focus on communication as a primary research area, potentially hindering the development of a cohesive research agenda in this field.
2. While there is potential for synergy between FBE and the Faculty of Media and Creative Technologies in the field of ICS, the full exploitation of this potential appears to be limited.
3. There is a need to align the focus of foreign experts with local realities to better serve the university's strategic goals and address the specific needs of Latvian society.
4. Neither RISEBA as an institution, nor its faculty members are members of international organizations in the ICS field.
5. Concerns arise regarding the attribution of research work, particularly for staff affiliated with other research institutions, which may impact institutional competition and the evaluation of research activities.

Assessment of the requirement [2]

- 1 R2 - Compliance of scientific research and artistic creation with the level of development of scientific research and artistic creation (if applicable)

Assessment of compliance: Partially compliant

Good organized field lack concentration on communication research topics, most research is carried out in the field of business and marketing.

1.5. Cooperation and Internationalisation

Analysis

According to RISEBA Strategy 2022-2027 one of their Strategic Cornerstones for 2022 - 2027 'International Competitiveness' is among top priorities of the University. Analysis of documentation and interviews with RISEBA staff proves it as described below.

1.5.1/1.5.2 RISEBA developed an extensive partnership and cooperation network both among local and foreign institutions, including employees, academic and scientific institutions. RISEBA concluded cooperation agreements with other HEI's such as "Turība" University, RTU (Riga Technical University), Ventspils University of Applied Sciences, BA School of Business and Finance, LBTU (Latvia University of Life Sciences and Technologies; former LLU), as well as other HEI's in specific fields as eridiction of plagiarism, single application to undergraduate programmes.

During an assessment visit by experts, it was found that commendable cooperation was established with employers and graduates since the employer's part was represented by companies who are among well known in a communication market in Latvia.

RISEBA positions itself as University which is paying special attention to collaboration with local and international partners based on partners' relevance to the study field, prestige within the labor market, ability to provide internships and some other criteria (SAR, 2.5.1). However some of the criteria are not accountable e.g. prestige within the labor market.

According to Annex 26 there are 54 cooperation agreements between University and different organizations both in Latvia and abroad. The quality of the self-assessment report (SAR) could gain if the respective Annex would indicate how many partnerships rely directly on the study process (e.g. internships, academic exchange), and which ones are simple economic cooperation agreements (e.g. hotel services for visitors, translation services etc.).

Also RISEBA names around 80 local (in Latvia) organizations (SAR, p. 87.) with which internship agreements were concluded during the last 3 years. Those are listed in random view without

classification or alphabetical order besides names of several organizations appearing multiple times thus creating the impression that the number of organizations is artificially increased.

Taking into consideration specifics of communication market and its institutions (e.g. PR, advertising, marketing) it would be advisable to create classification among partnership institutions dividing them to private (agency, in-house) and public (government, municipality) thus providing a more easy opportunity to evaluate scope and division of organizations which could provide possible internships.

Regarding cooperation with institutions from abroad it should be noted that a commendable network of Erasmus+ agreements has been developed during recent periods of time. Most of Erasmus+ partnership institutions represent universities from western countries like Spain, Portugal, Netherlands, France, Germany and other Western countries, although RISEBA's main target market for attracting international students are Central Asian, as emphasized during on-site meetings. However, implementation of those agreements would show real contribution towards internationalization of the University only in the future, especially taking into consideration numbers of incoming students and academic staff in comparison with outgoing ones.

1.5.3. It has been found by experts that RISEBA employs a number of foreign academic staff within the field of ICS.

Although RISEBA currently educates students from 40+ countries (according to information provided by RISEBA Management during assessment visits by experts), priority markets where foreign students coming from were named basically from countries with autocratic political regimes (Uzbekistan, Kazakhstan, Azerbaijan, Tajikistan). This situation could be viewed from different angles: from one hand, RISEBA Western-type education provided to students from autocracies significantly contribute to development and promotion of democratic values to citizens from other political systems, but from other hand education received would be of little use (apart of broadening of horizons) when students will return to its home countries. The above-mentioned factors might be considered when planning the study process for foreign students, especially when establishing partnership and signing agreements within the Erasmus + network. Expert does not evaluated quantitative measures regarding the numbers of incoming/outcoming mobility activities both for students and academic staff since such data were not available. Also from information received during the visit to HEI it is presumed that mobility activities are sufficient.

Conclusions on this set of criteria, by specifying strengths and weaknesses

According to RISEBA Strategy 2022-2027 one of their Strategic Cornerstones for 2022 - 2027 'International Competitiveness' is stated. Even though RISEBA has established good partnerships with foreign academic entities and was able to attract academic staff from abroad, the core markets to attract foreign students are countries with either autocratic political systems or underdeveloped democracies. The above-mentioned fact obviously does not contribute to fulfilling aims set in the RISEBA's strategy especially regarding the reach of the strategic cornerstone of international competitiveness.

Commendable achievement is established partnership with employers from the communication industry incl. PR and advertising agencies as well as organizations which employ specialists of the communication field including significant companies contributing to the development of Latvia's economy. However, there are no measurable criteria set for choosing partners as might be necessary in order to make clear the process and ensure future sustainability of the partnership system between RISEBA and its stakeholders.

Strengths:

1. Extensive partnership network of local employers established.

2. Commendable network of Western universities within Erasmus+ programme established.
3. Strong support by RISEBA management in finding internships for students within an established partnership network.

Weaknesses:

1. No measurable criteria identified in finding local industry partners.
2. List of partnership organizations should be systemised.
3. Priority markets for attracting foreign students does not correspond to RISEBA Strategy's cornerstone of 'International Competitiveness'.

Assessment of the requirement [3]

- 1 R3 - The cooperation implemented within the study field with various Latvian and foreign organizations ensures the achievement of the aims of the study field.

Assessment of compliance: Partially compliant

Strategic goals do not comply with performance tactics in recruitment of foreign students as well as amendments in technical performance required. The cooperation implemented within the study field with various Latvian and foreign organizations ensures the achievement of the aims of the study field, p. 25.

1.6. Implementation of the Recommendations Received During the Previous Assessment Procedures

Analysis

1.6.1. The RISEBA ICS field was accredited for two years in 2021 (SAR, p. 94). For the Field of Study 12 recommendations were given, 12 for the bachelor's study programme, and 7 for the master's study programme (SAR, p. 94).

RISEBA grouped recommendations for the study division into four main categories: increase the number of scientific publications in high-quality journals, promote publications in the direction of advertising, public relations, marketing, and communication, also involving students of the master's programme, promoting cooperation at the international level; involve students in decision-making; determine the Moodle (e-riseba) digital site as mandatory, improving the quality of materials in it (SAR, p. 94).

RISEBA has taken numerous steps to increase the scientific productivity of teachers in the field of ICS – from encouraging them to participate in certain conferences to publishing papers in prestigious scientific journals (SAR, p. 95; Appendix 30). The aforementioned activities ensured a greater number of publications, but there is still a lack of works in communication, not marketing or management, which was discussed in more detail in criterion 1.4. The Moodle platform, where all materials are available to students, has also been significantly improved. For a period of two years, support was provided for teachers in the form of numerous workshops and recorded tutorials on how to use the platform itself (SAR, p. 95). Students expressed their great satisfaction with the platform during the meeting with the experts. Significant changes have also been made regarding the inclusion of students in decision-making bodies, but they still need to be included much more in bodies that are an important part of the quality assurance system.

When it comes to recommendations for bachelor study programmes, significant changes have been made. A much larger number of experts related to the field of study were engaged (Appendix 30); descriptions of study courses are being renewed and more practical workshops introduced (Appendix 30; study course descriptions); with the aim of retaining students and reducing the drop-out quota, the "Procedures for monitoring reasons for study leaving at the School of Business, Art

and Technology RISEBA" has been developed, but the number of students who abandon their studies is still very high, which is why it is recommended that RISEBA further elaborate the mechanisms of student retention and reduction of the drop-out quota; changes were made within the content of the study programme and individual subjects; the number of scientific papers by academic staff in prestigious journals has increased, and the improvement process in this area is planned to continue (Appendix 30; onsite visit meetings); the number of teachers who participate in scientific projects in the field of study has increased, but this still needs to be developed and intensified because, these projects are primarily done by external lecturers, and not full academic staff RISEBA (onsite visit meetings with academic staff); methodological seminars on bachelor thesis both for teachers and students were organized (Appendix 30); representatives of students are approved in the composition of the Programme Council and participate in meetings (Appendix 30, onsite meetings).

In addition to one part of the changes that was already mentioned as part of the undergraduate study (especially concerning the scientific activities of the teachers), numerous changes were made in the graduate study regarding the content of the study, in accordance with the received recommendations (Appendix 30; course description); the number of employers where students can go on internships closely related to the field of study has increased (Appendix 30, onsite meetings).

In the spring of 2023, a negative conclusion was received regarding including the "Public Relations and Advertising Management" study programme in the "Management, administration and Real Estate Management" study direction (SAR, p. 96). According to the experts' recommendations, specific goals, tasks, and intended learning outcomes have been determined for each sub-programme according to the qualification and standard of the profession; the programme targets employment opportunities in the private sector; detailed mapping of study programmes and study course was carried out; the methodological guidelines of the institution of higher education have been established for the transfer from the Latvian credit system (KP/CP) to the European credit transfer and accumulation system (ECTS); an evaluation of the two sub-programmes has been carried out in accordance with the new national vocational education standard (SAR, p. 96; Appendix 30a).

Conclusions on this set of criteria, by specifying strengths and weaknesses

Considering the short deadline for the implementation of the recommendations received during the last two evaluation processes, significant progress has been made, and RISEBA has already fully implemented a good part of the recommendations, while some of them are in the process of implementation and they will certainly take a number of years, such as the recommendations concerning the improvement of the scientific activities of full-time teachers. It is the proposal of the experts to continue with the implementation of the received recommendations in both procedures.

Strengths:

1. Given the short period, most of the proposals obtained in the previous two evaluation procedure were adopted
2. Both short-term and long-term recommendations received from expert's regarding the bachelor's study programme "Public Relations and Advertising Management" inclusion in the study direction "Management, Administration and Real Estate Management" were implemented.

Weaknesses:

1. Student drop-out is still very high
2. Scientific papers and activities of teachers are more focused on marketing and management than on the field of communication itself
3. Insufficient involvement of students in quality assurance processes as an important part of the

Assessment of the requirement [4]

- 1 R4 - Elimination of deficiencies and shortcomings identified in the previous assessment of the study field, if any, or implementation of the recommendations provided.

Assessment of compliance: Partially compliant

Considering the short deadline for the implementation of the recommendations received during the last evaluation process, significant progress has been made, and RISEBA has already fully implemented a good part of the recommendations, while some of them are in the process of implementation. It is still recommended to increase the scientific productivity of teachers in the field of communication, not marketing or management as well as to increase the presence of students in bodies that are an important part of the quality assurance system. RISEBA also needs to determine additional mechanisms to reduce drop out quota since it is still very high.

1.7. Recommendations for the Study Field

Short-term recommendations

1. Provide more data from the quality assurance system on the official website, especially those that can be useful to current and especially future students, such as, for example, data on the percentage of completion of studies, employment opportunities, data on how long, on average, students are employed in the profession after obtaining the diploma because this can be very useful information for future students.
2. Given the problem of low student response to teacher evaluations, it is recommended that students be given feedback on the results of teacher evaluations, at least at the level of individual studies, and not at the level of the entire university, and highlight, for example, the best-rated teachers.
3. Keep official notes/minutes from meetings of Programme Directors and students, because the data obtained in this way can and should be used for the purpose of improving the quality of the study programmes, and information about which must be available to everyone, not just one person.
4. Consider the application of RISEBA for institutional membership with European Communication Research and Education Association (ECREA), encourage staff members to join international professional communication organizations and support their efforts financially (cover membership fees).

Long-term recommendations

1. To involve students much more in the quality assurance system, where it is important that they are independent and objective (e.g., not employed by RISEBA or other HEI) who will fully represent the rights of students.
2. Strengthen Integration in ICS Research: Foster closer collaboration and integration within the Faculty of Business and Economics to consolidate communication-related research efforts. This could involve establishing interdisciplinary research teams or initiatives focused specifically on ICS topics to drive innovation and excellence in this field.

3. Enhance Collaboration with Media Arts and Creative Technologies: Explore opportunities for deeper collaboration between the ICS field and the Faculty of Media and Creative Technologies to leverage complementary expertise and resources. This could involve joint research projects, cross-disciplinary courses, or shared research facilities to maximize synergies between the two faculties.
4. Promote Localization of Research: Encourage foreign experts engaged in research activities to align their focus with local realities and priorities. This could involve providing training or resources to help international researchers better understand the Latvian context and tailor their research accordingly to address pressing societal challenges.
5. Consider hybrid format of studies: Create a more accessible and appealing study environment for young professionals, who could benefit from hybrid distance learning.
6. For the next accreditation period, diversify the stakeholders involved in the preparation of SAR and for the meetings with the Expert Committee. For example, ensure that the graduates are not predominantly active alumni, employers are not predominantly graduates.
7. Increase the number of academic/administrative staff with the appropriate competencies and degrees from the ICS field.
8. The importance of selecting appropriate personnel in leading positions with an emphasis on possessing the necessary competencies for managing study programmes, where it is necessary that these people have knowledge related to the study programme itself, as this will also ensure a higher quality of study programmes in ICS field.
9. Increase the number of library resources in the Latvian language or increase the level of English proficiency in the admission criteria.
10. Organize the moodle platform so that there is no overlap or duplication of courses.
11. Clearly prescribe the criteria for selecting local partners from the industry and organize a list of partnership organizations in a more systematic way.
12. Adjust priority markets for attracting foreign students with RISEBA Strategy's cornerstone of 'International Competitiveness'.
13. Determine measures and undertake appropriate activities with the aim of reducing the drop-out quota
14. It would be good to provide meals with no animal products and vegetarian options in the student kitchen.

II - "Public Relations and Advertising Management" ASSESSMENT

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2.1. Indicators Describing the Study Programme

Analysis

2.1.1. Study programme Public Relations and Advertising Management (42342) is a professional bachelor study programme that consists of two sub programmes: Public Relations (prepare specialists in accordance with the knowledge, skills and competencies specified in the standard of the public relations manager profession) and Advertising (prepare specialists in accordance with the knowledge, skills and competencies specified in the standard of the advertising manager profession)

(SAR, p. 102). Taking out one qualification out of study programme, made the programme better than it was previously evaluated.

2.1.2. / 2.1.3. The study programme corresponds to the study field "Information and Communication Sciences" in terms of its content, name and awarded degree (SAR, p. 108-109). However, since the majority of subjects are common to both study sub-programmes and only a small number of subjects are specific to each qualification it would be good for RISEBA to consider whether the division into two sub-programmes is really necessary. Namely, considering the subjects offered, students should get both qualifications (both Public Relations Manager and Advertising Manager), and not just one of them. In that case, one classification code would be enough. With the aim of obtaining two different qualifications, the number of different subjects in the two mentioned sub-programmes should be much higher. Furthermore, classification (42342) is given, but it is not within the Information and Communication field. Full-time study lasts 4 years, and part-time study lasts 4 years and 6 months. The study carries a total of 240 CP/ECTS. There are five general expected learning outcomes of the study programme and three more specific expected outcomes for each sub-programme (SAR, p. 109). The study is conducted in Latvian and English language. Given that one of the key plans of RISEBA is to attract more foreign students with the aim of increasing the number of students, conducting studies in English is commendable and necessary.

2.1.4. As stated by the Director of bachelor's study programme, the minimum number of students to open the study programme each academic year is 12, maximum – 30. In the academic year of 2023./2024., 24 students were enrolled in the Latvian group and 23 students in the English group (SAR, p. 113). The number of students enrolled annually are still stably above the minimum requirement, yet is decreasing noticeably (Annex 33). This data suggests that, currently and for the past reporting period, the study programme should be financially stable and able to ensure profitability, nevertheless, raises a concern for the future, given the annual decrease in the number of students. The number of students in English is growing year by year (SAR, p. 113), which is an indication that the decision to conduct studies entirely in English language was adequate and timely. However, it is definitely recommended to work on a strategy to attract a larger number of students from European countries as well.

All information about the study programme is public and accessible on the study programme website.

During the reporting period two sub-programmes have been made and admission rules have been clarified. As written in SAR (p. 111), for the admission of students a person must have a general secondary education or a four-year secondary vocational education. For matriculation, following conditions are admitted: has received secondary education; the grades of the secondary school attestation shall not be less than 4; a centralized examination of Latvian and literature has been passed; have passed a centralized examination in English, French or German. Applicants wishing to study in English should additionally undergo an entrance test in English if the result of central secondary examinations in English is lower than B2 level. Language test is not required if the applicant has completed their previous Education in English or has a positive IELTS (rated at least 6) or TOEFL (rated at least 500) certificate (SAR, p. 111).

A survey on employment of graduates of the bachelor programme showed that 65% of respondents have already found work in the industry within the first two years after graduation (SAR, p. 112). Graduates of the RISEBA programme work for all major Latvian marketing agencies and manage departments in large international and local companies such as WRONG, New Black, Swedbank, CleanR, JYSK (SAR, p. 112; online meetings).

In the SAR (p. 109), as well as at the meeting itself, it was stated that several study programme directors had changed in the past period. In the last three months (as of February 2024), this position has been held by the person who previously led the Career Center. Although the experts are aware that RISEBA can appoint any person to that position, with the aim of profiling the study programme as well as raising its quality, which is necessary considering the need to attract as many

students as possible, domestic and foreign, the expert committee is of the opinion that the position of study programme director should be held by a person who has an excellent knowledge of the profession - from the content itself and the necessary competencies, both theoretical and practical, to the need to know the labor market in the field of study programmes.

Conclusions on this set of criteria, by specifying strengths and weaknesses

Study programme Public Relations and Advertising Management is a professional bachelor study programme that consists of two sub-programmes: Public Relations and Advertising. The study programme corresponds to the study field Information and Communication Sciences in terms of its content, name and awarded degree, however since the majority of subjects are common to both study sub-programmes and only a small number of subjects are specific to each qualification it would be good for RISEBA to consider whether the division into two sub-programmes is really necessary. Namely, considering the subjects offered, students should get both qualifications (both Public Relations Manager and Advertising Manager), and not just one of them. With the aim of obtaining two different qualifications, the number of different subjects in the two mentioned sub-programmes should be much higher, and it is recommended that RISEBA clearly divides the competencies, and accordingly the learning outcomes and related courses, which should be possessed by people with one and the other qualification. Furthermore, given classification code is not within the Information and Communication field. The study is conducted in Latvian and English language. The number of students in English is growing year by year which is an indication that the decision to conduct studies entirely in English language was adequate and timely.

Strengths:

1. Full time programme in English will enable the application of a larger number of foreign students

Weaknesses

1. Frequent changes to the position of study programme director
2. Small differences in subjects in the two mentioned sub-programmes, so the question arises whether two qualifications are necessary
3. Given classification code is not within the Information and Communication field

2.2. The Content of Studies and Implementation Thereof

Analysis

2.2.1. The content of the bachelor's programme Public Relations and Advertising Management is topical, courses and modules are interconnected and provide a sequential and logical route for students to acquire theoretical and professional knowledge of the field. The choice of the courses and their themes are in the line with the needs of the industry and the labor market. The content also corresponds to the State education standard (Cabinet regulations No 305) e.g. objectives and the results of the study programme corresponds to the framework structure of the sixth level of professional qualifications in terms of theoretical knowledge, practical readiness, skills and competences included in the content of the programme. The scope of the study programme (240 CP), duration of the implementation of the programme (4 years for the full-time, 4 years 6 months for the part-time studies) as well as amount of the contact hours (40%) correspond with the necessary requirements set by the State education standard. The demands regarding mandatory study content of a Bachelor's programme such as courses of study in the humanities and social sciences, including courses of study developing basic social, communicative and organizational skills, including a study module for the development of professional business competence (30 CP);

basic courses of theoretical knowledge and information technology courses in the sector (54 CP); courses of specialization studies corresponding to the sector (90CP); optional study courses (9 CP); internship (30 CP); State test with developing and defending Bachelor's thesis (18 CP); development and defense of three study works; the content requirements of study courses laid down in the environmental Protection Law (Environmental Protection Law, 02.11.2006.) and the Civil Protection Law (Civil Protection and Disaster Management Law, 01.10.2016.); assigned professional Bachelor's degree in the sector along with a sixth-level professional qualification; possibility to continue studies at the relevant Master's programmes are all observed. The principles and procedures for evaluation of acquisition of a study programme such as openness of evaluation; mandatory rating; possibilities for review of the evaluation; diversity of the test methods used in the evaluation are all taken into consideration when organizing and implementing the study programme. The degree of achievement of study results is evaluated on a 10-point scale.

The practice is organized in accordance with the requirements specified in Cabinet regulations (Cabinet regulations No 305) and in accordance with the by-law of practice approved by the RISEBA Methodological Council and in accordance with the requirements of the Agreement on the Organisation of Internship. The module for the development of professional business competence (at least 6 CP) exceeds the minimum demands as the programme includes courses in the amount of 15 CP in the respective area (SAR, Appendix 34 & 37).

The content of the study programme complies with professional standards of Public Relations manager and Advertising manager. The professional standard of PR manager declares the following blocks of skills and attitudes, professional knowledge and competences necessary for the performance of basic tasks and duties of professional activity of a PR manager: monitoring, analysis and evaluation of the internal and external environment of the organization; organization communication planning and management; provision of day-to-day communication by the organization; participation in the design and provision of the organization's communication processes; analysis and evaluation of PR results. It also declares the skills and attitudes necessary for the performance of the basic tasks and duties of the professional activity, general knowledge and competences. For each of the elements under the aforementioned professional dimension the programme provides at least two courses (but usually more) that correspond to the defined element in the level of awareness and/or use, and/or both, depending on the specifics defined by the professional standard. For each of the elements under general knowledge and competence the programme provides at least one course (but usually more) that corresponds to the defined element in the professional standard (SAR, Appendix 35 & Public Relations Manager's Professional Standard, 2020).

The professional standard of Advertising manager declares the following blocks of skills and attitudes, professional knowledge and competences necessary for the performance of basic tasks and duties of professional activity: management of advertising projects/campaigns; brand market category research; development of advertising strategy; development of creative advertising strategy; participation in the development of company brand positioning and identity. It also declares the skills and attitudes necessary for the performance of the basic tasks and duties of the professional activity, general knowledge and competences. For each of the elements under the aforementioned professional dimension the programme provides at least two courses (but usually more) that correspond to the defined element in the level of awareness and/or use, and/or both, depending on the specifics defined by the professional standard. For each of the elements under general knowledge and competence the programme provides at least one course (but usually more) that corresponds to the defined element in the professional standard (SAR, Appendix 35 & Advertising Manager's Professional Standard, 2021).

All the necessary study content is easily available for students on Moodle e-learning system. Yet, many courses on Moodle are duplicated or overlapping, thus making it hard to navigate the course catalog and differentiate between similar courses. Currently, there are approximately 3000 courses

in the catalog, and, as approved by the Programme Director during the onsite visit, it is a matter of technical and systematic issue. It is advised to improve the system of Moodle course catalog by uniting the courses of the same or nearly the same content and, perhaps, encouraging the teaching staff not to create new courses of similar content and improve already existing ones.

2.2.3. RISEBA's teaching staff uses a variety of student-centered methods that are appropriate for the content and outcomes of the study courses and the programme. Students of the programme expressed satisfaction with teaching and assessment methods implemented by the teaching staff. Instructors expressed satisfaction with the variety of management support in developing their range of methods and understanding in the new coming challenges associated with digitalization and AI. Generally lecturers use a variety of monological and dialogical methods and forms of study work as well as feel encouraged and supported to improve their teaching (SAR, p.119, expert's meeting with teaching staff and students). Students themselves express approval of such methods as well as experience understanding and flexibility from instructors that facilitates their learning. For example, several students recalled instances where instructors expressed interest in their general workload of the semester and were eager to balance it by tailoring the scope of the coursework and deadlines (Experts' meeting with students).

2.2.4. The internship is included in the study programme and is well organized and managed. Documents describing the internship process and expectations regarding the internship report as well as student support associated with these are well developed; the tasks of the internship are related to the learning outcomes of the programme and are beneficial for students in their choice of career path. All involved parties—students, programme's management, and graduates—demonstrate a unified view on the beneficial aspects of internships for the development of their future carrier and the supportive role of the programme's management in organizing and providing the necessary support for this part of their study experience (SAR, Annex 40 & experts' meeting with students, programme director, graduates). The internship complies with the requirements of regulatory enactments (SAR, Annex 34 & 35) and employers recognize the use of English language as beneficial for their businesses when hosting interns-foreign students (experts' meeting with employers).

2.2.6. When considering the scientific trends, the bachelor thesis of the former students focus the research on one enterprise and the solution of its marketing, advertising or PR problems (as indicated in the shared data base provided for experts by RISEBA). This reflects the approach more associated with the field of applied business communication than a broader context of related theoretical fields. While this kind of applied research is valuable for the industry and benefits particular enterprises, it might not be particularly helpful for students' learning to situate the studied problem in the wider (theoretical) context, thus, allowing them to be better prepared for continuing their studies at Master's level.

The content of the programme generally corresponds to the strategic objective of the RISEBA's ICS study field "to prepare competent, competitive, and socially responsible public relations, advertising, and digital communication professionals [...]" (SAR, p. 17). However, it is not clear how the aforementioned "social responsibility" translates into action and reflects in the study content. Regarding the compliance of the programme's content with the goals of the programme, the content strongly supports development of the expertise associated with "[...] implementing communication campaigns and corporate communication strategies and acting skillfully in crisis situations [...] as well as to promote the development of students' creative and innovative potential" (SAR, p. 102).

Conclusions on this set of criteria, by specifying strengths and weaknesses

The content of the programme is particularly valuable for meeting the needs of the industry and labor market. Study methods are modern and appropriate for conveying the knowledge and skills of

particular courses as well as meeting the goals of the programme. Students themselves express a strong connection with the labor market and find the content of the programme relevant to their future job prospects. However, a stronger connection with scientific trends and part of the strategic goal of the RISEBA's ICS study field (social responsibility) should be more developed/emphasized to facilitate the sustainability and development of the programme.

Strengths:

1. Correspondence with the needs of industry and labor market.
2. Modern study methods and student involvement in their learning.
3. Well-developed internships.

Weaknesses:

1. The obvious link with the ICS study field's strategic goal to prepare socially responsible professionals is missing from the programme's content.
2. The scope of bachelor's thesis topics is beneficial for the industry but does not fully use the potential to cultivate the scientific understanding of the problem.
3. Many courses on Moodle e-learning system are duplicated or overlapping, the course catalog being disordered.

Assessment of the requirement [5] (applicable only to master's or doctoral study programmes)

- 1 R5 - The study programme for obtaining a master's or doctoral degree is based on the achievements and findings of the respective field of science or field of artistic creation.

Assessment of compliance: Not relevant

2.3. Resources and Provision of the Study Programme

Analysis

2.3.1. RISEBA's premises are well equipped with infrastructure resources and material and technical support necessary for the implementation of the study programme. Multiple computer classes, study rooms and audio, video, photo studios with professional equipment are available for students and teaching staff as well (SAR, p. 55). In the library, there are 1091 information sources specifically related to the information and communication science field available. 60% of library books and other information units are in English, 15% in Latvian and 25% in Russian (SAR, p. 57). Since there are no specific admission criteria for the level of English knowledge for students enrolling in the Latvian programme, the disproportionate amount of resources in Latvian and English available is of concern to provide a quality study process for the first year students. Additionally, databases such as EBSCO, Web of Science, Emerald, Greenleaf Publishing PRMEC are available for on-site and remote use. Multiple paid information sources such as Leta.lv, Nozare.lv and iŽurnāli are subscribed to.

RISEBA has integrated mandatory use of Moodle e-learning system e-riseba.lv for the teaching staff, providing students with all the necessary study content digitally. An audit of Moodle is done annually to maximize the utilization of Moodle's capabilities in facilitating the study process. (SAR, p. 37) Additionally, students use the platform my.riseba.lv to upload assignments, see grades, payments, etc., while teaching staff use UNIMETIS as a server for other e-platforms of RISEBA, thus ensuring all the study content and administrative information necessary for the implementation of the study process is available online.

2.3.3. 70% of RISEBA's revenue stems from tuition fees (SAR, p. 50). As stated by the Director of bachelor's study programme, the minimum number of students to open the study programme each

academic year is 12, maximum – 30. In the academic year of 2023./2024., 19 students were enrolled in the Latvian full-time group and 23 students in the English full-time group (Annex 33). This data suggests that the study programme should be financially stable and able to ensure profitability. Yet, only 5 students were enrolled in the part-time Latvian study programme this year (Annex 33), which raises a concern about the sustainability of this group and the efficiency of RISEBA's resources in maintaining a group so small.

Conclusions on this set of criteria, by specifying strengths and weaknesses

The study provision, scientific provision, informative provision, material and technical provision and financial provision comply with specific features and conditions for the implementation of the study programme. In most cases, the study programme has the minimum number of students to ensure the profitability of the study programme and to facilitate the development of the study programme. There is no additional data regarding funding sources and distribution in the bachelor study programme to evaluate the overall financial means to ensure full implementation of the study process.

Strengths:

1. Well-equipped study premises, including material and technical provisions;
2. Number of enrolled students each academic year, except for the part-time study groups, is enough to ensure the profitability and development of the study programme.

Weaknesses:

1. Only 15% of books and/or other information units in the library are in Latvian language, although the admission criteria for students in Latvian programmes do not require a certain level of English to ensure a quality study process for the students.

Assessment of the requirement [6]

- 1 R6 - Compliance of the study provision, science provision (if applicable), informative provision (including library), material and technical provision and financial provision with the conditions for the implementation of the study programme and ensuring the achievement of learning outcomes

Assessment of compliance: Fully compliant

RISEBA's premises are very well equipped, the annual student enrolment is stable. The study, scientific, informative, material and technical provision comply with specific features and conditions for the implementation of the study programme.

2.4. Teaching Staff

Analysis

2.4.1. In the implementation of the study programme, RISEBA has successfully assembled a diverse cadre of expert academic staff, encompassing both seasoned researchers and seasoned practitioners possessing profound domain expertise. Out of 45 lecturers engaged, 2 are professors, 4 associate professors and 6 assistant professors. 40% of the faculty have PhD degrees (18 in total). Four of RISEBA's elected associate professors represent foreign teaching staff, the business environment is represented by 18 lecturers (40%) (SAR, p. 129). The majority of academic staff are proficient in delivering lectures in both Latvian and English; however, in instances where this capacity is lacking, programme management has diligently sought suitable replacements (SAR, Annex 20, 21). While this may pose a managerial challenge, it has had negligible impact on the

overall academic quality.

2.4.2. It is noteworthy that the recruitment of qualified instructors for certain practical courses presents inherent complexities, prompting RISEBA to adopt innovative strategies. The challenge of securing competent personnel for teaching modules such as Fundamentals of Visual Communication (I and II) is acknowledged. In response, the institution has engaged experienced professionals holding bachelor's degrees, supported by an appropriately qualified lead lecturer. Encouraging further academic advancement among these individuals is deemed imperative (SAR, Annex 21, 38). Despite the fact that a majority (24 out of 45) of lecturers engaged in the programme lack formal scientific publications, their involvement in rigorous professional endeavors and dissemination of knowledge through popular outlets is considerable. Notably, a significant proportion of scholarly publications lie outside the realm of ICS, primarily within adjacent fields such as marketing (SAR, Annex 25). Given the programme's dual subprogrammes, this divergence may potentially impact the Public Relations (PR) subprogramme adversely.

2.4.4. The academic staff satisfy 2.4.4. criteria (scientific publications, or artistic achievements, or five years of practical experience), however the management attitude towards “artistic achievements” of the academic staff could be more rigorous. The field of ICS is really broad, nevertheless it would be wise not to evaluate some public expressions in social media as “artistic achievements” (SAR, Annex 25).

2.4.5. In a closely-knit professional landscape typical of a small nation, seamless collaboration among teaching staff is expected, facilitated by mutual familiarity and shared experiences. Furthermore, given that some instructors concurrently teach identical subjects at other academic institutions, inter-institutional cooperation is inherently facilitated (SAR, Annex 21). Nonetheless, the cultivation of collaborative endeavors within the programme's Council framework and the scholarly discourse afforded by the bachelor's thesis defense commission serve as conduits for deeper engagement. Regrettably, the transitional phase within the programme's management, currently overseen by an acting Director, has yielded adverse repercussions on the academic milieu.

Conclusions on this set of criteria, by indicating strengths and weaknesses

RISEBA has successfully assembled a diverse team of expert instructors, blending academic researchers with seasoned practitioners possessing extensive practical knowledge in their respective fields. This diversity ensures a rich learning experience for students. While most lecturers are proficient in both Latvian and English, the need for substitutes in some cases highlights a minor challenge in programme management. The institution has demonstrated creativity in recruiting qualified personnel for practical courses, leveraging experienced professionals with bachelor's degrees and providing necessary support for their continued professional development. Despite a significant portion of lecturers lacking formal scientific publications, their engagement in high-quality professional activities and dissemination of knowledge through popular outlets underscores their commitment to academic and professional excellence. The presence of scholarly publications outside the field of ICS, particularly in adjacent disciplines like marketing, suggests an interdisciplinary approach within the programme. However, this may necessitate careful alignment to prevent potential divergence and ensure coherence, especially in dual sub-programmes. Changes in programme management, particularly under an acting Director, have had a negative impact on the programme's stability and possibly on the quality of education.

Strengths:

1. The programme benefits from a diverse team of expert instructors, including both researchers and practitioners with extensive practical experience (i.e. photo or film production). This diversity

enriches the learning environment and provides students with varied perspectives.

2. RISEBA demonstrates creativity in recruiting qualified personnel for practical courses, accommodating experienced professionals with bachelor's degrees and supporting their professional development. This flexibility ensures access to expertise even in challenging recruitment scenarios.
3. Despite some instructors lacking formal scientific publications, their active engagement in high-quality professional activities and knowledge dissemination through popular outlets indicates a commitment to staying current and relevant in their fields.
4. The presence of scholarly publications in adjacent fields like marketing suggests an interdisciplinary approach within the programme. This interdisciplinary perspective can foster holistic understanding and skill development among students.
5. The interconnectedness of the professional landscape and concurrent engagements of teaching staff in other institutions facilitate seamless collaboration. Formal mechanisms like the programme Council and thesis defense commissions further promote interdisciplinary discourse and cooperation.

Weaknesses:

1. While instructors are engaged in professional activities, the absence of formal scientific publications, particularly in the field of ICS, may impact the programme's academic credibility and research output.
2. Uncertainty and lack of clear leadership direction can hinder programme effectiveness and student experience.
3. The presence of scholarly publications in adjacent fields may suggest a divergence from the core focus of the programme. Without careful alignment and integration, this interdisciplinary approach could dilute the programme's coherence and relevance.
4. Despite employing innovative strategies, recruiting qualified personnel for practical courses remains challenging.

Assessment of the requirement [7]

- 1 R7 - Compliance of the qualification of the academic staff and visiting professors, visiting associate professors, visiting docents, visiting lecturers and visiting assistants with the conditions for the implementation of the study programme and the requirements set out in the respective regulatory enactments.

Assessment of compliance: Fully compliant

Overall, while RISEBA's study programme demonstrates strengths in faculty diversity, innovative recruitment, and interdisciplinary engagement, addressing weaknesses in language proficiency management, research output, transitional leadership, focus coherence, and practical course recruitment is essential for sustaining and enhancing programme effectiveness and quality.

2.5. Assessment of the Compliance

Requirements

- 1 1 - The study programme complies with the State Academic Education Standard or the Professional Higher Education Standard

Assessment of compliance: Fully compliant

Professional Higher Education Standard is defined by Cabinet regulations No 305, the compliance to the regulations is reflected in SAR, Appendix 34.

- 2 2 - The study programme complies with a valid professional standard or the requirements for the professional qualification (if there is no professional standard required for the relevant occupation) provided if the completion of the study programme leads to a professional qualification (if applicable)

Assessment of compliance: Fully compliant

The compliance with the valid professional standard is reflected in SAR, Annex 35 that corresponds to the professional standards for Public Relations Manager (PS 130) and Advertising Manager (PS 173).

- 3 3 - The descriptions of the study courses and the study materials have been prepared in all languages in which the study programme is implemented, and they comply with the requirements set forth in Section 561 , Paragraph two and Section 562 , Paragraph two of the Law on Higher Education Institutions.

Assessment of compliance: Fully compliant

Descriptions of Study courses and materials associated with implementation of the studies are provided in Latvian and English as evident at SAR, Annexes 34-40. They also comply with the relevant requirements set by the Law on Higher Education Institutions

- 4 4 - The sample of the diploma to be issued for the acquisition of the study programme complies with the procedure according to which state recognised documents of higher education are issued.

Assessment of compliance: Fully compliant

The sample of the diploma includes elements associated with the state recognised documents of higher education (Cabinet Regulations No 202) as evident from SAR, Annex 32

- 5 5 - The academic staff of the academic study programme complies with the requirements set forth in Section 55, Paragraph one, Clause 3 of the Law on Higher Education Institutions.

Assessment of compliance: Not relevant

- 6 6 - Academic study programmes provided for less than 250 full-time students may be implemented and less than five professors and associated professors of the higher education institution may be involved in the implementation of the mandatory and limited elective part of these study programmes provided that the relevant opinion of the Council for Higher Education has been received in accordance with Section 55, Paragraph two of the Law on Higher Education Institutions.

Assessment of compliance: Not relevant

- 7 7 - At least five teaching staff members with a doctoral degree are among the academic staff of an academic doctoral study programme, at least three of which are experts approved by the Latvian Science Council in the respective field of science. At least five teaching staff members with a doctoral degree are among the academic staff of a professional doctoral study programme in arts (if applicable).

Assessment of compliance: Not relevant

- 8 8 - The teaching staff members involved in the implementation of the study programme are proficient in the official language in accordance with the regulations on the level of the official language knowledge and the procedures for testing official language proficiency for performing professional duties and office duties.

Assessment of compliance: Fully compliant

The proficiency of Latvian of the teaching staff is confirmed by SAR, Appendix 22, information about the proficiency of each instructor is evident from Appendix 21.

- 9 9 - The teaching staff members to be involved in the implementation of the study programme have at least B2-level knowledge of a related foreign language, if the study programme or any part thereof is to be implemented in a foreign language (if applicable).

Assessment of compliance: Fully compliant

The knowledge of a foreign language (English) corresponds with the requirement for implementing the programme in English (B2 or higher) as evident from SAR, Annex 20 and 23 as well as instructors' biographies provided by Annex 21.

- 10 10 - The sample of the study agreement complies with the mandatory provisions to be included in the study agreement.

Assessment of compliance: Fully compliant

The sample of the study agreement complies with the mandatory provisions (Cabinet Regulations No 70) to be included in the study agreement as evident from SAR, Annex 8.

- 11 11 - The higher education institution / college has provided confirmation that students will be provided with opportunities to continue their education in another study programme or another higher education institution or college (agreement with another accredited higher education institution or college) if the implementation of the study programme is terminated.

Assessment of compliance: Partially compliant

As evident from SAR, Annex 6, RISEBA has a cooperation agreement with "Turība" University that ensures its students the continuation of their education. However, the corresponding Bachelor programmes at "Turība" currently are offered in Latvian language only. The agreement does not specify, how the continuation of the studies will be ensured for students at English version of the programme.

- 12 12 - The higher education institution / college has provided confirmation that students are guaranteed compensation for losses if the study programme is not accredited or the study programme's license is revoked due to the actions (actions or omissions) of the higher education institution or college and the student does not wish to continue studies in another study programme.

Assessment of compliance: Fully compliant

SAR, Annex 7 certifies that RISEBA guarantees compensation for losses.

- 13 13 - The joint study programmes comply with the requirements prescribed in Section 55.(1), Paragraphs one, two, and seven of the Law on Higher Education Institutions (if applicable)

Assessment of compliance: Not relevant

- 14 14 - Compliance with the requirements specified in other regulatory enactments that apply to the study programme being assessed (if applicable)

Assessment of compliance: Not relevant

Assessment of the requirement [8]

- 1 R8 - Compliance of the study programme with the requirements set forth in the Law on Higher Education Institutions and other regulatory enactments.

Assessment of compliance: Partially compliant

From 14 requirements 8 are evaluated as "Fully compliant", 1 as "Partially compliant", and 5 as "Not relevant". The only partially compliant requirement (No11) has a minor impact on the final evaluation, as continuation of studies in "Turība" university could proceed in other study programme.

General conclusions about the study programme, indicating the most important strengths

and weaknesses of the study programme

Conclusions:

The Public Relations and Advertising Management programme seems to be well-aligned with industry needs and the labor market, as students, graduates and employers perceive the content as relevant to their future job prospects. There's acknowledgment of a need for stronger emphasis on scientific trends and social responsibility to enhance the programme's sustainability and development. The programme seems adequately supported in terms of study, scientific, informative, material, and technical provisions, although there's uncertainty regarding funding sources and distribution for the full implementation of the study process. The programme benefits from a diverse team of instructors, blending academic researchers and seasoned practitioners, providing students with a rich learning experience. There are minor challenges in programme management, particularly in ensuring consistent language proficiency among lecturers and managing changes in leadership. Despite some lecturers lacking formal scientific publications, their engagement in high-quality professional activities and dissemination of knowledge indicates a commitment to academic and professional excellence. The programme demonstrates an interdisciplinary approach, evidenced by scholarly publications outside the core field, particularly in related disciplines like marketing. Changes in programme management, especially under an acting Director, have had a negative impact on the programme's stability and potentially on the quality of education, indicating a need for more consistent leadership and management practices. Overall, while the programme seems to have strengths in content relevance, instructional quality, and interdisciplinary approach, there are areas for improvement such as strengthening the focus on scientific trends and social responsibility, ensuring consistent management practices, and clarifying financial resources for programme sustainability.

Strengths:

1. The programme content is perceived as valuable for meeting industry needs and labor market demands, indicating that it prepares students effectively for their future careers.
2. The programme benefits from a diverse team of instructors, including both academic researchers and seasoned practitioners, providing students with a well-rounded learning experience.
3. The study methods employed are described as modern and appropriate for conveying knowledge and skills effectively, aligning with contemporary educational practices.
4. The programme seems to be adequately supported in terms of study materials, technical resources, and other provisions necessary for its implementation.

Weaknesses:

1. The programme may lack a strong emphasis on scientific trends, which could hinder its ability to stay updated with the latest developments in the field.
2. Changes in programme management, especially under an acting Director, have negatively impacted the programme's stability and potentially its quality, indicating a weakness in consistent leadership and management practices.
3. There's a lack of clarity regarding funding sources and distribution for the full implementation of the study process, which could pose a risk to the programme's sustainability.
4. While most lecturers are proficient, there are occasional challenges in ensuring consistent language proficiency among instructors, which could affect the quality of instruction for some students.
5. The programme could benefit from a stronger emphasis on social responsibility, aligning with strategic goals and enhancing its overall contribution to society.
6. The agreement about the continuation of studies with "Turība" University does not specify how

the continuation will be ensured for students studying in English.

Evaluation of the study programme "Public Relations and Advertising Management"

Evaluation of the study programme:

Good

2.6. Recommendations for the Study Programme "Public Relations and Advertising Management"

Short-term recommendations

1. Ensure stability in programme management by appointing a permanent Director or providing adequate support and resources to the acting Director. Clear leadership and effective communication are crucial for maintaining programme coherence and quality during transitional periods.
2. Implement stricter evaluation criteria for "artistic achievements" for those lecturers whose communication experiences border artistic creation to ensure consistency and relevance in assessing academic staff qualifications.
3. Strengthen formal mechanisms for collaboration, such as the programme Council and thesis defense commissions, to promote deeper engagement and interdisciplinary discourse among teaching staff.
4. With the aim of obtaining two different qualifications, the number of different subjects in the two mentioned sub-programmes should be much higher, and it is recommended that RISEBA clearly divides the competencies, and accordingly the learning outcomes and related courses, which should be possessed by students with one and the other qualification.
5. Change the classification code so that it is in accordance with the area of the proposed study programme
6. In the agreement on the continuation of studies with Turība University, it is necessary to specify how the continuation of studies will be ensured for students who study in English. If this will not be possible at the mentioned university, a more adequate and better solution is needed.

Long-term recommendations

1. Integrate Interdisciplinary Perspectives: Foster collaboration and integration between disciplines within the programme to capitalize on the interdisciplinary strengths while maintaining focus and coherence. Encourage cross-disciplinary research and teaching initiatives to enrich the learning experience for students.
2. Enhance Recruitment Strategies for Practical Courses: Develop targeted recruitment strategies to attract qualified instructors for practical courses. This may involve partnering with industry experts, offering competitive compensation packages, and promoting opportunities for professional development and advancement within the programme.
3. Conduct periodic reviews of the curriculum to ensure alignment with industry trends and emerging technologies, as well as to address any potential gaps resulting from the interdisciplinary approach.

4. Given that 60% of library resources are in English and only 15% in Latvian, it is advised to adjust the admission criteria for studies in Latvian language with higher criteria for the English level proficiency (for example, grade 7 and above in the state centralized examination in English) to ensure quality study process.

5. Consider additional instruments for providing financial transparency regarding the sustainability and profitability of the study programme, and provide this information as part of the SAR and corresponding annexes for the next evaluation procedure.

6. Organize the moodle platform so that there is no overlap or duplication of courses.

7. The content related to socially responsible business should be further strengthened in the study programme.

8. In the final bachelor theses, greater emphasis should be placed on the scientific understanding of the researched problem, which is very important for the science, but for the industry as well.

II - "Public Relations and Digital Communication" ASSESSMENT

II - "Public Relations and Digital Communication" ASSESSMENT

2.1. Indicators Describing the Study Programme

Analysis

2.1.1. /2.1.2. Study programme Public Relations and Digital Communication (47342) is a professional master study programme. Full-time study lasts 1,5 or 2 years. The study programme carries a total of 90 and 120 CP./ECTS. The study programme is conducted in Latvian and English language. The programme corresponds to the national regulation, namely-the State Education standard (SAR, Appendix 43) and Professional standard (SAR, Appendix 44). In accordance with the above and the fact that the proposed code is related to the field of Business studies and administration - Marketing and advertising, and not to the Information and Communication Sciences (according to the The Cabinet of Ministers Regulations No. 322 Regulations on the Classification of the Latvian Education), it is recommended to change the study programme code. The professional standard of Public Relations manager (2020) defines the following areas of the duty of the aforementioned professional: monitoring, analyzing and evaluating of organization's internal and external environment; planning and managing of organization's communication; ensuring of the cooperative communication of the organization; creating and ensuring of the everyday communication processes of the organization; managing of the human resources and finances; analyzing and evaluating of public relations as well as general skills, attitudes, knowledge and competence necessary for implementing professional tasks and duties. Each of the tasks and duties defined in the professional standard are backed-up with relevant courses of the programme (SAR, Annex 44.). Above mentioned analysis indicates that the programme corresponds to the national regulation, namely-the State Education standard (SAR, Appendix 43) and Professional standard (SAR, Appendix 44).

Currently the title of the programme creates a false "promise" of the skills and competences associated with the modern PR work in the heavily digitized communication landscape. However, this "promise" seems to be only partially fulfilled when examining the content of the courses in detail. Namely, the essential portion of PR-specific digital knowledge is still missing from the curricula and could be beneficial for distinguishing the programme from similar kinds of programmes in the area. Experts recognize that the programme's content as such corresponds to the professional standard, thus, the identified issue can also be seen in the light of programme's marketing and a choice of a more suitable title that reflects the content more precisely.

2.1.3. During the last two reporting years, students have not been admitted to the professional master's programme "Public Relations Management", and changes in this study programme were necessary with the aim of increasing interest in enrolling in graduate studies (SAR, p. 138). In the new study programme, more emphasis is placed on the digitization, internalization and intercultural aspects (SAR, p. 138). However, the question arises of the existence of quality teaching staff in the area of the aforementioned content changes, especially in the area of digitization. In accordance with the recommendation of evaluation experts admission requirements were improved. For applicants who have obtained a first-level education in other branches of science and cannot prove the competences acquired during professional activity in the field of communication science, marketing and advertising, the Introductory module is included as an additional requirement (SAR, p. 139). The admission requirements are for 90 CP/ECTS programme – first cycle professional higher education in advertising, public relations, marketing, communication management, business administration or related field and obtained a level 5 professional qualification, while for 120 CP/ECTS programme include the first cycle higher education (academic bachelor's) in advertising, public relations, marketing, communication management, business administration or related field (SAR, p. 140). However, in the first cycle it should be the 6th level prof. qualification, as the 5th level qualification is obtained in short-cycle study programme. Persons who obtained their first-cycle higher education in other branches of science and who cannot transfer knowledge gained through professional experience in the field of marketing and communication management must complete the Introductory module in the amount of 15 CP/ECTS before starting their studies (SAR, p. 140). Yet, during the meeting with the Programme Director, it was observed that it is not clear what would be the content of this module. Additional requirements are set for studies in English – the level of English knowledge is at least B2. If the applicant cannot prove it, has not previously obtained education in English, or cannot present an IELTS certificate with a score of at least 6 or a TOEFL certificate with a rating of at least 500, or another equivalent international certificate, the applicant must take the entrance exam in English (SAR, p. 140). Foreign applicants must also take the RISEBA admission test (SAR, p. 140).

2.1.4. As for the economic and / or social justification of the study programme, 70% of the students of the master's programme are already employed in public relations or advertising agencies, as public relations or communication specialists in public or private sector organizations (SAR, p. 141). A year after graduating from the programme, more than 90% of graduates are already working in their speciality (SAR, p. 141).

As in the case of the acting programme director of the bachelor study programme, the same recommendations apply here as well – to ensure the permanence of the person who holds the position of study programme director, because this is important for both teachers and students, but also for the reputation of the study programme in general, and it is important to ensure that the said person has necessary competences and knowledge in the field of study programme.

Conclusions on this set of criteria, by specifying strengths and weaknesses

Since the interest in enrolling in graduate studies was extremely weak, changes in the content of the study programme were necessary. The proposed changes are commendable, but the question arises whether they are good enough to attract international students and even the Latvian ones. The number of full academic staff who possess knowledge in the field of digitization and intercultural aspects should certainly be increased. The programme corresponds to the national regulation and professional standard (SAR, Appendix 44). In accordance with the above and the fact that the proposed code is related to the field of Business studies and administration - Marketing and advertising, and not to the Information and Communication Sciences (according to the The Cabinet of Ministers Regulations No. 322 Regulations on the Classification of the Latvian Education), it is recommended to change the study programme code. Admission requirements have improved in the

last two years. However, in the first cycle it should be the 6th level prof. qualification, as the 5th level qualification is obtained in a short-cycle study programme. Most students already work during the master's study programme, and those who do not work during their studies find a job in the profession quickly after obtaining their diploma.

Strengths

1. The Introductory module for students who obtained their first-cycle higher education in other branches of science and who cannot transfer knowledge gained through professional experience in the field of marketing and communication management.

Weaknesses

1. The code of the study programme is not within the information and communication field.

2.2. The Content of Studies and Implementation Thereof

Analysis

2.2.1. The study programme is well organized in terms of being topical, interconnected, complementary among its courses and coherent with the defined objectives.

The scope and the duration of the programme as defined by the State Education standard (minimum of 60 ECTS) in the case of the programme is 90 (1 year, 6 months) or 120 ECTS (2 years), depending on the previous education and the experience of students. Amount of contact hours is not less than 30%. Acquisition of knowledge, skills and competence corresponds with the level 7 of Latvian Qualifications Framework, as indicated in the extended mapping of the study courses (SAR, Annex 45). As to the compliance of the content of the programme, the mandatory part demands general education study courses, which ensure in-depth acquisition of the latest achievements in theoretical knowledge and practice of the industry sector (at least 8 ECTS) and courses in research work, creative work, design work and management studies (at least 5 ECTS). The programme's content exceeds the minimum by providing 12 ECTS for each of these respectively. As to the optional courses, the minimum requirement is 4 ECTS and the programme provides 6 ECTS. The scope of internship directly corresponds with the State Education standard that defines the amount of it to be at least 39 ECTS if it is intended for graduates of the academic Bachelor programme or at least nine credits if it is intended for graduates of the professional Bachelor programme. The Standard also determines that the mandatory content of the study programme shall also include the content, which ensures the achievement of professional competence in entrepreneurship. The programme contains 12 ECTS of study courses devoted to subjects in this area. In compliance with the requirements stipulated in the Environmental Protection Law and Civil Protection and Disaster Management Law, the programme offers the course in Civil and Environmental Protection (in the amount of 3 ECTS) for students who have not acquired it in the previous cycle of studies. At the end of their studies, students are granted a professional master's degree in public relations and a seventh level professional qualification - strategic communications manager that gives them the right to continue education in the third cycle higher education study programme. The principles and procedures for evaluation of acquisition of a study programme such as openness of evaluation; mandatory rating; possibilities for review of the evaluation; diversity of the test methods used in the evaluation are all taken into consideration when organizing and implementing the study programme. The degree of achievement of study results is evaluated on a 10-point scale. The practice is organized in accordance with the requirements specified in Cabinet regulations and in accordance with the by-law of practice approved by the RISEBA Methodological Council and in accordance with the requirements of the Agreement on the Organisation of Internship (SAR, Appendix 43).

The professional standard of Public Relations manager (2020) defines the following areas of the duty

of the aforementioned professional: Monitoring, analyzing and evaluating of organization's internal and external environment; planning and managing of organization's communication; ensuring of the cooperative communication of the organization; creating and ensuring of the everyday communication processes of the organization; managing of the human resources and finances; analyzing and evaluating of public relations as well as general skills, attitudes, knowledge and competence necessary for implementing professional tasks and duties. Each of the tasks and duties defined in the professional standard are backed-up with relevant courses of the programme (SAR, Annex 44.).

Above mentioned analysis indicates that the programme corresponds to the national regulation, namely-the State Education standard (SAR, Appendix 43) and Professional standard (SAR, Appendix 44). In its reorganization, the international examples have been taken into consideration (SAR, p.138).The needs of industry and labor market are taken into consideration when developing the content of the programme. However, more emphasis on the digital aspects of public relations communication specifically could potentially make this programme more appealing for national and international audiences. Currently the title of the programme creates a false "promise" of the skills and competences associated with the modern PR work in the heavily digitized communication landscape. However, this "promise" seems to be only partially fulfilled when examining the content of the courses in detail. For instance, the course "Digital transformation and social media" focuses on e-marketing; the course "Innovation strategy and digital media communication" on digital economy (SAR, Annex 47). While these kinds of courses offer useful and up-to-date knowledge, in the case of the programme they seem to have value on their own, while the essential portion of PR-specific digital knowledge is still missing from the curricula and could be beneficial for distinguishing the programme from similar kinds of programmes in the area. Experts recognize that the programme's content as such corresponds to the professional standard, thus, the identified issue can also be seen in the light of programme's marketing and a choice of a more suitable title that reflects the content more precisely.

2.2.2. Past Master's thesis provide a beneficial insight into specific problems and solutions for particular organizations. While from the perspective of industry players, this is relevant and generates value for their everyday operation, from the scientific perspective it seems to be insufficient scope of study since it focuses on the one organization as opposed to a particular PR/strategic communication phenomenon.

2.2.3. Generally, the study implementation methods are relevant to the aims and learning outcomes of the study programme and course descriptions demonstrate the consideration of student-centered learning and teaching principles (SAR, Appendix 47). Considering the rapid development of Artificial Intelligence writing tools along with student-centered preferences for effective learning, it might be more beneficial to avoid including several individual written reports as course assignments (for instance, SAR, Appendix 47, course "Corporate communication and PR"), but focus more on plagiarism-safe options while RISEBA develops clear policies and tools ensuring the ability to detect AI presence in written coursework.

2.2.4. Internship provided as a part of the programme, complies with the regulatory enactments and outcomes of the programme and RISEBA have all preconditions to organize them successfully also for international students. Depending on the type of Bachelor's degree (academic or professional), students can be subjected to a long (39 ECTS) or short form (9 ECTS) of an internship, the rest of the programme's content remaining the same in both variations of the study programme (SAR, p.143-144). There is a detailed description of internship report guidelines along with requirements for internship diary and rules for the internship defense procedure developed by the programme's administration. Student internship guidelines state that providing internship programmes in all the

languages of implementation of the programme is the responsibility of RISEBA (SAR, Annex 48). While intentions to provide 39 ECTS amount of internship for students without professional background in the field is well intended (SAR, p. 150) and corresponds to the State education standard, in practice this might be an obstacle for local working students – to complete an internship would mean they either switch to the different department of their workplace or change jobs. Both at times can be objectively impossible, thus, pushing to look for more formal albeit not so experience-wise fruitful solutions. Experts realize that this is a systemic issue and of a concern of professional Master's programmes in social sciences in general. Therefore, experts encourage RISEBA's management to facilitate discussion with lawmakers and other providers of professional graduate studies in order to lobby for better rules that would, in substance, allow implementing internships as a part of professional graduate studies.

2.2.6. Currently, from the couple of thesis examples provided by RISEBA (<https://sway.cloud.microsoft/7bkTZklaITqfx5Ov?ref=email>) for Experts to gain the impression, there is no possible way to tell the difference between Bachelor and Master's level research beyond the number of pages these works contain. Additionally, provided Master's thesis examples contain rather handbook-level descriptions of the main communication concepts. Experts realize that professional programmes logically are more oriented to applied research. Nevertheless, solutions of applied problems can still be investigated and developed by following the best practice of Master's level research, especially, considering the opportunity for Master's alumni to continue with PhD studies at the same institution, thus contributing to the quality of future research. Therefore, this comment is done in the light of marking the path for future improvements.

Conclusions on this set of criteria, by specifying strengths and weaknesses

Generally, the programme is well organized, corresponds to the needs of industry and labor market as well as national regulations. While its applied nature is definitely a benefit for employers of the alumni, the scientific dimension of it in terms of the quality of Master's thesis level of research can be improved so that the emphasis is switched from a specific organization to a particular communication phenomenon. Also PR-specific knowledge and skills could be more emphasized in the content of the courses. Internship is a required and important part of the professional programme, however, in this kind of plan, it can also obstruct local students from being able to combine it with already existing employment in the cases where students do not have the background and, thus, are demanded to take 39 ECTS of internship. . It is recommended to maximize the number of practical subjects and enable students to practice with as many different partners as possible, including international ones, in the field of the study programme. This particularly applies to partners in the area of proposed changes to the study programme.

Strengths:

1. Connections with the labor market in terms of internship providers.
2. Updated content of the programme.
3. Correspondence with the needs of industry and the labor market.
4. Applied nature of the course content.

Weaknesses:

1. More emphasis on the digital knowledge, competences and skills specifically for PR work could be expected by applicants from the title of the programme, thus, potentially cause a disappointment.
2. Scientific contribution of Master's thesis research is insufficiently developed.
3. Internship period for students without a background in the field poses risks for local working students to be able to meet this criteria.

Assessment of the requirement [5] (applicable only to master's or doctoral study programmes)

- 1 R5 - The study programme for obtaining a master's or doctoral degree is based on the achievements and findings of the respective field of science or field of artistic creation.

Assessment of compliance: Partially compliant

The programme focuses on the needs of the labor market and industry with a special emphasis on marketing and e-commerce. PR focus in terms of latest digital advancements along with the quality of Master's thesis and beneficial internship requirements for local working students is not sufficient.

2.3. Resources and Provision of the Study Programme

Analysis

2.3.1. RISEBA's premises are well equipped with infrastructure resources and material and technical support necessary for the implementation of the study programme. Multiple computer classes, study rooms and audio, video, photo studios with professional equipment are available for students and teaching staff as well (SAR, p. 55). In the library, there are 1091 information sources specifically related to the information and communication science field available (SAR, p. 57). Additionally, databases such as EBSCO, Web of Science, Emerald, Greenleaf Publishing PRMEC are available for on-site and remote use. Multiple paid information sources such as Leta.lv, Nozare.lv and iŽurnāli are subscribed to.

RISEBA has integrated mandatory use of Moodle e-learning system e-riseba.lv for the teaching staff, providing students with all the necessary study content digitally. An audit of Moodle is done annually to maximize the utilization of Moodle's capabilities in facilitating the study process. (SAR, p. 37) Additionally, students use the platform my.riseba.lv to upload assignments, see grades, payments, etc., while teaching staff use UNIMETIS as a server for other e-platforms of RISEBA, thus ensuring all the study content and administrative information necessary for the implementation of the study process is available online. Students, administrative and teaching staff are satisfied with these solutions.

2.3.3. 70% of RISEBA's revenue stems from tuition fees (SAR, p. 50). As stated by the Director of the bachelor's study programme, the minimum number of students to open the study programme each academic year is 12. The number of enrolled students in the Master's programme of the ICS field in RISEBA has not been as high since the academic year 2018/2019 (Annex 42), thus creating serious doubt about the profitability and sustainability of the programme in the future as well. Given the significant changes in the Master's programme since the last enrolled students and given the management's marketing plans to attract more international students, especially for the Master's level studies (information from the on-site meeting), it can be anticipated to reach the minimum number of students, yet it can not be guaranteed. Moreover, it does not firmly facilitate the development of the study programme. Additional funding sources and funding strategies for the study programme are not provided and are unclear.

Conclusions on this set of criteria, by specifying strengths and weaknesses

The study provision, informative provision (including library), material and technical provision comply with specific features and conditions for the implementation of the study programme. There is no data available regarding funding sources and financial distribution in the study programme to evaluate the financial means to ensure full implementation of the study process, as well as its development.

Strengths:

1. Well-equipped study premises, including material, technical, informative provisions.

Weaknesses:

1. No prognosis available regarding funding sources and financial distribution in the study programme to evaluate the financial means to ensure full implementation of the study process, as well as its development.

Assessment of the requirement [6]

- 1 R6 - Compliance of the study provision, science provision (if applicable), informative provision (including library), material and technical provision and financial provision with the conditions for the implementation of the study programme and ensuring the achievement of learning outcomes

Assessment of compliance: Partially compliant

The study, informative, material and technical provision comply with specific features and conditions for the implementation of the study programme, however, firm strategy for the financial provision is not available.

2.4. Teaching Staff

Analysis

2.4.1. As the study programme is currently not implemented, the analysis should be interpreted as an investigation of vision, which has a rather clear shape. The teaching staff is a diverse and simultaneously a balanced team. 19 modules are taught by 24 lecturers, more than half of them have doctoral degrees, others are experts in their fields with long years of practical work and distinctive achievements. For the implementation of the programme RISEBA has hired four foreign lecturers on a permanent basis and expects to attract one visiting professor (SAR, Annex 20, 21). It means that a quarter of all the subjects are taught by the lecturers with broader international experience and perspective.

2.4.2. Most of the subjects taught by foreign lecturers have a local supervisor as well. Their relationship and duties are not clearly explained, however, taking into account the positive and collaborative atmosphere at the University it could be presumed that this is not only a managerial decision, but can have a deeper meaning to encourage scientific collaboration.

2.4.4. Nearly one third of all the lectures involved in the implementation of the study programme do not have scientific publications (SAR, Annex 25). However, they are involved in high quality professional activities, publish popular articles. Most of the scientific publications are not in the field of ICS, but in "neighboring" fields, primarily in marketing. As the graduates acquire a Professional Master's degree in Public Relations this brings some disbalance.

2.4.5. In a small country nearly all the professionals of a certain field know each other, the cooperation of the teaching staff should flow without any formal difficulties. Especially considering that some of the lecturers teach the same subjects in other universities as well (SAR, Annex 21). Nevertheless the teaching staff is encouraged to cooperate within the framework of the study programme Council. Unfortunately, the programme lacks clear leadership, which could guarantee its sustainable success in the future. The current director is a highly respected specialist in the field of psychology and could act as a temporary administrator. However, a programme with practical orientation in the field of PR and digital communication needs a key person with the expertise in this particular field.

Conclusions on this set of criteria, by indicating strengths and weaknesses

Conclusions:

The analysis of the study programme reveals a promising yet complex landscape. The teaching staff comprises a diverse and balanced team, with a significant portion holding doctoral degrees and others bringing extensive practical experience and achievements to the table. The inclusion of foreign lecturers, constituting a quarter of the faculty, injects valuable international perspectives. While a portion of the faculty lacks scientific publications, their engagement in high-quality professional activities underscores their expertise. However, the predominance of publications in adjacent fields such as marketing raises concerns about alignment with the programme's focus on Public Relations, potentially creating a disbalance in curriculum content. The programme faces challenges in fostering seamless cooperation among faculty members, exacerbated by the absence of clear leadership. While mechanisms like the Study Programme Council promote collaboration, the programme's sustainable success hinges on the appointment of a dedicated leader with expertise in PR and digital communication, essential for steering the programme towards its objectives effectively.

Strengths:

1. The teaching team comprises individuals with a mix of academic qualifications and practical experience, contributing to a well-rounded educational environment.
2. The inclusion of foreign lecturers brings diverse viewpoints and experiences to the programme, enriching the learning experience for students.
3. Despite some faculty members lacking scientific publications, their involvement in high-quality professional activities and popular articles demonstrates their expertise and relevance in their respective fields.

Weaknesses:

1. The relationship and duties of foreign lecturers and their local supervisors are not clearly defined, potentially leading to confusion or inefficiencies in the implementation of the programme.
2. The predominance of publications in neighboring fields like marketing, rather than in the core area of Public Relations, may result in a disbalance in the curriculum content, affecting the programme's alignment with its objectives.
3. Lack of own full academic staff in the field of proposed changes within the study programme

Assessment of the requirement [7]

- 1 R7 - Compliance of the qualification of the academic staff and visiting professors, visiting associate professors, visiting docents, visiting lecturers and visiting assistants with the conditions for the implementation of the study programme and the requirements set out in the respective regulatory enactments.

Assessment of compliance: Fully compliant

Overall, while RISEBA's study programme demonstrates strengths in faculty diversity, innovative recruitment, and interdisciplinary engagement, addressing weaknesses in language proficiency management, research output, transitional leadership, focus coherence, and practical course recruitment is essential for sustaining and enhancing programme effectiveness and quality.

2.5. Assessment of the Compliance

Requirements

- 1 1 - The study programme complies with the State Academic Education Standard or the Professional Higher Education Standard

Assessment of compliance: Fully compliant

Professional Higher Education Standard is defined by Cabinet regulations No 305, the compliance to the regulations is reflected in SAR, Appendix 43.

- 2 2 - The study programme complies with a valid professional standard or the requirements for the professional qualification (if there is no professional standard required for the relevant occupation) provided if the completion of the study programme leads to a professional qualification (if applicable)

Assessment of compliance: Fully compliant

The compliance with the valid professional standard is reflected in SAR, Annex 44 that corresponds to the 2020 professional standard for Head of Strategic Communication (PS-131)

- 3 3 - The descriptions of the study courses and the study materials have been prepared in all languages in which the study programme is implemented, and they comply with the requirements set forth in Section 561 , Paragraph two and Section 562 , Paragraph two of the Law on Higher Education Institutions.

Assessment of compliance: Fully compliant

Descriptions of Study courses and materials associated with implementation of the studies are provided in Latvian and English as evident at SAR, Annexes 45-48. They also comply with the relevant requirements set by the Law on Higher Education Institutions

- 4 4 - The sample of the diploma to be issued for the acquisition of the study programme complies with the procedure according to which state recognised documents of higher education are issued.

Assessment of compliance: Fully compliant

The sample of the diploma includes elements associated with the state recognised documents of higher education (Cabinet Regulations No 202) as evident from SAR, Annex 32.

- 5 5 - The academic staff of the academic study programme complies with the requirements set forth in Section 55, Paragraph one, Clause 3 of the Law on Higher Education Institutions.

Assessment of compliance: Not relevant

- 6 6 - Academic study programmes provided for less than 250 full-time students may be implemented and less than five professors and associated professors of the higher education institution may be involved in the implementation of the mandatory and limited elective part of these study programmes provided that the relevant opinion of the Council for Higher Education has been received in accordance with Section 55, Paragraph two of the Law on Higher Education Institutions.

Assessment of compliance: Not relevant

- 7 7 - At least five teaching staff members with a doctoral degree are among the academic staff of an academic doctoral study programme, at least three of which are experts approved by the Latvian Science Council in the respective field of science. At least five teaching staff members with a doctoral degree are among the academic staff of a professional doctoral study programme in arts (if applicable).

Assessment of compliance: Not relevant

- 8 8 - The teaching staff members involved in the implementation of the study programme are proficient in the official language in accordance with the regulations on the level of the official language knowledge and the procedures for testing official language proficiency for performing professional duties and office duties.

Assessment of compliance: Fully compliant

The proficiency of Latvian of the teaching staff is confirmed by SAR, Appendix 22, information about the proficiency of each instructor is evident from Appendix 21.

- 9 9 - The teaching staff members to be involved in the implementation of the study programme have at least B2-level knowledge of a related foreign language, if the study programme or any part thereof is to be implemented in a foreign language (if applicable).

Assessment of compliance: Fully compliant

The knowledge of a foreign language (English) corresponds with the requirement for implementing the programme in English (B2 or higher) as evident from SAR, Annex 20 and 23 as well as instructors' biographies provided by Annex 21.

- 10 10 - The sample of the study agreement complies with the mandatory provisions to be included in the study agreement.

Assessment of compliance: Fully compliant

The sample of the study agreement complies with the mandatory provisions (Cabinet Regulations No 70) to be included in the study agreement as evident from SAR, Annex 8.

- 11 11 - The higher education institution / college has provided confirmation that students will be provided with opportunities to continue their education in another study programme or another higher education institution or college (agreement with another accredited higher education institution or college) if the implementation of the study programme is terminated.

Assessment of compliance: Fully compliant

As evident from SAR, Annex 6, RISEBA has a cooperation agreement with "Turība" University that ensures its students the continuation of their education at the programme "Public relations".

- 12 12 - The higher education institution / college has provided confirmation that students are guaranteed compensation for losses if the study programme is not accredited or the study programme's license is revoked due to the actions (actions or omissions) of the higher education institution or college and the student does not wish to continue studies in another study programme.

Assessment of compliance: Fully compliant

SAR, Annex 7 certifies that RISEBA guarantees its students compensation of losses.

- 13 13 - The joint study programmes comply with the requirements prescribed in Section 55.(1), Paragraphs one, two, and seven of the Law on Higher Education Institutions (if applicable)

Assessment of compliance: Not relevant

- 14 14 - Compliance with the requirements specified in other regulatory enactments that apply to the study programme being assessed (if applicable)

Assessment of compliance: Not relevant

Assessment of the requirement [8]

- 1 R8 - Compliance of the study programme with the requirements set forth in the Law on Higher Education Institutions and other regulatory enactments.

Assessment of compliance: Fully compliant

The study programme complies with the State Academic Education Standard or the Professional Higher Education Standard and the valid professional standard. Descriptions of the study courses and the study materials have been prepared in respective languages and in adherence with the requirements. The diploma to be issued complies with the relevant procedure. The teaching staff members are proficient in the official language in accordance with the regulations on the level of the official language knowledge and the procedures for testing official language proficiency. They also have at least B2-level knowledge of English. The sample of the study agreement complies with the mandatory provisions to be included in the study agreement. The confirmation has been provided that students will be ensured with opportunities to continue their education in another study programme or another higher education institution or college, if the programme is terminated. RISEBA confirms that students are guaranteed compensation for losses if the study programme is not accredited or the study programme's license is revoked and the student does not wish to continue studies in another study programme. To sum up, the programme complies with 9 requirements from 14 and other 5 requirements are "Not relevant", therefore, the overall evaluation is "Fully compliant".

General conclusions about the study programme, indicating the most important strengths and weaknesses of the study programme

The Public Relations and Digital Communication professional master's study programme is offered by RISEBA in both Latvian and English. Due to low enrollment in the previous version of the programme, changes are proposed, focusing on increasing faculty expertise in digitalization and intercultural aspects, enhancing practical subjects with diverse partners including international ones, and improving the scientific quality of master's theses. However, the code of the study programme is not within the information and communication field, the acquired qualification does not derive from the name of the study programme, the name of the study programme does not correspond to the proposed learning outcomes at the level of the study programme. The programme generally meets industry needs but needs more emphasis on PR-specific knowledge and skills. Internships are mandatory but may hinder local students from working simultaneously. The study, informative, and material provisions meet standards, but financial details are lacking. The faculty is diverse, with a mix of doctoral holders and practitioners, including foreign lecturers, but publication balance and leadership issues pose challenges. A dedicated leader with expertise in PR and digital communication is suggested for effective programme management.

Strengths:

1. The programme aligns with industry needs and regulations, ensuring graduates are well-prepared for the job market.
2. The faculty comprises a diverse mix of individuals, including those with doctoral degrees and extensive practical experience, providing students with a well-rounded educational experience.
3. The inclusion of foreign lecturers brings valuable international perspectives to the programme, enhancing the learning environment and global relevance
4. Emphasis on practical subjects and partnerships with various organizations, including international ones, offers students valuable hands-on experience in the field.
5. The programme's applied nature benefits employers by producing graduates with practical skills and experience relevant to the industry.

Weaknesses:

1. The code of the study programme is not within the information and communication field.
2. The acquired qualification does not derive from the name of the study programme
3. The name of the study programme does not correspond to the proposed learning outcomes at the

level of the study programme.

4. The programme faces challenges with low enrollment, indicating a need for improvements to attract more students, particularly international ones.
5. There's a lack of faculty expertise in certain areas, such as digitization and intercultural aspects, which may limit the programme's effectiveness in addressing modern communication challenges.
6. The scientific quality of master's theses could be improved to ensure a deeper understanding of communication phenomena and to enhance the programme's academic reputation.
7. The mandatory internship requirement may pose challenges for local students balancing work and study commitments, potentially limiting accessibility for certain demographics.
8. Lack of information on funding sources and financial distribution raises concerns about the programme's long-term sustainability and resource allocation.

Evaluation of the study programme "Public Relations and Digital Communication"

Evaluation of the study programme:

Average

2.6. Recommendations for the Study Programme "Public Relations and Digital Communication"

Short-term recommendations

- | |
|--|
| 1. Resolve technical deficiencies such as the programme code which must be harmonized and result from the planned and specified learning outcomes. |
| 2. Increase recruitment efforts to attract more students, both domestically and internationally, by promoting the programme's unique features and opportunities. |
| 3. Provide training and support for existing faculty to enhance their expertise in areas such as digitization and intercultural aspects, ensuring they are equipped to deliver high-quality instruction. |
| 4. Conduct a thorough review of the curriculum to strengthen the emphasis on PR-specific knowledge and skills, as well as practical subjects, to better align with industry needs and student interests. |
| 5. Offer flexibility in internship requirements to accommodate local students' work commitments, such as allowing part-time internships or providing alternatives for those with relevant work experience. |

Long-term recommendations

- | |
|---|
| 1. Establish and nurture partnerships with a diverse range of organizations, including international ones, to provide students with a broader range of practical experiences and networking opportunities. |
| 2. Foster a culture of research within the programme by providing incentives and support for faculty to conduct high-quality research aligned with the programme's focus on Public Relations and digital communication. |

3. Appoint a dedicated programme leader with expertise in PR and digital communication to provide clear direction, foster collaboration among faculty, and drive strategic initiatives for programme improvement.
4. Implement a system for continuous programme evaluation and improvement, including soliciting feedback from students, alumni, and industry partners to identify areas for enhancement and innovation.
5. Enhance the programme's global engagement by recruiting more international students, offering study abroad opportunities, and facilitating cross-cultural exchanges to enrich the learning experience and promote global perspectives.
6. Consider additional instruments for providing financial transparency regarding the sustainability and profitability of the study programme, and provide this information as part of the SAR and corresponding annexes for the next evaluation procedure.

III - Assessment of the Requirements for the Study Field and the Relevant Study Programmes

III - Assessment of the Requirements for the Study Field and the Relevant Study Programmes

Assessment of the Requirements for the Study Field

Requirements	Requirement Evaluation	Comment
R1 - Pursuant to Section 5, Paragraph 2.1 of the Law on Higher Education Institutions, the higher education institution/ college shall ensure continuous improvement, development, and efficient performance of the study field whilst implementing its internal quality assurance system:	Partially compliant	The quality assurance system is continuously improved with the aim of raising the quality of the study programme. However, considering the weaknesses mentioned, there is room for improvement, especially in terms of data collection, which is an important part of the quality assurance system; as well as insufficient involvement and familiarity of students with the quality assurance system.
R2 - Compliance of scientific research and artistic creation with the level of development of scientific research and artistic creation (if applicable)	Partially compliant	Good organized field lack concentration on communication research topics, most research is carried out in the field of business and marketing.

Requirements	Requirement Evaluation		Comment
R3 - The cooperation implemented within the study field with various Latvian and foreign organizations ensures the achievement of the aims of the study field.		Partially compliant	Strategic goals do not comply with performance tactics in recruitment of foreign students as well as amendments in technical performance required. The cooperation implemented within the study field with various Latvian and foreign organizations ensures the achievement of the aims of the study field, p. 25.
R4 - Elimination of deficiencies and shortcomings identified in the previous assessment of the study field, if any, or implementation of the recommendations provided.		Partially compliant	Considering the short deadline for the implementation of the recommendations received during the last evaluation process, significant progress has been made, and RISEBA has already fully implemented a good part of the recommendations, while some of them are in the process of implementation. It is still recommended to increase the scientific productivity of teachers in the field of communication, not marketing or management as well as to increase the presence of students in bodies that are an important part of the quality assurance system. RISEBA also needs to determine additional mechanisms to reduce drop out quota since it is still very high.

Assessment of the Requirements for the Relevant Study Programmes of the Study Field

No.	Study programme	R5	R6	R7	R8	Evaluation of the study programme (excellent, good, average, poor)
1	Public Relations and Advertising Management (42342)	Not relevant	Fully compliant	Fully compliant	Partially compliant	Good
2	Public Relations and Digital Communication (47342)	Partially compliant	Partially compliant	Fully compliant	Fully compliant	Average

The Dissenting Opinions of the Experts

Experts unanimously agree on the text of the report.